

**Is Salvation Forever?
The Doctrine of Eternal Security**

**A position paper prepared for Grace
Community Church**

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**"It is profoundly satisfying to the believer
that in the last resort what matters
is not his feeble hold on God,
but God's strong grip on him".**

- Dr. Leon Morris

PLEASE READ THIS FIRST!!!

This paper is intended to be a teaching tool for the people of Grace Community Church. It is a biblical study of one of the beliefs expressed in the doctrinal statement found in our Constitution.

It is not intended to be a recruiting tool for our friends who attend other churches. If you have any questions about this paper or any other doctrine taught here at Grace, please contact the church office.

Few things in life are more enjoyable than sitting down with our Bibles open in order to explore the Word of God.

IS SALVATION FOREVER?

Can a Christian lose or forfeit his salvation? If not, why not? If so, how so? The question of "eternal security" is a very important one and is often hotly debated. The purpose of this position paper is to briefly state the biblical teaching of eternal security.

I know many fine Christian brothers and sisters hold a different view than the one defended here. I believe they are mistaken but I am thankful for the bond we share in Christ. I have no desire to be hostile or to generate hostility on the part of those who hold a different position.

My goal is to handle the Scriptures with accuracy and respect and to encourage others to do the same. All Christians should be Berean in spirit (Acts 17:11). During the course of this paper many Bible references will be cited.

Please read this paper with your Bible open and look up each reference.

The simple answer to the title question is "Yes, salvation is forever". A person who has been truly born again is saved forever and no failure on his part can change his position. He is sealed with the Holy Spirit who is a deposit guaranteeing his inheritance (Ephesians 1:13-14). That's the simple answer. I recognize, however, that those who hold a contrary position will not be satisfied that I have proven my case by citing just one passage. Those who hold to eternal security will also require a fuller explanation. Many books have been written on this subject, which goes to show that there is much that can be said. What you are about to read is a paper, not a book, and so it is not an exhaustive treatment of the issues.* I have not written on a technical level because the intended audience is not professional theologians, but the congregation of Grace Community Church. Nevertheless, the key issues will be treated sufficiently enough to establish the position that salvation is forever.

There are eight primary concepts explored in this paper. They are as follows:

- I. The Nature of a Gift
- II. God's Promises
- III. How God Deals With Our Failures
- IV. Does It Matter How I Live?
- V. The Folly of Human Effort
- VI. Position Vs. Practice
- VII. The Endurance Passages
- VIII. "Problem" Passages

*For those who are interested in a book-length treatment of the subject, one need look no further than to Dr. Robert Gromacki's excellent work Salvation Is Forever (Regular Baptist Press, 1989). Dr. Gromacki is the Pastor Emeritus of Grace Community Church.

I. THE NATURE OF A GIFT

Salvation is a gift. The Bible states this very clearly (Romans 6:23; Ephesians 2:8; Revelation 22:17). A gift is not a reward for human effort, it is not earned. If salvation comes to us because of what we do then God is fulfilling an obligation when He saves us and what we receive is not a gift. This was Paul's argument in Romans 4:4-8.

"Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness." (Romans 4:4-5)

If we had to earn salvation to get it then it is not a gift.
Likewise, if we have to work to keep it, it is not a gift - it is a reward.

The teaching that states a Christian can lose his salvation if his faith or obedience fails is nothing more and nothing less than a smuggling of a "works righteousness" in the back door.

Consider a simple analogy. If I go home today and give my daughter a new iPad, my daughter (knowing it is not her birthday) might be tempted to ask me why I am giving it to her. If I were to say, "It is because you are a good daughter and you have been very helpful to your mother", then the iPad is **not a gift in the truest sense of the word**, it is a reward. But if I were to say to her, "This is a gift and it is an expression of my love for you", then I have said something very different than the first response. Now suppose that upon arriving home tomorrow I were to learn that my daughter had failed to clean the kitchen for her mother. If, in response to her failure, I told my daughter that she could no longer have her iPad then I have demonstrated that the iPad was never truly a gift, it was a reward. If I had originally told her it was a reward for her efforts then I might have grounds for revoking it when her efforts fail. But if I had told her it was a free gift and then revoked it I would be guilty of inconsistency.

