

“The Essentials Of Our Faith”

Session XXIV

March 27, 2011

“JUSTIFICATION”:

The Person And Work Of Jesus Christ!

Part Five: “Can A Believer Have Assurance?”

Can a person who has “believed” on the Lord Jesus Christ be confident (“assured”) that they are a Child of God (John 1:12), that their sin-debt has been paid in full (Romans 5:1; 8:1), and that they presently possess “eternal life” (John 3:16; 5:24)?

Asked bluntly, “Can a Christian know he/she is going to Heaven when they die?”

Three popular theological positions or Church movements do not think so:

- 1) **The “Roman Catholic” Church** teaches justification is a “**lifelong process**”. It begins with baptism and continues with the further teachings/requirements of the Church.

“Christ did His part, and now we have to cooperate by doing ours.” --Karl Keating

The Council of Trent (1564) states:

*“If anyone says that the sinner is justified by faith alone, meaning that nothing else is required to cooperate, in order to obtain the grace of justification . . . let him be **anathema**. If anyone says that the sacraments of the New Law (canons and decrees of the Catholic Church) are not necessary for salvation but . . . without them . . . men obtain from God through faith alone the grace of justification . . . let him be **anathema**.”*

--The Council of Trent, Session 6, Canon 9

The Roman Catholic Catechism states:

*“Living faith works through charity . . . Service of and witness to the faith are **necessary** for salvation.”*

—Catechism of the Catholic Church, Part 3, Section 1

“To gain the happiness of Heaven we must know, love, and serve God in this world.”

—Catechism of the Catholic Church, Part 3, Section 1

Summary:

*“Without good works, **no one will get to Heaven**.”*

--Jeremy D. Myers

--If a Christian fails to continue in “good works”, Justification/Salvation is lost!

2) The “Arminian” theological position teaches that a person can sincerely “believe” in Jesus Christ at one point, and then, at a later point, commit sins of such a serious nature that personal salvation is “lost”!

“The Remonstrants, followers of Arminius, wrote in reaction to the Calvinists, ‘True Believers can through their own fault fall into horrible sins and blasphemies, persevere and die in the same: and accordingly they can finally fall away and go lost.’ The Remonstrants thus taught the possibility of a loss of justification.”

—Jeremy D. Myers

In writing a letter to a Roman Catholic, John Wesley tried to show how similar Catholics and Protestants are in answering this question:

“If he does not (act according to Christian principles), we grant all his faith will not save him. And this leads me to show you, in few and plain words, what the practice of a true Protestant is . . . a true Protestant believes in God, has a full confidence in His mercy, fears Him with a filial fear, and loves Him with all his soul. He worships God in spirit and truth, in everything gives his thanks; calls upon Him with his heart as well as his lips, at all times and in all places, honors His holy name and His word, serves him truly all the days of his life . . .”

—John Wesley

A more recent writer gives this explanation of the Arminian position on “assurance”:

“ . . . to enter the kingdom of God Christians must endure hatred and persecution to the very end of their lives (Matt. 10:22; Heb. 3:14; Rev. 2:10,11), live holy (Rom. 6:22; Heb. 12:14); bring forth good fruit (Matt. 7:19); and do good works (John 5:29), according to New Testament grace.”

—Daniel Corner

The practical application of the question of “assurance” is seen in these words:

*“We have seen that God’s salvation covenant is a continuing covenant. And it is a monstrous deception to teach that the continual sinner will be saved by a continued covenant that **DEMANDS** his continued obedience.”*

—Guy Duty

Primary Scriptural Support:

“You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace.”

Galatians 5:4

—Paul’s Warning: A person “falls from grace” if they leave a “grace” approach to God for salvation and substitute a “law” foundation in hope of salvation!

Summary: *“It is clear that Arminians teach that by committing some gross sin the one who is justified can lose their justification and thereby forfeit Heaven if they do not repent before they die. Thus, works are crucial in maintaining one’s justification.”*

—Jeremy D. Myers

3) The “**Reformed**” **theological position** teaches that the “elect” of God will continue or persevere in “faith” which is evidence by “good works”.

