

Eternal Security: Fact or Fiction?

I started out as a “born-and-bred” Catholic, with a generations-long heritage of loyal and often strident papists on my father’s side. Through twelve years of Catholic education, including daily church attendance, I never once heard the true gospel. But because of my considerable fascination with “spiritual things” (of which there are an abundance in the Catholic Church) and the systematic indoctrination that started, literally, at birth, I embraced that faith wholeheartedly for all of my youth.

I began reading the Bible for the first time, however, when I left home for college, and, with my first sortie into the book of Hebrews, I discovered the incontrovertible evidence that Catholicism and the Bible were at serious odds on a number of foundational issues. This forced a decision and I left the “Church” never to return, yet still not really comprehending the gospel. Interestingly enough, I was led to the Lord within the next two years and experienced His supernatural and powerful presence for the first time in my life. I felt as if I were floating on a cloud, with all of the fruit of the Spirit at my disposal: peace, joy, patience, kindness, love.

But my unsanctified self soon reared its ugly head again and within months I stumbled and married a Catholic, of all things, who had once studied for the priesthood. Our rocky union led me down a long road that detoured through Zen Buddhism, the New Age movement, Unitarianism, and various mainline denominations before I was again led, by the importunate urging of a newly converted friend, to reexamine the fundamentals of the one true faith. (All during this nearly ten-year hiatus from fellowship, incidentally, I experienced God as if He were standing at my left shoulder, rather than living in my heart.)

This time, commitment found more solid footing in my heart as I responded to the intensely emotional, charismatic church I visited, with its eclectic mix of doctrines touting both eternal security and a fear-breeding “you-better-be-sure you’re saved” message. After being yanked to both theological and emotional extremes for the better part of five years, I “moved on” to what appeared to be the consistent systematic theology I longed for: dispensationalism and eternal security with a Calvinistic (God did it all, including somehow your own decision) twist. After studying for six-odd years under the skilled tutelage of a 50-year veteran of the OSAS (once-saved-always-saved) message, I was a confirmed “eternal security” proponent.

Though I had initially found it difficult to embrace the doctrine because of its head-butting of obvious warning passages, I eventually adopted it, primarily for emotional reasons. I liked the feeling of “settled”-ness it gave me. Because of my own profound insecurity and low self-esteem, I was desperate for a fail-safe “contract” that provided a guarantee against my own frailty.

“Eternal security” was just that—essentially an irrevocable, unilateral, fire-insurance contract. Just sign on the dotted line, a one-time “acceptance,” and you’re covered for life, “no matter what.” There were no exception or exclusion clauses in *this* contract. Such a deal! Arguments like: “You can’t *slip through* His fingers; you are His fingers!” and “You’re born again! How can you be “un-born?” or “You are part of His body! Is He going to let parts of Himself be amputated?” or “If God loses you, it proves Satan is more powerful than He is. He can’t let that happen!” among many others, were seductively simple and appealing.

Unfortunately, along with the comfort came a growing, though subtle, complacency regarding sin and repentance. After all, if all my sins—past, present *and* future—were already “cast into a sea of forgetfulness” never to be mentioned again, then what did it matter how many there were? And what need could there possibly be for ongoing repentance if my sins were literally “no more,” even the ones I hadn’t yet committed? And if we all were to be magically made like Christ anyway, perfect and holy, immediately after death, then what exactly was the point of efforts toward earthly sanctification? It all seemed optional at the very least. Repentance was said to be “unnecessary” and actually an insult to God, asking for something (forgiveness) that had already been given, once for all. This truth-numbing, verse-bending soteriology (doctrine of salvation) led to an increasing casualness toward the faith, and to a growing alienation from God that I didn’t understand and didn’t know how to fix.

Fortunately, my desperately flawed marriage continued to press me into the palm of God’s hand as I pursued solutions to that relentlessly painful and frustrating situation. Nearly fifteen years of daily deliberate prayer for healing and deliverance finally brought me to the end of my own resources and self-effort, at which point God came to the rescue, effecting an eventual elder-sanctioned release and the freedom to remarry. My subsequent marriage to a godly Christian man, who demonstrates God’s steady love and faithfulness on a daily basis, has led to the beginnings of emotional stability and with it has come the courage to reexamine this doctrine. After two years of concerted effort to let Scripture speak apart from manmade theological constructs, I’ve discovered many things, not the least of which is a profound internal consistency regarding the doctrine of security.

It is clear from verse after verse that we must persevere, consciously; that we cannot afford to let down our guard or become complacent. We cannot afford dalliances with sin. God is in the business of getting Himself a wife, and He wants a committed bride; one who will not ever forsake Him for another suitor regardless of how attractive “he” may be. We have embarked on a betrothal, in which our love will be tested, and our hearts purified. The world, the flesh and the devil will all vie for our hand, but we must spurn their advances. We must not be seduced away despite the lure of other gods.

Yes, Jesus is our Advocate, our faithful Shepherd, our Champion. It is His intent to lead us to the wedding chamber, but He will never force us to enter. We must go forward willingly, eagerly, hand-in-hand with Him, to the consummation of our engagement. A wedding awaits us, and we will be ready, if we don't turn away. "The bride has made herself ready." This requires effort, single-mindedness, and complete surrender to our Groom. No half-hearted bride will do. No imposter, no gold-digger, no idolatrous harlot will wed the King of Kings! He will not be hoodwinked! He knows our hearts.

Hang on! Be ready! Humble yourself. Repent. Forsake sin. Don't delay! For you do not know at what hour your Lord may come. Don't be like the foolish virgins who were caught unprepared. Don't sell your birthright for a bowl of pottage. I know all the arguments. "Those verses don't apply to the Church today." But remember, the Church is grafted in to the olive tree (the Israel of God) and its promises, not the other way around. Shall we not heed the warnings, not only from Jesus, but from Paul, James, Peter, John? Indeed we must. Our hearts are exposed by our response to them.

Choose this day whom you will serve: self, sin, or the God who is. Yes, we are free to choose! Our future has not been predetermined. Foreknown, yes, but not fixed like a crooked card game. We are free to choose. Choose Him! Yes, we sin. Yes, we are weak. But He is strong. Hold on to Him and He will escort you all the way to the altar!