

spirit of the Law. It was like straining a tiny gnat out of a drink while swallowing a large and smelly camel. Like many of Jesus' parables, the idea he portrays is exaggerated beyond the realms of possibility. A ridiculous picture is drawn in order to make an important point: that God is seeking hearts full of His own characteristics, justice, mercy and faith, not just outward observance of law; and meticulous attention to the second at the expense of the first was outrageous.

The next parable follows the same lines. The Pharisees were like those who were careful to clean the outside of the cups and plates they used while leaving dirty the parts that most needed to be clean. No one would normally do this with their dishes, but the point is made that, not only were they neglecting to do righteousness, their hearts were dirty, in need of cleansing.

More than that, they were like rotting carcasses inside, as the last of these three parables accuses. The outside was whitewashed and beautiful, but inside was totally unclean.

So we see a progression in these parables. There was outward observance of the Law in all its meticulous detail. There was an appearance of cleanliness, indeed of beauty. But there was no change of heart, no desire to be like God, to manifest His character. So instead there was

dirt and uncleanness, and ultimately outright corruption.

Unprofitable servants

Our final example is this parable in Luke 17:7-10, which follows on from the parable of faith as a grain of mustard seed, discussed above; and the two are really a linked pair. This time the Lord Jesus is not speaking to the scribes and Pharisees, but to his own disciples. Living under the Law of Moses, they were servants—slaves—to it. Yet even if they were able to fulfil every little detail of the Law every moment of their lives, God was not beholden to them. Ultimately they were “unprofitable servants”, doing no more than was their duty.

It is by faith that we are saved, by a living, growing, dynamic faith; a faith that puts all its trust in God, that He will faithfully do as He has promised; a faith that develops the character of God within us, those characteristics of justice and mercy; a faith that reaches out in forgiveness and kindness to others, seeking their salvation. And salvation is of God's grace, His undeserved kindness towards us:

“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God” (Eph. 2:8).

Holding fast to the faith

Reg Carr

“As soon as a sinner receives Christ, he possesses full, unending salvation . . . Though the Bible does not use the term ‘security’ to describe the believer’s relationship in Christ, it leaves no doubt that the child of God is eternally safe in Christ”.

Entry on ‘Eternal Security’, quoted from the *Fundamental Baptist Way of Life Encyclopedia of the Bible & Christianity* (1994 edition).

THE PHRASE “eternally safe”—or, in more modern terms, “once saved, always saved”—is not a theological concept that sits well with the Apostle Paul’s genuine expression of concern, recorded in 1 Corinthians 9:27, that he might lose his own salvation: “I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others,

I myself should be a castaway”. If the apostle, as one of the elect, had been “eternally safe”, why would he have entertained the possibility of ultimate rejection?¹

In later years, of course, Paul wrote to Timothy in really positive terms about his conviction that “the Lord, the righteous judge” had laid up for him “a crown of righteousness”, to be given to him on the day of the Lord’s “appearing” (2 Tim. 4:8). But Paul could only speak with such confidence because he knew he was very close to a martyr’s death and was able also to say, “I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, *I have kept the faith*” (v. 7). As Paul’s life of probation drew

1. The Greek word *adokimos*, translated “castaway” in 1 Corinthians 9:27, means, literally, ‘without approval’. It is elsewhere translated “reprobate” (2 Tim. 3:8) and “rejected” (Heb. 6:8).

to its close, he was glad that he could say that he had fulfilled the all-important requirement to 'keep the faith'.

"Holding fast"

To believers who had not yet reached the end of their probation, Paul and other New Testament writers wrote consistently to encourage them to 'hold fast', making it both implicit and explicit that failure to do so would result in the loss of their eternal reward.

There were many occasions when Paul felt it appropriate to exhort believers to continue to hold on to certain things necessary for their salvation. He urged Timothy to *hold on* to his faith and his good conscience by fighting "a good warfare" (1 Tim. 1:18,19); and he reminded him also about the spiritual "shipwreck" made by others who had "put away" the faith (vv. 19,20). Paul wrote too about the need to "continue" in the true doctrine, for only by that means could Timothy both "save" himself and those who heard his teaching (4:16). Far from giving his son in the faith reasons to believe that his salvation was guaranteed or secure, Paul made it clear that eternal life was something Timothy needed to "fight" to "lay hold on" (6:12; see also v. 19).