Men are capable of being inconsistent, God is not (Numbers 23:19).
If my possession of salvation ultimately depends on my effort, either before I receive it, or

There are two possible objections to this argument. First, someone might argue that a Christian does have to do something to receive salvation - he has to exercise faith. Response: It is true that a Christian does make the choice to believe, but it is also true that even at this level God is graciously working in the human heart (John 6:44, 64-65). Left to himself man will not choose God (Romans 3:9-12). God is the One who deserves all the credit for salvation. We have no grounds for boasting (Ephesians 2:9; II Timothy 1:9; I Corinthians 1:28-31).

Secondly, someone might suggest that God will not revoke the gift, but a Christian might willfully repudiate his faith and, in the sense that he is voluntarily "giving it back", forfeit his salvation. This objection will be addressed in section III, but for now a short

answer is that such a person was either never truly saved (regenerated, converted, born-again) or he will come under the corrective discipline of his Heavenly Father.

To summarize the first section, we must take seriously the implications of the biblical description of salvation being a gift. It is impossible to preserve the true meaning of "gift" if my keeping it is contingent on how I fulfill certain obligations. The implications of having nothing to boast about (I Corinthians 1:30-31) are just as far reaching.

*... God, who has saved us and called us to a holy life –
Not because of anything we have done but because of
His own purpose and grace. II Timothy 1:9*

If my efforts contribute to my salvation being secured then on the day I step into Heaven I deserve some credit for being there. But such a position is expressly forbidden by Scripture. The reason I have nothing about which to boast is because from first to last my salvation is a gift from God.

NOTE: There is a sense in which staying true to the faith (persevering) is connected to eternal security. But as we will see in Section VII, the desire and ability to persevere in the faith is included in the free gift of our salvation. It is given to us by God. **Therefore, it isn't that our perseverance secures our salvation, our salvation secures our perseverance.**

II. THE PROMISES OF GOD

God has made promises in His Word which are completely trustworthy. In light of the character of God and the weakness of man, the only sure hope of Heaven anyone can have must be rooted in God and not man. Here are some of God's promises:

*And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth,
the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were **marked in Him with a seal,**
the promised Holy Spirit, **who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance**
until the redemption of those who are God's possession –to the praise of His glory.*
Ephesians 1:13-14

The Holy Spirit Himself is the seal which God the Father uses to mark those who have trusted in Christ. It identifies Christians as being owned by God. We are His possession and He guarantees our eternal inheritance. In the first century a seal was an official mark of identification. It was usually made of hot wax and was marked with the owner's (usually a king or high official) signet ring. No one was authorized to break that seal. That is why Paul could say that the Holy Spirit is a deposit which **GUARANTEES**

the eternal inheritance of each Christian. My personal failures and the sins I commit after I come to Christ cannot break or override the authority of the seal. This is God's promise to His children. Because of cultural differences, it is difficult for Christians today to understand just how intensely authoritative an official seal was in the first century. Notice the significance of the seals described in Revelation 5:1-5 as described by the Apostle John:

*“Then I saw in the right hand of Him who sat on the throne a scroll with writing on both sides and **sealed** with **seven seals**. And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming in a loud voice,
‘Who is worthy to **break the seals** and open the scroll?’ But no one in Heaven or on earth or under the earth could open the scroll or even look inside it. I wept and wept because no one was found who was worthy to open the scroll or look inside. Then one of the elders said to me,
‘Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals.’”*
Revelation 5:1-5

When John's original readers read this passage they understood something that we must recognize. When God, the universe's Owner, places His seal upon something, only God (in this case Jesus, the eternal Son of God) can open that seal. No one else in the universe is permitted to do that. When, according to Ephesians 1:13-14, God places the Holy Spirit as His seal upon us, we have the strongest guarantee in the universe that we will receive our heavenly inheritance.

Because it is so important to the Bible's promise to us that we are eternally secure in Him, let's consider two other passages that speak of seals. In Daniel 6:17, Daniel was being placed in the lion's den. It is described with these words:

*“A stone was brought and placed over the mouth of the den, and the king sealed it with his own signet ring and with the rings of his nobles, so that **Daniel's situation might not be changed**.”*

Because the den had been marked with the king's seal, Daniel's situation could not be changed by anyone except the king himself.

According to Daniel 6:17, the king's seal carried with it an unbreakable authority. How much greater is the authority of God's seal, especially when the seal God uses is the Holy Spirit.
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Another passage that mentions a seal is Matthew 27:62-66. Immediately after the death of Jesus, the Jewish religious leaders went to Pilate to express their concern that

Jesus's disciples might steal His body from the grave so they could claim He had risen from the dead. In verses 65-66 Pilate gave this response.

