

What Does God's Word Say About Eternal Security And Falling Away

Eternal Security

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I. Introduction

- A. Last Sunday we talked about Calvinism and Arminianism in order to better understand their theological position and their separate influences on Eternal Security as it is taught today.
 - 1. Calvinism teaches that the believer is eternally secure because the same sovereign God who elected and saved him sovereignly keeps him living a godly life to the end.
 - 2. Arminianism teaches that the believer responds to the invitation of God for salvation through an act of his will, and he can, with the same will, choose to turn away from God and return to living in known sin. If he dies in his unrepented, ongoing practice of sin, he will die in a lost condition – having lost his salvation. Therefore, Arminianism teaches that the believer is secure in his salvation as long as he continues living according to the truth he has gained from knowing the will and word of God.
- B. Prayer

II. Eternal Security, as it is taught today

- A. Eternal security as it is taught today, is a combination of Arminianism and Calvinism.
 - 1. Though Calvin preceded Arminius, those who hold to eternal security as it is taught today start from the Arminian position of man having a free will and being assisted by God rather than the Calvinism position where man is controlled by God.
 - a. Therefore, all eternal security teaching today holds that we have a free will – and the ability to exercise our free will – in responding positively or negatively to God and His promptings in relation to salvation and sanctification.
 - b. However, when it comes to the Arminian teaching about falling away from the faith, those who teach eternal security remove that from their teaching and replace it with a bit of Calvinism which allows them to have a salvation that is eternally secure.
 - c. In other words, they blend the exercise of free will in relation to being born again and living the Christian life – on the one hand

with God's sovereign rule over the outcome of salvation so that once we are saved we will always be saved because the security of our salvation is entirely God's doing.

2. Let me explain this just a bit further in an effort to make sure you understand what I am saying.

a. The Arminian part of the current teaching on eternal security promotes free will in relation to coming to saving faith in Jesus Christ and in going on from there to live a Christian life – or what we commonly call “being sanctified.” In relation to these two activities, we are free to respond as we will in either moving toward God and cooperating with Him or moving away from God and rebelling against Him.

b. The part of the eternal security teaching that says once we are saved we cannot lose our salvation draws on two ideas from Calvinism.

(1) The first part of Calvinism that is used to support eternal security is drawn from Calvin's teaching on the Perseverance of the Saints – or the teaching that says an elected Christian will – by the sovereign work of God – live a sanctified life to the end of his days and therefore cannot fall away from the faith. However, current eternal security teaching rejects Calvin's teaching about persevering in a godly life as proof of election and salvation, while using the part that teaches once we are saved we will always be saved.

(2) The second part of Calvin's teaching that is used to support eternal security is drawn from Calvin's teaching on God's sovereign determinism over our salvation and sanctification. Here again, current eternal security teaching replaces Calvin's broad view of God's sovereign determinism over all aspects of the Christian's life with a view that limits God's sovereign determinism to securing the outcome of our salvation.

c. My point here is that this blending of Calvinism with a foundation of Arminianism leads to the current teaching on eternal security which holds to the free will of man in regard to salvation and how a Christian lives after being saved while holding to the sovereign determinism of God in regard to keeping Christians eternally secure in their salvation regardless of how they live after being saved.

B. One of the stronger criticisms of the current teaching on eternal security is that it opens the door for born again Christians to live an unchristian or unsanctified life.

1. Dealing with this criticism has led to two distinct groups within the eternal security camp.
 - a. One group – which is the smaller group – holds that going back to a persistent, unrepented life of sin is proof a person was never born again. Of course, this view is very similar to Calvin’s teaching on the Perseverance of the Saints – with the addition of free will.
 - b. The larger group holds that once a person is born again, living a godly life subsequent to salvation is good but not essential to being eternally secure. This does not mean there are not consequences for living in any ungodly way after salvation – but those consequences are limited to the loss of eternal rewards according to those in this larger group.
2. In more recent church history, a growing number in this second group have replaced the “eternal security” label with the label “free grace.”
 - a. Among those who prefer the “free grace” label are such notable Christians as Charles Stanley, Norman Geisler, Zane C. Hodges, and Bill Bright (who has passed away).
 - b. The essence of what they teach is that God saves mankind by grace alone, through faith in Jesus Christ and in His redeeming sacrifice on the cross.
 - (1) They teach that we must respond to God’s invitation to salvation by an act of our will. However, no human effort of any kind leading up to or during the moment of saving faith contributes anything to the free and gracious gift of forgiveness and eternal life. (*This teaching is according to orthodox Christianity from the disciples onward.*)
 - (2) They go on to teach that since we are saved by grace alone, nothing we do or don’t do following salvation can affect the intended outcome of our salvation.
3. In his book, *Eternal Security: Can You Be Sure?* (Nashville: Oliver Nelson, 1990), Charles Stanley states in very clear terms what is meant by “nothing we do or don’t do following salvation can affect our salvation.”
 - a. In the chapter entitled “For Those Who Stop Believing” Stanley says, “The Bible clearly teaches that God’s love for His people is of such magnitude that even those who walk away from the faith have not the slightest chance of slipping from His hand (p. 74).”
 - b. Six pages later Stanley says: “Faith is simply the way we say yes to God’s free gift of eternal life. Faith and salvation are not one and the same anymore than a gift and the hand that receives it are the

same. Salvation or justification or adoption – whatever you wish to call it – stands independently of faith. Consequently, God does not require a constant attitude of faith in order to be saved – only an act of faith" (p. 80).

- c. A little later, Stanley also writes: "You and I are not saved because we have an enduring faith. We are saved because at a moment in time we expressed faith in our enduring Lord" (p. 80).
4. Commenting on these quotes from Stanley's book, Zane C. Hodges writes: "It is Christ who endures, not necessarily our faith, as Stanley points out so clearly. 'If we are faithless,' wrote the Apostle Paul, 'He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself' " (II Timothy 2:13).
5. Now you may be thinking that Charles Stanley, and others like him who hold to the free grace teaching believe that our behavior after salvation makes no difference at all. This is not true.
 - a. Stanley is crystal clear about the doctrine of rewards and the role that the biblical teaching on rewards should play in motivating godly Christian living.
 - b. Stanley says: "Does our behavior matter once we are assured of our salvation? You bet it does. Are there any eternal consequences when a believer sins? Absolutely. Will eternity be the same for those who follow Christ faithfully and those who live for themselves? Not a chance" (p. 118). Further down that page he states: "Keep in mind we are not talking about heaven and hell. That is a different issue altogether. Our works have nothing to do with where we spend eternity. But they have a lot to do with what we can expect once we get there" (p. 118).

C. To summarize:

1. In relation to eternal security and falling away from the faith, we see that Calvinism, Arminianism, and some who hold to the eternal security teaching believe that salvation and sanctification are both essential if a Christian is to enjoy eternal life with God.
2. In contrast, the majority in the eternal security group, including those who hold to the free grace teaching believe that salvation and sanctification are two separate options. Salvation is essential for spending eternity with God, while sanctification is optional such that how we live after being saved has no impact whatsoever on our eternal salvation.

III. Conclusion