

Eternal Security (2)

Arguments Against Eternal Security

Salvation by Works

- James seems to teach it is possible to be justified by works (James 2.14). And if salvation can be *obtained* by works, then it must be *kept* by works or else it could be lost.
- It seems, therefore, that James disagrees with Paul who unequivocally declares that justification is by faith without the works of the Law (Romans 3.28; Galatians 2.16). But there is no variance.
- Paul speaks of *legal* works – the keeping of the Mosaic Law as a means of salvation. That could never justify a man in the sight of God. But when James speaks of ‘works’ he is thinking of *actions* which prove a person’s faith is genuine.
- Jack Hunter said, “Works are an integral part of faith and if you haven’t got the works you’re not saved.”
- Both Abraham and Rahab proved their faith to be genuine by their works. Indeed, faith without works is “dead” (2.20) – barren and inactive. We are saved by faith alone, but not by a faith that is alone.
- In 2.14, James introduces a hypothetical case, “though a man *say* he hath faith”. Here is a man that says he has faith, and yet there is nothing in his life in the way of works to support his claim.
- Then James says, “can [that] faith save him?” The definite article means that James is not questioning whether faith saves, but whether ‘that kind’ of faith can save – a merely intellectual faith is empty (cf. 2.19).
- Note, then, the difference between Paul and James. Paul is speaking in a *legal* sense – we are in the courtroom before the Judge, but James is speaking about justification in a *practical* sense.
- Positionally, we are declared righteous at conversion. Practically, we are declared righteous by works.

Profession vs. Possession

- It is important to carefully distinguish between the backsliding of real believers, such as Lot, and the falling away of apparent believers such as Simon Magus (Acts 8).
- Judas and Peter also illustrate the case well. Both failed in that Peter denied the Lord and Judas betrayed the Lord. But there is an eternal difference: Peter was true; Judas was false. Peter was a backslider; Judas was apostate.
- Walter Scott says, “Many a believer has followed in the footsteps of Peter, the backslider, but no true child of God has ever gone, nor can go in the way of Judas, the apostate.”
- Peter denied his Lord and sinned. But his faith did not fail. The Lord prayed for him, and His look of love brought the poor backslider to tears of repentance. Judas was different. The Lord’s touching appeal of the sop had no effect.
- A believer may go down into terrible depths of evil, and, for the time being, wreck present happiness and usefulness, as Lot did in Sodom. But there is one thing he cannot do. He cannot, like Judas, absolutely give up Christ.
- John wrote his first epistle to tell us how we can know we have eternal life (5.13). There are *seven* tests of a true profession with the repetition of the phrases ‘born of God’ or ‘born of Him’. These tests fall into three categories:
 - The **life** of God. The true believer ‘doeth righteousness’ (2.29) and keeps God’s commandments (5.1-2).
 - The **Son** of God. Those born of God believe that Jesus is the Christ (5.1) and ‘come in the flesh’ (4.2).
 - The **love** of God. Those born of God display the character of God, loving Him and one another (4.7, 11).

License to Sin

- An accusation frequently levelled at the doctrine of eternal security is that it gives a believer license to sin.
- Paul answers this exact question in Romans 6. Shall we continue in sin to magnify the grace of God? God forbid!
- Romans 6 divides into two distinct portions. In vv.1-14, Paul answers the question as to whether grace allow believers to live under the dominion of sin? God forbid. We have both died *with* Christ and died *to* sin. We are thus free from sin’s power and dominion with no obligation to serve sin any longer. As those alive to God, we live to glorify Him.
- In vv.15-23, Paul answers the question as to whether grace allows believers to commit single, premeditated acts of sin (v.15). God forbid! Christians have changed masters and now serve righteousness rather than sin.

A man visited a slave market. He watched for a while, then bid on a slave until no one was able to bid any higher. After paying the price, he gave the bill of sale to the slave, and said, ‘I have purchased you to set you free’. Overcome with gratitude, the slave refused to leave him and became his devoted servant for life.

- Thus, the story of Romans is the story of two masters – sin and righteousness. Christ has deposed the old master. We are now under new management where righteousness reigns. Though sin no longer reigns, it still remains!

- Ironside says, “The new nature abominates sin, and henceforth dominates his desires and his thinking. Sin becomes detestable. He loathes himself for the follies and iniquities of his past, and he yearns after holiness.”

Sin in the Life of a Believer

- Sin in the life of a believer cannot result in the loss of salvation. The man of 1 Corinthians 5 was delivered to Satan for “the destruction of the flesh” – to destroy his sinful lusts. His spirit would still be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.
- Christians oftentimes fail. But always distinguish between *position* (standing) and *practice* (state). The believers at Corinth were sanctified in Christ Jesus and called “saints”. But they were acting anyway but saintly!
- Failure to live the way we ought does not mean we are not saved.
- When one is born physically, he is born into a family and will always be a part of that family (John 1.12). A believer has been born into the family of God. No amount of sin can change his birth.
- **But** sin does affect the enjoyment of the family relationship. After his sin with Bathsheba, David did not pray for the restoration of salvation itself, but for the restoration of the ‘joy’ of that salvation (Psalm 51.12).
- Thus, our Father will chasten and discipline His own, as any loving parent (Hebrews 12) that we might be brought to confession (1 John 1.9) and enjoy parental (not judicial) forgiveness.