*“‘Take a guard,’ Pilate answered. ‘Go, make the tomb **as secure as you know how.**’
So they went and made the tomb **secure by putting a seal on the stone and posting a guard.**”*

Are you starting to see the significance of official seals during Bible times? When Paul used the imagery of God sealing us with the Holy Spirit as a deposit guaranteeing our future inheritance, he was using the strongest picture possible to communicate just how eternally secure the Christian is. The seal is not ours, it is God's. We did not mark ourselves with a seal, God did. We don't determine the destiny of the seal, God does. God **alone**. This is why Jesus said this in John 10:27-30.

*“My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.
I give them eternal life and they shall never perish;
no one can snatch them out of my hand.
My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all;
no one can snatch them out of My Father's hand.
I and the Father are one.”*

Jesus' promise in John 10:27-30 is a reflection of the manner in which the Father seals the Christian with the Holy Spirit as a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance. The entire Trinity is active in securing the believer.

*“... being confident of this, that He who began a good work in you
will carry it on to completion until the day of Jesus Christ.”
(Philippians 1:6)*

Paul's confidence in eternal security was an extension of his God - centered view of salvation. Paul taught that God, **not man**, is the originator of our salvation and on this basis Paul could have confidence in the inevitability of the Christian attaining Heaven. It is God's work, not man's, and this is why the Bible calls it GRACE!

*“To Him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you
before His glorious presence without fault and with great joy ...”
(Jude 24)*

In this great doxology Jude expressed his full confidence that his Christian readers would absolutely make it to Heaven. From where did Jude's confidence come? Certainly

not in the performance of Christians. Jude's confidence was in God. The Christian will be presented without fault (blemish) - the same word used of Christ as a faultless lamb in I Peter 1:19. **Man cannot present himself as faultless**, it requires the work of God.

*“May God Himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through.
May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus
Christ. The One Who calls you is faithful and He will do it.”*
(I Thessalonians 5:23-24)

Paul did not pray for the Thessalonians to keep themselves. Preservation is the work of God. Of this passage in I Thessalonians, Dr. Leon Morris wrote, "It is profoundly satisfying to the believer that in the last resort what matters is not his feeble hold on God, but God's strong grip on him". This great truth is stated in the strongest possible terms by Jesus Himself in John 10:25-30.

God has promised He will never leave us or forsake us (Hebrews 13:5). Please take the time to read these other promises: John 5:24; 17:11-12; Romans 8:35-39; 16:25; I Peter 1:3-5.

These promises are not conditioned upon human performance. Even if one were to argue that the promises are conditioned upon human faithfulness, **the enablement for man to continue in the faith would be divinely given**. This concept will be explored in section VII. Until you actually get to section VII, be assured that the eternal security position does take seriously the importance of human faithfulness. We also take seriously that if God guarantees our secure position (He does), then He will work in the hearts of believers to enable them to be faithful. (See Jude 21, 24).

To reject eternal security all of these passages have to be explained away. If one were to read these passages together in one sitting the overwhelming sense they give is that a person who is truly born again is a child of God who has the divine protection and guarantee of his Heavenly Father that his position is secure.

III. HOW GOD DEALS WITH OUR FAILURES

Christians can fall into serious and grievous sin. By these sinful deeds a Christian is acting in a way which is a denial of Christ (James 3:9-12). Does this mean the fallen Christian has lost, or is in danger of losing, his salvation? NO. God's Word leaves two possible ways of explaining how God deals with professing Christians who fall back into habitual sin or even deny the faith. Neither possibility allows for the loss of salvation.

1. There are many professing Christians who will not end up in Heaven. This is not because they once possessed salvation and then lost it. **It is because though they once professed Christ, they never possessed Christ**. The Bible warns readers of the ever-present danger of false professions of faith. In this category we find people who hear the gospel and claim to believe and accept it. In these cases there is no inward

possession of the truth that is outwardly professed. The profession of faith is not valid because there is no inward regeneration. A close look at I John 2:19 shows that this phenomena has existed since the early days of Christianity.

John spoke of those who had been true Christians, but became false teachers, had not lost their salvation. John made it clear that they had never been genuine Christians, they had only claimed to be Christians.

“They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us” (I John 2:19).