“In the Reformed view works is a necessary fruit of justification.” --R.C. Sproul

The Westminster Confession Of Faith (1646) states:

“Although hypocrites, and other unregenerate men, may vainly deceive themselves with false hopes and carnal presumptions: of being in the favor of God and estate of salvation; which hope of theirs shall perish; yet such as truly believe in the Lord Jesus, and love Him in sincerity, endeavoring to walk in all good conscience before Him, may in this life be certainly assured that they are in a state of grace, and may rejoice in the hope of the glory of God: which hope shall never make them ashamed.”

--The Westminster Confession Of Faith

“Thus, the Confession states that only those who truly believe, love God in sincerity, and endeavor to walk in all good conscience before Him may be assured that they will make it to Heaven.”

--Jeremy D. Myers

James Montgomery Boice agrees:

“ . . . this is not only a matter of our demonstrating a genuinely changed behavior and thus doing good works if we are justified. It must also be that our good works exceed the good works of others. When Jesus said, ‘Unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law . . .’ he meant, ‘Unless you who call yourselves Christians, who profess to be justified by faith alone and therefore confess that you have nothing whatever to contribute to your own justification – unless you conduct yourselves in a way which is utterly superior to the conduct of the very best people who are hoping to save themselves by their own good works, you will not enter God’s kingdom because you are not a Christian in the first place.’ ”

--James Montgomery Boice

Charles Hodge, the famous Reformed theologian, writes:

“False security of salvation commonly rests on the ground of our belonging to a privileged body, the Church, or to a privileged class, the elect. Both are equally fallacious. Neither the members of the Church nor the elect can be saved unless they persevere in holiness. And they cannot persevere in holiness without continual watchfulness and effort.”

--Charles Hodge

Arthur Pink, popular Reformed writer of commentaries on the Word of God, states:

“Readers, if there is a reserve in your obedience, you are on your way to hell . . . There is a deadly and damnable heresy being widely propagated today to the effect that, if a sinner truly accepts Christ as his personal Savior, no matter how he lives

afterwards, he cannot perish. That is a satanic lie, for it is at direct variance with the teaching of the Word of truth. Something more than believing in Christ is necessary to ensure the soul's reaching Heaven. . . . all faith does not save; yea, all faith **IN CHRIST** does not save. Multitudes are deceived upon this vital matter. Thousands of those who sincerely believe that they have received Christ as their personal Savior and are resting on His finished work, are building upon a foundation of sand." --Arthur W. Pink

This matter is made difficult when gifted and popular authors like John Piper say: "Election is unconditional, but glorification is not. There are many warnings in Scripture that those who do not **hold fast** to Christ can be **LOST** in the end." "Present justification is based on the substitutionary work of Christ alone, enjoyed in union with Him through faith alone. Future justification is the open confirmation and declaration that in Christ Jesus we are perfectly blameless before God. This final judgment accords with our works. That is, the fruit of the Holy Spirit in our lives will be brought forward as the evidence and confirmation of true faith and union with Christ. Without that validating transformation, there will be no future salvation." --John Piper

"Piper has embraced the idea of 'initial justification' by faith alone and 'final justification' by works. . . . Piper says we have eternal life 'through faith alone'. He also says that without our good works 'there will be no future salvation'. This is becoming a popular way to explain justification by faith alone by Reformed scholars." --Robert Wilkin

Speaking as the head of "**Grace Evangelical Society**", Robert Wilkin gives this helpful insight in commenting on a recent book by Thomas Schreiner and Ardel Caneday, The Race Set Before Us – A Biblical Theology of Perseverance and Assurance:

" . . . it is clear the authors are speaking of 'a potential future reality,' not a guaranteed one. They are speaking of 'the gift of righteousness that will be theirs on the day of redemption if they persevere to the very end.' The person who is righteous now will only be declared righteous finally if he perseveres in the race. Even if the Apostle had stopped short of the finish line, he would have been eternally condemned." --Robert Wilkin

Summary: Reformed scholars today speak of initial justification before God, which is indeed by faith alone, apart from works, and also they speak of final justification before God, which is by works. After life is over God will judge all people at what is called the final judgment. Those whose works are sufficiently 'good' to result their final justification before God will be granted access to the Kingdom.