Salvation, of course, is made possible in the first place only by God's grace, and on the basis of our faith, as Paul told the Ephesians (Eph. 2:8). But it is perfectly possible for a believer to 'fall' from that grace (Gal. 5:4), or to "depart from the faith" (1 Tim. 4:1). Paul explained to the Corinthians, too, that although belief in the gospel message is the initial means by which God relates men and women to salvation, faith in that message still has to be 'held fast' by the individual if their salvation is not to be lost (1 Cor. 15:1,2).²

The writer of the letter to the Hebrews teaches exactly the same in relation to the conditions for salvation, and gives no support to the evangelical view of "eternal security".³ He tells us, for example, that we are Christ's house only if "we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end" (3:6). He insists that we are "partakers [that is, 'fellows'] of Christ" only "if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end" (v. 14). He urges us to "hold firmly to the faith we profess" (4:14, NIV), because the Lord Jesus has already gone before us into eternal life. And he repeats the same urgent advice in 10:23, where he exhorts us to "hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering". The 'conditionality' of our salvation, and its depend-

ence on our 'holding fast' to the faith, could hardly be clearer.

The Lord Jesus Christ himself could not have been more categorical than he was on this issue when he dictated the terms of his letters to the seven churches in Asia. Speaking from heaven through the Apostle John to those who had taken on his name, the Lord did not mince his words about what was still required of them before he returned from heaven to judge them. To those in Thyatira not caught up in the errors of "Jezebel" he says, "that which ye have already *hold fast* till I come. And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works *unto the end*, to him will I give power over the nations" (Rev. 2:25,26). In Sardis, too, the Lord could identify a few saints who had "not defiled their garments", and they would "walk with [him] in white" (3:4). But, again, the majority were warned to remember the faith they had first "received and heard", and the Lord had to urge them to "hold fast, and repent" (v. 3). The consequence of not doing that was spelled out in block capitals to the ecclesia at Philadelphia: "hold that fast which thou hast, *that no man take thy crown*" (v. 11). There certainly appears to be no basis, in these last important messages from the risen Lord Jesus to his first-century saints, for believing that an individual's salvation is 'eternally secure'.

Patient continuance: 'Keeping on keeping on'

The New Testament is bursting with passages which stress the need for believers to continue patiently in the faith. Not that a believer can *earn* his or her salvation by works: Paul's letter to the Romans shows very clearly that 'salvation by works' is itself a false doctrine that will only lead to failure. Instead, Romans underlines the importance of a continuing faith in the promises of God—a faith which is *active* out of gratitude

2. In the Greek text of 1 Corinthians 15:2 ("by which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain"), the phrase "keep in memory" is the single word *katechō*, which the AV translates "hold fast" or "hold" in other places where it occurs.
3. 'Unconditional eternal security' is the formal name given to the widespread, but erroneous, evangelical teaching that "every born again believer has perfect, complete, eternal salvation in Jesus Christ" (David Cloud). The doctrine's most widely-read twentieth-century formulation was perhaps Harry A. Ironside's *Eternal Security of the Believer*, first published in 1934.

to God and not because of any misguided notion that eternal life can be earned.

Paul's teaching was very clear on this point: he wrote that God would give eternal life, not to all who called on His Name, but to those "who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality" (Rom. 2:7). Paul became even more explicit about the need for faithful believers to 'keep on keeping on',⁴ when he warned the Gentile Christians in Rome not to assume that their salvation was unconditionally secure. God had set the nation of Israel aside because of their unbelief, and the same failure might still overtake Gentile believers: "Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou *continue* in His goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off" (11:22).

The possibility of baptized believers failing, ultimately, to receive the "crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love Him" (Jas. 1:12) is a consistent theme of the New Testament, and is often related directly to the need for perseverance, or patient continuance.⁵ A few further examples of this serve to illustrate the point:

- In John 15, the Lord Jesus stressed the need for his disciples to "abide" in him, as the branches of the true vine;
- In Mark 13:13, the Lord Jesus made it clear that "he that shall *endure* unto the end, the same shall be saved";
- In Acts 13:43, Paul and Barnabas persuaded those in Antioch who were taking a serious interest in the gospel "to *continue* in the grace of God";
- In Acts 14:22, Paul and Barnabas exhorted believers "to *continue* in the faith";
- In 2 Timothy 3:14, Paul charged Timothy to "*continue* . . . in the things which [he had] learned", including "the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation" (v. 15);
- In James 1:25, an enduring principle was underlined: "whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and *continueth* therein . . . this man shall be blessed";
- In Hebrews 8:9, by way of warning, we are reminded that Israel were rejected by God because of their failure to remain faithful: "they *continued* not in My covenant, and I regarded them not".