John did not say, "they no longer belong", his choice of verb tenses is clear - "none of them belonged". To this type of people Jesus will someday say, "Depart from me, I never knew you" (Matthew 7:22-23). Jesus did not speak of a relationship that had been terminated. He spoke of a relationship which never existed - despite the claims of these people. The immediate context is a description of false teachers, but the dynamic of false professions applies to more than just false teachers.

The danger of false professions is again stated in Hebrews 6:4-8.

It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age, if they fall away, to be brought back to repentance, because to their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting Him to public disgrace. Land that drinks in the rain often falling on it and that produces a crop useful to those for whom it is farmed receives the blessing of God. But land that produces thorns and thistles is worthless and is in danger of being cursed. In the end it will be burned.

Ironically, Christians who believe salvation can be lost often cite these verses as proof of their position. But in verse 9 the writer makes it clear that he has two types of people in mind.

*Even though we speak like this, dear friends,
we are confident of better things in your case –
things that accompany salvation.*

In 6:4-8 he is speaking of those who professed Christ yet never truly possessed salvation. That is why in verse 9 the writer introduces a contrast. The writer, having warned of false professions and the defections which accompany false professions in verses 4-8, now states that he is "confident of better things" where his readers are concerned, "things that accompany salvation". The people of verse 9 are of a different sort than those of verses 4-8. This is the same distinction John made in I John 2:19 (see the prior discussion). Like John, the author of Hebrews knew that true believers would continue in the faith, false professions would lead to defections. *

* Some scholars who support eternal security interpret Hebrews 6:4-8 as describing genuine believers but that this passage is a warning using a hypothetical = “If you could fall away into apostasy the results would be a spiritual disaster and you would have no possibility of being restored.” While this interpretation does make sense (a warning using a hypothetical scenario that will not happen in reality because God won’t allow it), I prefer the interpretation that this is a warning about false professions.

2. God disciplines genuine believers when they fall into sin or are on the verge of turning their back on the faith. The discipline (administered in divine fatherly love) is not a taking away of salvation but a taking away of joy, blessing, and protection. Please read Hebrews 12:3-13. Once again we see the writer of Hebrews making a crucial distinction between false professions and genuine professions. Both types of people sin. But when a professing Christian sins, God disciplines only those who are truly born-again (verse 8). Many people have, at some point in their lives, been professing believers who have later walked away from the faith. If they are not chastised by God it is because they were never truly born again (Hebrews 12:6).

“Because the Lord disciplines those He loves, and He punishes everyone He accepts as a son ... If you are not disciplined (as other fathers discipline their children) then you are illegitimate children and not true sons.” Hebrews 12:6-8

A true believer can commit horrible sins. This will never cost him his salvation but it can compel God to discipline even to the point of physical death. I Corinthians 11:17-32 is clear on this. The Corinthians had sinned horribly against the Lord's Supper even to the point of being drunk during communion. Consequently, God had to deal severely, even to the point of death.

“This is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep.”

"Falling asleep" is a description used of Christians who have died (see I Thessalonians 4:13). The incredible wickedness of these Corinthian believers cost them their **lives but not their salvation**. Paul asserts this in 11:32.

“When we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned with the world.”

I Corinthians 11:32

These believers were **not condemned** with the world, yet look at the devastating description of their sin in verses 27-29.

Think about this: The Corinthian believers who had fallen asleep (died) as a result of God’s discipline went to the grave in a state of disobedience. Had they repented they would not have been under this extreme measure of God’s discipline.

Still, they were not condemned

In I Corinthians 3:5-15 we see the same pattern. God's judgment of the Christian's life can even lead to the loss of rewards in Heaven, but not the loss of Heaven itself. Some Christians may, through disobedience and wrong motives, suffer the loss of all reward. But of this type of Christian Paul says in verse 15:

“If it (his work) is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames.”

Summary: When a professing Christian falls into prolonged sin and unrepentance (including a falling away from the Christian community) there are two possibilities.

- 1) He was never truly born again and his defection is the fruit of an empty profession.
- 2) He is a true Christian and it is only a matter of time before the discipline of a loving Heavenly Father weighs down on him. Continued resistance increases the temporal (earthly) consequences that God will use to correct His straying child, but the loss of salvation is not possible.

IV. DOES IT MATTER HOW I LIVE?

If I had a dollar for every time a critic claimed that the eternal security position is at odds with a holy lifestyle I would be Bill Gates' next door neighbor! Seriously though, I understand the nature of the concern and there is a certain logic to it. I don't begrudge anyone for raising it, but I would also gently and humbly suggest **that this question shows a lack of understanding of the grace of God.** It also demonstrates a lack of understanding of Paul's teaching in Romans 3:5-8; 6:1-2.

