

CHAPTER 2

Defining Our Terms

Sad to say, insecurity plagues numerous lives in our world. Many people hurl themselves down various dead-end streets philosophically and practically in order to find real identity, unconditional love, personal acceptance, significant purpose, and genuine security in life, only to come up empty-handed and miserable. Even in Christian circles, some individuals profess to have trusted in Christ but believe that their salvation is neither eternal nor secure. They believe that if they don't "hang-in-there," God will boot them out of His family. Or they fear that if they seriously "slip up," salvation will "slip out" of their hands. Is this the message of the Scriptures? Is this the good news of the Gospel of Jesus Christ? Is God's gift of salvation to undeserving sinners eternal and secure or not?

WHAT IS ETERNAL SECURITY?

It would be well for us to define our terms at the outset. What do we mean by the theological phrase "eternal security"?

Eternal security means that those who have been genuinely saved by God's grace through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone shall never be in danger of God's condemnation or loss of their salvation, but God's grace and power keep them forever saved and secure.

Please don't get sidetracked by the phrase "eternal security" itself. I realize that it is not in the Bible. But neither is the word "Bible,"

though I believe in it. Neither is the word “Trinity,” though the Bible teaches it. All of these theological terms help us concisely explain particular truths that the Scriptures clearly declare. So let’s not get hung up on the term itself.

OBSERVING THIS DEFINITION

Several components of this definition are worthy of noting. First, eternal security only applies to those “who have been genuinely saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone.” This eliminates any counterfeit “Christians” who think salvation is something they earn from God by way of their good works, instead of trusting in what God does for them because of Christ’s finished work on the cross. 2 Timothy 1:9 clearly teaches us that it is God “*Who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus.*”

Second, notice that this definition explains the quality or extent of salvation that undeserving sinners receive when they trust in Christ alone as Savior. Their salvation is eternal and secure so that they “shall never be in danger of God’s condemnation or loss of their salvation, but God’s grace and power keep them forever saved and secure.” Regarding this, the Lord Jesus Christ clearly declared, “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me *has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life*” (John 5:24).

Last, God wants you to recognize that one’s eternal salvation and security are all by God’s *grace* and *power*. No one can save himself or keep himself saved through his repentance from sin, holy life, commitment to Christ, or faithfulness to God. God’s gift of salvation and eternal security are both spiritual realities that God alone provides and accomplishes for us to His own praise and glory. As the apostle Paul explains, “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” (Eph. 2:8-9). Thus our definition ends with, “*but God’s grace and power keep them forever saved and secure.*”

CLARIFYING THE CONFUSION

In seeking to explain what something is, it is often helpful to explain what it is not. The result of this contrast is greater clarity and comprehension of the truth. Paul uses this teaching technique

in the two verses you just read: Ephesians 2:8-9. The glaring contrast within these verses serves to clarify the truth of salvation by grace through faith apart from our works. By applying this teaching technique to the issue of the security of salvation, I will clarify what eternal security does *not* mean.

1. Eternal security does not mean that all who *profess* Christ actually *possess* eternal salvation.

A classic passage of Scripture expressing this truth occurs in Matthew 7:21-23. From the lips of the Lord Jesus we read,

Not everyone who says to Me, "Lord, Lord," shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, "Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?" And then I will declare to them, "I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!"

The individuals in this passage *profess* Christ, but do *not* actually *possess* eternal salvation. They accurately call Him "Lord, Lord," and indeed, Christ is Lord. They apparently had "prophesied," "cast out devils," and "done many wonders" all in His "name." Surprisingly, Christ does not deny the reality of these claims; He just denies the reality of their salvation. While they profess to Him their own faithfulness and good works at this time of judgment, He professes to them, "I never knew you." Christ does not reply, "I used to know you, but you lost your salvation." Instead He replies to these religious but lost individuals, "I never knew you." Christ never had a personal saving relationship with them. Like so many people who claim to be "Christians" today, they profess Christ but do not actually possess salvation, for they trust in themselves and their goods works to save them. They fail to do the will of God, which is not an issue of their surrender and submission to Christ's mastery over their lives but instead is stated so simply in John 3:16: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that *whoever believes in Him* should not perish but have everlasting life."