The fact that so many of these exhortations to "patient continuance" are couched in positive

rather than negative form should not blind us to the consequences of not continuing in the faith and in the grace of God. Failure to continue as part of the true vine leads to an end which was spelled out by the Lord himself: "If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered" (Jno. 15:6). The younger widows in the ecclesia at Ephesus were in danger, if they did not follow Timothy's God-guided instruction, of "having damnation, because they have cast off their first faith"; and some of them, according to Paul, had "already turned aside after Satan" (1 Tim. 5:12,15). The writer to the Hebrews was also alarmingly explicit about what would happen to those who, in the first century, fell away from the faith after having shared the gifts of the Holy Spirit: it would be "impossible . . . to renew them again unto repentance" (6:4-6), and they would be "rejected, and . . . nigh unto cursing; whose end is to be burned" (v. 8).

'If', 'if', 'if': the conditional preservation of the saints

There can be no doubt about it: the 'eternal preservation' of the saints and their entry into eternal life at the second coming of the Lord Jesus is not a foregone conclusion. The Apostle John was clear that eternal life was conditional when he wrote, "*If that which ye have heard from the beginning shall remain in you, ye also shall continue in the Son, and in the Father.* And this is the promise that He hath promised us, even eternal life" (1 Jno. 2:24,25). Paul prayed fervently that the believers in Thessalonica might be "preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thess. 5:23); and he could confidently add, "Faithful is He that calleth you, Who also will do it" (v. 24). Yet the very same apostle knew that it was possible for believers to "receive . . . the grace of God in vain" (2 Cor. 6:1); and he warned the Christians in Rome that they were "debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh", for if they did, they would die (Rom. 8:12,13).

The apostolic testimony about the conditionality of the believer's ultimate salvation is attested

4. 'Keep on keeping on' was a favourite theme of a well-known American Christadelphian fraternal speaker, who used it to encourage his audience to "patient continuance in well doing".
5. In all the passages referred to or quoted in what follows, the Greek word *menō* (and its various compounds) occurs, meaning 'to continue', 'to remain', 'to abide', or 'to keep on'.

on very many occasions by the presence of the all-important word ‘if’, as shown in the following selection of examples:

- Galatians 6:9—“And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, *if we faint not*”;
- Colossians 1:23—“*if ye continue in the faith grounded and settled*, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel”;
- Hebrews 10:26,27—“For *if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth*, there remaineth . . . a certain fearful looking for of judgment”;
- Hebrews 10:38—“*if any man draw back*, My soul shall have no pleasure in him”;
- Hebrews 12:25 —“. . . much more shall not we escape, *if we turn away from Him That speaketh from heaven*”.⁶

The Apostle Jude addressed his readers as “sanctified . . . preserved in Jesus Christ, and called” (Jude v. 1); yet he still had to exhort them about the need to “earnestly contend for the faith” (v. 3), to build themselves up on their faith (v. 20), and to “keep [them]selves in the love of God” (v. 21).⁷ First-century Christian discipleship was no less fraught with the potential for failure than it is today; and Peter’s advice still applies: “Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness” (2 Pet. 3:17).

“They shall turn away their ears from the truth”

With all this clear Scripture testimony showing that salvation can be lost, we might wonder how and why so many Christians today have come to believe that they can count on their personal salvation with absolute certainty. The simple answer is that the doctrine of unconditional eternal security is part of the long-standing declension of Christianity from the purity of New Testament teaching. It is one aspect among many of what the Apostle Paul, writing to Timothy, foresaw—a time when “sound doctrine” would be set aside, and when people would “turn away their ears from the truth” (2 Tim. 4:3,4).

The notion that, once brought within God’s saving grace, believers are saved eternally and unconditionally, is now widely held among evangelical Christians especially. And the view has a very ancient pedigree. Like so many distortions of apostolic teaching, it can be traced back at least as far as the writings of Augustine, Bishop of Hippo

(A.D. 354–430).⁸ Based on his views about the ‘irresistible’ grace of God, Augustine promoted the idea that human free will was overridden by God in order to save eternally and unconditionally those predestined by Him to salvation.

Many centuries later, building on Augustinian thinking, the followers of the French protestant theologian John Calvin (1509–1564) formulated the so-called Doctrines of Grace, as part of which it was explicitly claimed: “Once God has saved elected sinners, He continues to keep and preserve them by His power and grace and will *never* let them go. Thus, they persevere to the end and can never be lost”.⁹

With a false view of grace and of the supposed activity of the Holy Spirit overriding man’s free will, Calvin’s doctrines of unconditional election and limited atonement¹⁰ were carried forward into dogmatic denominational teaching by the Strict and Particular Baptists. They were subsequently