The criticism of the eternal security position is often stated in this sort of way: "If you say that I can never lose my salvation no matter what I do, then you're saying it doesn't matter how I live. I can commit adultery, murder and anything else I want to do and I still get to go to Heaven". Of course, a similar criticism comes from those who reject salvation by faith alone. They say of this doctrine: "That's giving people a license to sin because you're telling them it doesn't matter how they live. As long as they have faith in Christ they are free to do whatever they want".

“Why not say – as we are being slanderously reported as saying and as some claim that we say – ‘Let us do evil that good may result’? Their condemnation is deserved.”
(Romans 3:8)

“What shall we say then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?”
(Romans 6:11)

These objections are a distortion of eternal security and salvation by faith alone. These objections are also predictable and the Apostle Paul, knowing they would be raised by critics, raised and answered them himself in Romans 3:5-8 and 6:1,15. A useful summary of Paul's response is seen in this saying:

“Grace understood is holiness desired”.

In other words, those who appreciate the doctrine of eternal security are as motivated to live a holy life as those who fear the possibility of losing their salvation. The difference is in the nature of the motivation. An appreciation of God's grace and a recognition of the painful price paid by Christ on the cross generates gratitude and love. These are the best motives for wanting to please God – not the fear of losing salvation but the humble gratitude of knowing that in spite of our complete unworthiness God loves and keeps those who trust in Him.

My children tend to be obedient. I am glad for this. They also have some measure of fear of provoking my discipline. This fear is useful because it acts as a safeguard and restraint in their lives. They also know that I love them deeply and would never abandon them. These factors all operate together when they choose their response to me. When they choose to obey (which is most of the time!) I know that **it is not because they are afraid of being forsaken by me**. They know that as long as I am alive I will be their father and I will love them. Therefore, when they obey me **I am gratified** because their obedience is not an expression of the fear of being cut off. Do they fear my discipline? Yes, they do, because they know it will not be pleasant (Hebrews 12:5-11). But they also know that the discipline will be administered in love and is not an act of rejection. **Nothing they do, or fail to do, could change their status as being my children.** I am glad their obedience is not tainted by a fear of being abandoned. As their father I would have no joy in knowing that my children's obedience included an element of that type of fear. I have great joy in knowing that a major part of their obedience is the mutual love we share. And yes, I even have some satisfaction in knowing they respect my discipline enough to fear it, because it is a healthy fear. It is **not** the type of fear that children have in families where love is conditional and discipline is carried out in anger and rejection.

Can the doctrine of God's unlimited grace and faithfulness be abused by those who want to indulge in sin? Yes, it can be. But the fault is not in the doctrine but in the improper response to it. Again, to truly understand grace leaves one so humbled (after all, grace is a testimony to our complete unworthiness) that he who understands it is ultimately motivated to obey because of a deep sense of gratitude and appreciation. This is the type of obedience that is most gratifying to God. It also brings true joy to the Christian.

A wonderful example of this is found in the story of Zacchaeus the tax collector in Luke 19:1-10. A careful reading of this account shows that Jesus graciously reached out

to Zacchaeus by inviting Himself to Zacchaeus' home. This was an act of acceptance and its undeserved mercy and kindness was not lost on Zacchaeus. It was not lost on the crowd either (verse 7). As Zacchaeus realized the grace he was being shown he experienced an overwhelming sense of gladness (verse 6). Zacchaeus then happily set out to repay four times the amount he had stolen from people. This was in keeping with the Old Testament law (Exodus 22:1; Leviticus 6:1-5). Notice, however, that Zacchaeus did not stop there. He pledged to give half of his possessions to the poor. There was no requirement to do this. What motivated him? The text is clear - Zacchaeus recognized the wonderful gift of salvation that had been freely given to him, an incredibly unworthy man. The joy and gladness he had were a response to divine GRACE, and it was all the motivation he needed to embark on a new lifestyle. Zacchaeus is a portrait of this truth:

“Grace understood is holiness desired”

It is important to remember that when God saves a person He simultaneously does other things in the heart of the believer. The believer becomes a new creation (II Corinthians 5:17) and receives the Holy Spirit (II Corinthians 5:5). Such a person will have a desire to please God and will have a bothersome conscience when he sins. To use grace as a license to sin is evidence not only that grace has not been understood, it may not even be present (=a false profession).