Salvation is not a reward for good people or good works (Eph. 2:8-9; Rom. 3:28); it is a gift for undeserving sinners who trust in Christ alone. "And *if by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace*

is no longer grace. But if it is of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work" (Rom. 11:6). God is not impressed with our good works, wrought from sinful hands: "But we are all like an unclean thing, *and all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags*" (Isa. 64:6). If you add just one work to God's plan of grace, it destroys the truth of grace, for it is then earned favor. Grace is God's unmerited favor. Grace is God giving to you something you don't deserve and cannot earn by your good works, commitment, surrender, or faithfulness. This is why the only right response to God's message of salvation is not faith in Christ *plus*, but faith in Christ *period*.

Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit. (Titus 3:5)

But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness. (Rom. 4:5)

Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified. (Gal. 2:16)

The Bible makes it abundantly clear that we are all born sinners and part of Satan's "4-H" club: we are helpless, hopeless, hell-bound, and horrible sinners before the eyes of a thrice holy God. This provides the dark background for God's wonderful, thrilling plan of salvation. Being helpless and hopeless, we can do nothing to save ourselves from sin's penalty. Therefore, God says, "I will do it all for you." As long as we think we can do anything to save ourselves, we don't perceive ourselves as helpless. As long as we think there is hope in our own efforts and works to save ourselves, we don't see ourselves as hopeless. For Jonah 2:9 tells us, "Salvation is of the Lord"!

I emphasize this because you will never get a true picture of God's grace until you see the helplessness of man because of sin and that his only hope is found in Christ. Thus, the good news of the Gospel is that God determined to make a perfect salvation possible for unworthy sinners like you and me! In order to accomplish this, God sent His Son to the cross of Calvary to lay all our sins on Him, to

punish Him for our guilt, and then to offer this completed salvation freely as a gift to “whoever believes.”

All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; *and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.* (Isa. 53:6)

For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit. (1 Peter 3:18)

For God so loved the world *that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.* (John 3:16)

The one condition on our part in order to receive God’s gift of eternal life is to believe in Jesus Christ alone, trusting in Christ and His finished work *alone* to save us and not our own religious or moral works. Faith alone in Christ alone is the only means of receiving God’s gift of grace.

2. Eternal security does *not* mean that all who trust Christ *plus* their good works are eternally saved or secure.

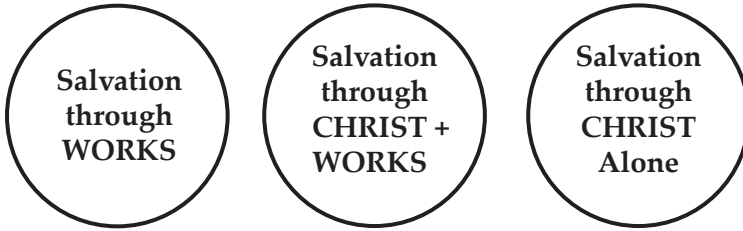
As we’ve already noted, salvation is not a reward for good people or good works; it is a gift for undeserving sinners who trust in Christ alone. The hymn writer of the past was right on target when he wrote, “Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to Thy cross I cling.”

Do you see the simplicity of God’s grace plan of salvation for you? Salvation is not a matter of putting your trust in Jesus Christ *plus* being baptized (though baptism has a place of testimony for believers). Salvation is not a matter of trusting Christ *plus* going to church (though Bible study can help believers to grow). Salvation is not a matter of asking Jesus into your heart (though He comes in when you believe).¹ Salvation is not a matter of making Christ “Lord of your life” (though He is Lord).² Can you see that it is not a matter of trusting in Christ *plus* good works (though good works should be the result of salvation)? Of

¹ Dennis M. Rokser, *Seven Reasons NOT to Ask Jesus into Your Heart* (Duluth, MN: Grace Gospel Press, 2012).

² Michael D. Halsey, *Truthspeak: The True Meaning of Five Key Christian Words Distorted through Religious Newspeak* (Milwaukee: Grace Gospel Press, 2010), 52-53.

the three approaches to God illustrated below, which one describes you?³



Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law. (Rom. 3:28)

So they said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved." (Acts 16:31)

These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God. (1 John 5:13)

John Newton, former slave-trader and converted preacher and songwriter, said it so well when he insightfully wrote,

Amazing grace, how sweet the sound,
that saved a wretch like me.
I once was lost, but now am found,
was blind, but now I see.

T'was grace, that taught my heart to fear,
t'was grace, my fears relieved.
How precious did that grace appear,
the hour I first believed.