The Unpardonable Sin [Matthew 12.31-32]

- The unpardonable sin, or blasphemy against the Spirit, is not a sin that can be committed by a believer. It was a national sin committed by the evil generation of Israel who lived during the earthly ministry of the Lord Jesus.
- The sin was the national rejection of the Lord Jesus as Messiah on the basis that He was demon possessed.
- As a national sin, it was not a sin an individual could commit. Even for individual members of the generation that committed the unpardonable sin, it was possible to escape the judgment for this sin by repenting.
- This sin was limited to the generation to whom Messiah came (cf. Acts 2.40).
- The consequences were twofold. First, the offer of the kingdom was rescinded, and the people lost out on seeing the kingdom established in their day. Instead, it will be reoffered to a later Jewish generation that will accept it.
- Second, it meant that that generation was under a special divine judgment, the physical judgment of the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple (AD 70).
- The consequences of the unpardonable sin reached from this world to that which is to come (the Messianic age). In other words, that evil generation would never inherit the kingdom, not in their day, or in the age to come.

The Vine and the Branches [John 15.2, 6]

- There is *one* Vine but *two* kinds of branches. First, there are branches that do not bear fruit and are taken away. Second, there are branches that bear fruit and are purged or cleansed (v.2).
- Neither salvation nor the church is in view in this passage; true discipleship is the leading thought (v.8). Thus, the Lord Jesus is teaching there are two kinds of disciples – those who bear fruit (the true) and those who do not (the false).
- The fruitless branches represent false profession. If there is no fruit, there is no life, and no vital connection to the vine. Fruit, in this context, is the reproduction of the life of the Vine.
- These individuals are “in me” in the sense of association and profession, but there is no vital link to Christ. He is not the source of their fruit, for they are fruitless.
- What becomes of such a branch? It is “taken away”. The fruitless branch is removed from the place of true discipleship and witness for God. They are taken away from the vineyard. This ‘taking away’ is expanded in v.6.
- It is “cast forth” (which cannot be true of a genuine believer) out of the vineyard, withered (dried up), gathered and burned. All this speaks of Divine judgment.
- The whole sad situation of a fruitless branch is well illustrated in the man who was once so closely associated with the Lord Jesus yet proved to be false – Judas Iscariot.

Impossible to Renew to Repentance [Hebrews 6.4-6]

- Again, these verses are not referring to believers. The company in view here is the “evil” generation that rejected Christ (Matthew 12.39). See Acts 28.27-28. This was a generation marked by unbelief.
- They were uniquely privileged, with the benefit of the full blaze of Christian revelation. Yet, they chose to stick with Judaism. Some may even have made an initial profession or change of mind (repentance) but then turned back.
- That these verses are about unbelievers is obvious because of v.9. Paul McCauley explains,

“The writer is stating that, although he has given this warning, he does not really believe they were in such danger, why? Because he was persuaded of their salvation. What that shows us is that the people described in vv.4-6 are people who did not have salvation, not people that had it and lost it. The writer is saying it is possible to be so close but not actually

possess salvation and turn away from it, but he doesn't think that is actually the case with his hearers, he believes they are possessors, not professors. He can see in them the things that accompany salvation, the marks of the genuine."

- The five (grace) statements of vv.4-5 describe the outward privileges of the Christian era which all had experienced.
- The nation had been "enlightened" by the Light of the world as He brought knowledge of the truth. They had tasted of the "heavenly gift" having had the presence of Christ Himself among them, as well as the Holy Spirit (Acts 2).
- They had been "partakers of the Holy Spirit" in the sense that they had experienced the Spirit's power in their midst and "tasted the good word of God" in the form of the preaching of the Lord and apostles (Hebrews 2.3).
- The "powers of the world to come" describes the signs, wonders and miracles (2.4) that were performed among them, and which will be characteristic of the coming kingdom.
- Despite every advantage and privilege, most of this evil generation had "fallen away" (committed apostasy). After being presented with the Substance, they fell back to the shadow thus despising the value and work of Christ.
- They "crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh" by repeating the sin of their fathers, affirming the judgment of crucifixion. They too had made trial of Jesus Christ, and esteemed Him to be no true Messiah, but worthy of death.
- That was to expose Christ to "open shame", to disgrace Him publicly and hold Him up to contempt by declaring the work of Calvary to be insufficient and of no value.
- David Gooding says, "You cannot belong to Judaism and accept the deity of Jesus; and if he is not the Son of God, then he deserved to be crucified. If he is the Son of God, you cannot remain in Judaism. It has to be one or the other."
- What can be done for such people? Nothing. It is "impossible" to "renew them again unto repentance".

David Gooding says, *"The only thing that could possibly bring them to repentance is the Holy Spirit's power. Once they have felt that and have deliberately rejected it, there is no other power in God's universe that could possibly reach them. The Holy Spirit, after all, is God. Reject him finally and knowingly, and there is nothing else that could save you."*

"Once a person has had his eyes opened by God's Holy Spirit, has seen the truth, has perhaps made intellectual profession, and then has gone back and rejected it all deliberately—when someone has once done that there is no more hope. I don't doubt that God would save them if he could; but God himself has no power greater than that of the Holy Spirit by which to renew them to repentance."