One last thought on this issue: It is possible that some people who criticize the eternal security position believe that we do not take sin seriously enough. Actually, I believe the exact opposite is true. **Those who believe in the possibility of losing salvation don't really understand the seriousness of human sin or the holy standards of God.** This will be explored in the next section.

V. THE FOLLY OF HUMAN EFFORT

There are many well intended people who believe that salvation depends upon human works and acts of obedience. Still more people believe that having been saved the Christian must avoid grievous sin and lapses in faith or risk the possibility of losing that salvation. Both scenarios involve, to some degree, a reliance upon human effort. That this is a formula for disaster is made clear in Scripture. Where effort is involved God accepts only one standard, the standard that is consistent with His character ... PERFECTION!

It is apparent that many people have not thought through this concept. Others refuse to accept it as the standard, preferring to think that God accepts an "honest effort" even though it is less than perfect. This is at odds with biblical commands that the sacrifices brought before God had to be without blemish or they were unacceptable (see Leviticus 22:19-20; Deuteronomy 17:1; I Peter 1:19; Jude 24). This points to the great substitutionary work of Christ. He was a lamb without blemish or sin and His perfection is

that which qualified Him to be an acceptable sacrifice. Anything less than perfection is inconsistent with God's nature and therefore unacceptable.

Let me share an illustration of the insurmountable problem created by any system which depends on human works for either receiving salvation or keeping it. Over the years I have had many opportunities to share my faith with Mormon missionaries. I am well aware that Mormonism is a "works righteousness" system. A few years ago I spent some time in Salt Lake City, Utah, the capital of the Mormon world. One afternoon, while visiting a museum there, I struck up a conversation with a retired Mormon gentleman who worked in the museum as a volunteer. Our conversation was very thorough and eventually several people gathered around as we spoke. He made it clear (as I knew he would) that salvation requires a great deal of human effort and dedication.

My response went something like this: "The Bible tells us that our sin has separated us from God. It is as though we stand on one cliff and God is on another, and the two cliffs are separated by a 1000 foot deep chasm. The distance between the cliffs is 100 yards. If I get a running start and try to jump across that gap there is only one acceptable jump. I must make the full 100 yards or I will fall into the chasm and die. If I jump ten yards I will fall short and die. Someone else might be better than I am and he manages to make twenty yards. There is no difference in the end result. We both fall short and die. Someone else might even make it fifty yards. He has out distanced me fivefold but even so he still ends up short. No one can make 100 yards. That is why we needed a perfect Savior to pay this full price for our sins and to give us salvation as a gift."

The Mormon gentleman, showing his spiritual blindness (and the arrogance of any works system), said "Well, if I make ninety yards I am sure God will consider that good enough". There were two problems with this response. James 2:10 is adamant - God's law requires perfection. To break it in even one little place is to be guilty of breaking the whole law.

"For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it." (James 2:10)

The Pharisees hated Jesus for daring to suggest that they were as guilty before God as the prostitutes and tax collectors. The Pharisees considered themselves to be vastly superior to such people. Jesus disagreed (see Matthew 5:20; Matthew 23:13-33; Luke 16:14-15). In the final analysis I am no better off jumping ninety-five yards than if I only jumped two feet. Either way I fall short (see Romans 3:9-20). **God will only accept us if we are totally faultless.** God, through Christ, makes us faultless in the sense that Christ, a lamb without blemish (I Peter 1:19), stands in our place. God sees us through Christ and that is why we are presented as faultless. No Christian ever achieves perfect faultlessness. He is given this standing as a gift. It is all of grace. Don't minimize the necessity of faultlessness. God's sinless perfection requires that we be faultless or we can not dwell with Him. No right thinking Christian would believe that he/she is constantly, without

even one failure, living a perfectly sinless and faultless life (I John 1:8)

The moment human effort or faithfulness becomes the ultimate basis of eternal security

I lose all hope because I can never perform at the only level which is acceptable to God; faultless perfection.