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6. There are further examples of the ‘if word’ in Hebrews in key passages already quoted in this article (for example, 3:6,14; 6:6).
 7. The English translations tend to mask the fact that, in various forms, the Greek word *tēreō* (‘to keep’ or ‘to guard’) occurs no fewer than five times in the first twenty-one verses of Jude’s letter. In the AV of Jude the word is translated “preserved” (v. 1), “kept” (v. 6), “reserved” (vv. 6,13) and “keep” (v. 21). The word translated “keep” in verse 24 is *phulassō*, a synonym of *tēreō*, meaning ‘to watch’ or ‘to guard’. The idea of ‘keeping’ or ‘guarding’ is therefore clearly a key theme in Jude; and it is important to note that, although Jude tells us that God is able to keep believers from falling (v. 24), this does not absolve them from their personal responsibility to *keep themselves* in the love of God (v. 21).
 8. Deeply influenced by the philosophy of Plato, Augustine was responsible for the development and acceptance of several non-Scriptural teachings that are now part and parcel of general Christian belief, such as the complete divinity of Jesus Christ, the kingdom of God in the church triumphant, and the doctrine of ‘prevenient grace’ (according to which a man *cannot* believe unless the Holy Spirit first acts directly upon him).
 9. Quoted from *The Doctrines of Grace*, available at <http://www.the-faith.org.uk/grace.html>. Three of these five Calvinist doctrines (unconditional election, limited atonement and irresistible grace) were opposed by Jakob Arminius (1560–1609), whose views were much closer than Calvin’s to apostolic teaching.
 10. ‘Limited’, not in the sense that Christ’s death has less than 100 per cent effectiveness to save, but in the sense that his death is only for the preordained number of the elect rather than (in theory at least) for the sins of the whole world.

given more general credence and popularity by John Bunyan in the seventeenth century, by Charles Spurgeon in the nineteenth century, and, in the twentieth century especially, by the worldwide evangelist Dr Billy Graham. But it is only on the basis of a false understanding of the way God works in saving sinners that it is possible to put upon a restricted number of carefully chosen New Testament passages¹¹ a construction which in any way favours the concept of 'eternal security' for the saints.

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11. 'Favourite' passages include John 3:15,16; 10:28,29; Romans 8:38,39; Ephesians 4:30; and Jude v. 24. None of these passages, however, when rightly interpreted, runs counter to the overwhelming teaching of the rest of the New Testament, as partially illustrated in this article. Readers wanting to look further into the historical development of the doctrine of eternal security are recommended to look at a number of well-written and informative entries in *Wikipedia* (<http://en.wikipedia.org>), especially those on 'Irresistible grace', 'Arminius', 'Limited atonement' and 'Strict and Particular Baptists'.

The full assurance of faith

Stephen Whitehouse

Although we are accountable to Christ at the judgement for our conduct as believers, we need not fear the judgement seat if we maintain our faith to the end and seek forgiveness for our sins.

THE APOSTLE PAUL reminds us all of the solemn reality of our future: "For we must *all* appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad" (2 Cor. 5:10). In fact, the presence of our brethren and sisters in Christ at the judgement seat is the one and only certainty in our lives. Even death itself is not guaranteed, as our Lord and Saviour may have returned before death has asserted its power over us. Yet do we really believe this? Or do we like to dismiss the thought to the back of our minds, and so avoid pondering the reality (and implications) of coming face to face with the Son of God at the judgement?

The judgement seat

Not only will we be confronted with the Lord Jesus at the judgement seat, but we will have to provide a verbal account of what we have done with our lives, for "every one of us shall give account of himself to God" (Rom. 14:12), says Paul. Of importance, the Greek word for "account" is *logos*, which can be interpreted as 'a word, uttered by a living voice'. It commonly refers to a 'word', 'saying', 'account' or 'speech' in the Scriptures. This suggests two important principles. Firstly, we, personally, will be actively involved in the

judgement seat as we will be asked to provide a verbal "account" of our lives; and, secondly, the format of this judgement is something akin to a tribunal, where the Lord Jesus will act as supreme judge.

Indeed, the prophets all confirm that the Lord Jesus will act as judge during the judgement. For instance, the prophet Isaiah spoke of a future judge who would possess the spirit of God Himself—being just, righteous and faithful—and would with "righteousness . . . judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek", but "with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked" (Isa. 11:4). The Lord Jesus himself had no doubt about his future role, for he declared, "the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son . . . and hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of man" (Jno. 5:22,27). Because the Lord Jesus Christ is both Son of God and Son of man he is uniquely qualified to be judge.

So, if we look at the Scriptural facts, there is much to consider and meditate upon. However, it is also helpful to bring to mind other words of the apostle regarding this future meeting with Christ. Paul makes it clear that the time of Christ's second advent is one that is very much related to the hope of eternal life for the faithful: "For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life" (2 Cor. 5:4). Indeed, this is our earnest hope: "that mortality might be swallowed up of life".