3. Eternal security does *not* mean that knowing for sure that you are saved forever gives you license to sin; rather, it grants you liberty to serve Christ with full assurance of your eternal destiny.

Paul, the unequalled apostle of grace, clarifies this point in his great doctrinal dissertation of the Christian faith—the epistle of Romans. In Romans 6:1-2, he states, "What shall we say then? Shall we continue

³ Diagrams adapted from R. Larry Moyer, *Free and Clear: Understanding and Communicating God's Offer of Eternal Life* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1997), 81.

in sin that grace may abound? *Certainly not!* How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?" Prior to these verses, Paul had previously explained in Romans several key truths about justification.

- Justification is received by faith alone in Christ alone (Rom. 3),
- Justification before God is not by works, law, or ritual (Rom. 4),
- The blessings of justification include the eternal security of salvation (Rom. 5).

Anticipating the objection that God's plan of eternal salvation by grace would lead to careless or sinful living, Paul emphatically exclaims, "God forbid!" Christ came to set us free from the guilt of our sins and the bondage of our sin natures. Every believer in Christ has "died to sin" because of his/her identification with Jesus Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection (Rom. 6:3-5). Christ has provided a new life in Himself so that "we also should walk in newness of life" (Rom. 6:4) by means of the Holy Spirit who indwells us (Rom. 8:1-4). Galatians 5:13 reiterates this truth saying, "For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another."

The objection that eternal security leads to sinful living is a "straw man" at best, as it would be very difficult to prove that those who reject this teaching actually sin *less* than those who accept it. In fact, let me affirm personally that being saved by God's grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, coupled with the full assurance of eternal security, has not encouraged sin in my life but instead has produced an attitude of gratitude that has motivated me to devote my life to serving Jesus Christ: "*For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again*" (2 Cor. 5:14-15).

AN ILLUSTRATION TO REMEMBER

When engineers constructed the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco, they anticipated that a number of lives would be lost during the dangerous construction that would transpire. The construction crews proceeded slowly and carefully; nevertheless, a few workers

fell to their death. Consequently, the engineers stretched a safety net below the bridge and above the water in order to catch any falling men, thus saving lives. This strategic invention resulted in tremendous personal security and greater production among the construction crews. Do you see the analogy? Instead of the eternal security of salvation being a license to sin, it grants believers in Christ tremendous personal security and the motivation to serve Christ all the days of their lives because of God's grace and love.

The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD, and He delights in his way. *Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down; for the LORD upholds him with His hand.*
(Ps. 37:23-24)

SOME IMPORTANT QUESTIONS

Dear reader, who or what have you trusted to save you from the wrath and judgment of God? If you were to die and stand before the infinitely holy God today, what would you say? Would it be, "Lord, Lord, I've done this and I've done that for my salvation"? Or would it be the glad refrain, "Jesus paid it all, all to Him I owe; Sin had left a crimson stain, He washed it white as snow. And when before the throne, I stand in Him complete; 'Jesus died my soul to save' my lips shall still repeat."⁴

If you have never personally trusted the Lord Jesus Christ *alone* to be your Savior, today can be *your* day of salvation. He died for your sins and rose again to provide salvation as a gift of God's grace for you. Isn't it time to accept His free gift by faith in Jesus Christ alone? It is a matter of eternal significance. "For He says: 'In an acceptable time I have heard you, and in the day of salvation I have helped you.' *Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation*" (2 Cor. 6:2).⁵

If you could see and know
Just what the future holds
You'd never take the chance
and lose your soul

⁴ Elvina M. Hall, *Jesus Paid It All*.

⁵ For further reading on settling your eternal destiny, see Dennis M. Rokser, *Let's Preach the Gospel* (Duluth, MN: Duluth Bible Church, n.d.) and Ron Shea, *The Gospel* (Duluth, MN: Duluth Bible Church, n.d.).

But God above can see
From here to eternity
So give it a thought my friend
Meet the Lord.

Time is a precious thing
It can't be recalled again,
Those years you waste in sin
Are gone evermore
So start today anew
Let Jesus walk with you
And when the journey's through
You'll meet the Lord.

Before you die
meet the Lord
Reach out by faith in Him,
Heed His Word.
Be certain you're not wrong
Eternity is long
Before you die
Meet the Lord.⁶

⁶ Dottie Rambo, *Before You Die*.