The Meaning Of “Security”

(From Dr. Charles C. Ryrie)

A. A Definition:

“Eternal security is that work of God which guarantees that the gift of salvation, once received, is possessed forever and cannot be lost.”

B. Practical Application:

“Since security rests on God’s guarantee, its truthfulness, then, does not rest on my feelings or experiences.”

“Its basis is the grace of God, who gives us the gift of eternal life, and that grace is eternal. Receiving that gift brings us into a relationship with all the Persons of the Godhead, which guarantees and assures us that our salvation is eternally secure.”

*“Security is a **TRUE FACT** whether or not an individual has assurance of that or not.”*

C. Reasons for Believing in “Eternal Security”:

1. Error: *Some argue that God’s power can be cut off if a person renounces his faith.*

Truth: *“But the Lord said that we are secure in His and the Father’s hand, and that guarantees that He will keep safe the one who has received the gift of eternal life, **John 10:28-29**. No one (including ourselves) is able to snatch us out of God’s hand. And remember, eternal life is a gift received through faith, not a reward for being willing to follow Christ.”*

2. Error: *Some suggest that there are earthly or heavenly powers that can “separate” us from the everlasting love of God.*

Truth: *“In this passage, **Romans 8:35-39**, Paul lists a number of candidates which might seem to be able to separate Believers from the love of Christ. They include . . . adverse circumstances like trouble and poverty; all the circumstances of life, present and future, including death; and the powers of angelic beings (and Satan is one of them). Then Paul concludes by saying no other created thing can separate us from the love of God in Christ. **Nothing in all creation**, including all the creatures (which includes us!) can cause a separation from the eternal love of Christ.”*

3. **Error:** *Many Believers allow the accusations of Satan (Rev. 12:10) or the accusations we make against ourselves to become their focus, rather than the finished and perfect work of Christ.*

Truth: “Our Lord’s continual **intercession** for us keeps us saved completely and eternally, **Hebrews 7:25**. When we do sin we have our Lord to plead our case before God, **I John 2:1-2**. And because He has provided total and eternal satisfaction or propitiation for our sins, **we stand forgiven**. ‘Who will bring a charge against God’s elect?’ (Rom. 8:33) It makes no difference what the answer is. It makes no difference who in all the universe may try to charge us with whatever. It makes no difference as long as it is not God who charges us. And God does not. In fact, He has already announced the verdict in all instances when we are and will be charged. And the verdict is ‘not guilty’. **God is the one who justifies, Romans 8:33.**”

4. **Error:** *Many Christians do not understand the relationship of the indwelling Holy Spirit to the experience of security and assurance.*

Truth: “The abiding presence and residence of the **Holy Spirit** in the Believer is also a gift from God, John 7:37-39; Acts 11:16-17; Rom. 5:5; I Cor. 12:12. **If salvation can be lost, then God would have to take back His gift of the Holy Spirit.**”

5. **Error:** *It is very common for Christians not to know the dispensational truth of the Believer being placed into the Body of Christ at salvation.*

Truth: “At conversion the Believer is joined to the Body of Christ by the baptism of the Holy Spirit, **I Corinthians 12:13**. **If salvation can be lost, then one would have to be severed from the Body, and the Body of Christ would then be dismembered.**”

6. **Error:** *While most Christians say they “believe” in the promises of God, many do not actually have confidence that the Word of God is true! (John 17:17)*

Truth: “When we believed, the Holy Spirit sealed us until the ‘day of redemption’, **Ephesians 1:13; 4:30**. **If we are not secure, then the seal has to be broken or the promise would be that we are sealed not until the day of redemption, but only until the day we sin . . .** And remember, God **seals ALL Believers**, not just those who are or who are willing to be committed Believers, **II Corinthians 1:22.**”

“Christ’s constancy to His own promises provides the Believer with his greatest security. It is unthinkable that any contingency could affect the faithfulness of God, for He cannot deny Himself.” (II Timothy 2:13) --Donald Guthrie