

SCRIPTURAL SECURITY

(Continued)

The Doctrine of "Eternal Security" Examined
With the doctrine of "Eternal Security" exposed to view, we may examine it in the light of scripture.

First of all, let us consider some of the passages commonly used to support the theory.

John 5:24 can serve as a sample scripture of the many "eternal life" passages quoted by the Calvinists, and used as a foundation stone in the construction of their theory. "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on Him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life." The interpretation given this passage by the "Eternal Security" advocates is: "Those who have believed in Christ have received eternal life; since this life is eternal, it can never be lost; therefore, the believer is saved for eternity."

Let us note two important factors in the interpretation of this and similar passages:

(1) The phrase "eternal life" refers primarily to the quality or nature of the life which the believer enjoys and not to its quantity or duration. The only scripture definition we have of eternal life is given us by our Lord in John 17:3: "And this is life eternal, that they might know the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent." Eternal life is a quality of life known by those who are in right relationship with God. It is knowing Jesus, and living in the joy of fellowship with Him. In I. John 1:1-3 and 5:11-20 the apostle links the knowledge of eternal life with the blessed fellowship which the believer knows "with the Father, and with His Son," clearly stating that "he that hath the Son, hath life" (eternal). Eternal life is not something that God puts within a man when he is born again which fixes man's destiny and lengthens the period of his existence. Eternal existence is sure for every man. Being born again will not add one moment to the period of our existence. The sinful soul will continue as long as the righteous. The difference between the two in respect to destiny, is not to be discovered in the problem of continued existence, that is assured to both. But salvation brings a man into reconciliation with God and re-establishes soul fellowship between the created and the Creator, giving the believer the hope of eternal association with Him who is the source and giver of life eternal. It is this acquaintance with God which differentiates the believer from the unbeliever. A man has eternal life because He has Christ who is its true source. Knowing Him, walking with Him, living in His will is eternal life. The man who does not know Him, has no delight in His company, and refuses to submit to His leadership, is void of true life and "dead while he liveth." That which makes men different now, in this moral sense, will make them different in the hereafter. The lost will exist eternally, but in a state of death, because of separation from God. The saved will exist eternally, but in a state of life, eternal life, because of union with God. To suggest that a man may be "out of fellowship" with God, because of sin, and yet in possession of eternal life, is contradictory. God is the source and giver of eternal life, and if fellowship with Him is lost, the life of that fellowship is lost also. This is the only scriptural

eternal life which we may know. It is a quality of life which is ours through fellowship with God and His Son, Jesus Christ, and is inseparably bound up with that fellowship.

(2) We cannot fail to note the present tense expression of the scripture under consideration. "He that HEARETH . . . and BELIEVETH . . ." "He that HATH the Son HATH life . . ." It is not an act of believing, but a life. It is not something related solely to the past, but also to the present. Eternal life, "as a present possession," can only be claimed as we in the present are in the enjoyment of an unbroken fellowship with its Author and Sustainer. This thought is clearly emphasized throughout the Word of God, and in no place is there the suggestion that the new birth brings you into possession of something that settles your destiny for time and eternity.

Another favorite passage of the Calvinists is John 10:27-28: "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me; and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand."

This whole parable is given to show the difference between the false shepherds and hirelings, and the true Shepherd, which is Christ. Jesus portrays the wolf coming to "snatch" or steal away the sheep ("snatch," *harpadzo*, means "to take by force." When ravenous beasts attack the flock, the hireling, or false shepherd, flees and leaves the sheep to the mercy of their enemies, but not so with the Good Shepherd. He protects, at the hazard of His own life, the sheep He loves. Moreover, He is fully able to defend, for no ravenous enemy is able to "snatch" away the sheep which are under His care.

The "sheep" who enjoy the protection of Him from whom none is able to "take them by force," are described in the early verses of John 10. "They hear my voice . . . I know them . . . they follow me." Now every student of the scriptures will agree that hearing the voice of Christ, as referred to here, means more than catching the sound. As in many other places where the expression is used, it means they heed His voice, that is, obey His word. "He calleth His own sheep by name, and leadeth them out." This indicates that the sheep of Christ are heedful and obedient to the voice of their shepherd. Now we can but leave it to the sincere reader to judge whether the professed Christian who returns to a sinful course is heeding the voice of Christ or that of the devil. The practical proof of our heeding the Shepherd's voice is in our following Him. To take a sinful course indicates that we have closed our ears to the call of the Good Shepherd and are obeying the voice of strangers. "He that followeth me shall not walk in darkness . . ." As the figures used by Peter of the dog and the sow returning to their former uncleannesses indicate the woe-ful state of the backslider, so this parable, and the general trend of scripture teach that the sheep who had gone astray, according to Isaiah 53:6, but at conversion has returned to the "shepherd and bishop" of the soul, could again return to "his own way." Such a course would take us away from the care and protection of the Good Shepherd, since it is obvious that we no longer heed his voice nor follow Him. In interpreting this and other parables which are used in the Word to convey some spiritual truth to us, we must not conclude that because human beings are some-

times likened to animals they are like animals, driven about as dumb beasts are. Moreover, to hold that "if we are once sheep we must always be sheep," is both unscriptural and unreasonable when applied to the parabolic teachings of the Word of God. Sinners are likened to sheep also, as well as goats and chicks. These figures are used to accommodate some lesson to our human understanding.

Another favourite argument of the "eternal security" school in defense of their doctrine is "Once a son, always a son; once you are born, you can never be unborn."

This language is another straining out of all proportion a parabolic portrayal of truth in order to justify a teaching that cannot be supported except as truth is distorted. The fact that certain laws operate in the natural realm does not mean they must run parallel in the spiritual, especially when the principle involved is not in harmony with other scriptures. God did not give us the parable of the Prodigal Son as a foundation for false conclusions, he gave it to us as an illustration of sin's deceptive power, and love's patient and forgiving nature.

But, as if the Holy Spirit, foreseeing the dangerous trend of Calvinistic thought, certain words are contained in the parable which frustrate the false interpretations given. We are given to understand that this boy, though a son, may be a rebellious and wayward son, a lost son, a dead son. If dead, he can in no way benefit from those things which his sonship would normally afford him. The words "lost" and "dead" are fearfully suggestive of the possibility of our forfeiting the blessings that are ours by inheritance and returning to that awful state from which we were redeemed. Sinners are children of the devil, but not necessarily for eternity; Christians are children of God, but in no sense which robs them of personal liberty. Our state and relationship with God are dependent on the obedience and faith which belongs to true sonship. "In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil . . ." "He that doeth righteousness is righteous . . . he that committeth sin is of the devil."

Reader, stand in awe, and sin not. There is a place of safety and contentment in the will of God, but it is not a place which provides for the shelter of sin and sinning. The storm of Divine judgment will sweep away the fragile shelter of those who have taken refuge in the man-made eternal security theory, so take heed, build upon the Rock!

HEAVEN AND HELL

R. Barclay Warren

The Scriptural teaching concerning heaven has never been the object of such vicious attacks as has been the Scriptural teaching concerning hell. One need not look far for the reason. Sinful, selfish man is willing to entertain the pleasing prospect of heaven while he resents the teaching of hell, where he would receive the just punishment of his sin. Some boldly affirm that there is no hell. Others say that certain people will go to heaven regardless of their ungodly manner of life and the state of their character at death. Still others believe that everyone will sometime, somewhere, somehow be saved; hence, no need of hell. This teaching is not based on the Scriptures but on the vain philosophies of conceited man who would deny God the right to

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