The second problem with the Mormon gentleman's response is that it makes personal

assurance of salvation impossible. Even if we grant that God's holy standard of righteousness is satisfied by something less than perfection, how could we ever know if we have done enough? To use our cliff analogy, how far do I have to jump before God says, "Well, it's not 100 yards, but I will accept it". Is ten enough? Twenty? Sixty? Seventy-four? Eighty-six? There is no way of knowing, nor is there even any way of measuring how far we have jumped! The bottom line is that we could never be sure we had done enough. But the Bible tells us that **we can know for sure** we are going to Heaven. Assurance of salvation is not only possible, it is a promise (see I John 5:13; II Corinthians 5:5; I John 3:1-3; I Thessalonians 5:23-24). In order for the Bible to declare that we can have assurance of salvation it is logically necessary that human works (either to earn salvation or keep it) cannot be a requirement.

Assurance, in the biblical sense, means being able to say, "I **know** I am going to Heaven, no matter what." This can only be said accurately by those Christians who **believe their salvation is permanently secure**. The best that a Christian who denies eternal security can say, if he is honest and consistent with his position, is, I **hope** I am going to Heaven."

The moment human works are required it is impossible to have assurance because there is no way for us to quantify the acceptableness of our works, or lack thereof, before God.*

I'll never forget how this was evident in a statement made by John Cardinal O'Connor at the time of Mother Teresa's death in 1997. He stated that he could not be sure but he hoped that because of Mother Teresa's life of service she had skipped purgatory and gone straight to Heaven. What a sad indictment of the folly of works righteousness systems. What does all this have to do with the question of this paper, "Is salvation forever?" In the concluding paragraph of the prior section (section IV), I stated that some people who criticize the doctrine of eternal security believe that we do not take sin seriously enough. The irony in this is that the exact opposite is true.

Anyone who believes that salvation is kept or lost according to human faithfulness is minimizing the utter vileness of sin.

Even the person who "sins rarely and then only little sins" has committed a massive transgression against the holiness of God. God is so holy, pure, righteous and opposed to

sin that no amount of human effort could possibly satisfy God's holy requirements either to merit salvation or to keep it.

To believe that salvation is kept intact or preserved by human performance is an insult to the holiness of God. How much failure does God permit before we lose our salvation? 10%? 20%? 60%? How do we know? We can't know and therefore we can't possibly have any assurance that we are still saved. I know there are Christians who believe salvation can be lost but nevertheless they are confident that they themselves are saved. With all due respect, I want to gently but firmly insist that such confidence is unfounded and minimizes the holiness and perfection of God.

Consider the lives of three men acknowledged by all Christians to be giants of the faith; Isaiah, Daniel and John. In Isaiah 6:1-5, Isaiah had a vision of God's holiness which left him completely devastated. In Daniel 10:1-21, Daniel had encounters with heavenly beings, and possibly one of them was a pre-incarnation appearing of Christ. Daniel was terrified and felt as though he

* I have stated this in strong terms. I do believe God requires us to be faithful. But to whatever degree our continuing faithfulness figures in the mix, to that degree God guarantees He will provide what we need (Philippians 1:6; 2:12-13). God's provision in sustaining us is consistent with the great truth that from start **to finish** salvation is a gift of God. would die simply because of the presence of these holy beings. I believe the most dramatic example is that of the Apostle John in Revelation I: 17. John saw the glorified Christ and fell in awe and fear as though he were dead. Remember, John had lived with Jesus for almost three years and their friendship was perhaps the most personal among all of the disciples [John 13:23]. But in his glorified state Jesus' holiness overwhelmed even the great Apostle John and left him feeling so unworthy that he thought he would die.

If these three godly men could not stand (or even live) in God's presence without divine enablement, how can we possibly think that any of us are capable of living faithfully **enough to keep our salvation based on our efforts?** There are only two possibilities which pay proper regard to God's holy requirement:

1. There is no hope of salvation for anyone because no one is perfect,
2. God provides what we need to be saved **AND KEPT**, and this is completely, not partially.

These two options are perfectly captured in Matthew 19:25-26.

In conclusion, to believe that human performance or faithfulness is required if we are to be saved in the end and then to believe that some people actually make it, is to

grossly underestimate both the vileness of sin and the perfect holiness and righteousness of God. Our hope must be in God's gracious gifts.

I am not counting on Christ to do most of the work of salvation while I do some of the work. My hope is in Christ **ALONE**. Even the faith I exercise to trust in Christ is because of God's sovereign work in my heart. Even my choice to repent was a result of God working in my heart (Acts 11:28; 2 Timothy 2:25). The bottom line is that I totally concur with Paul. I am confident I will be in Heaven (Philippians 1:21), and I have absolutely nothing about which to boast (2 Timothy 1:9; I Corinthians 1:26-31).

VI. POSITION VS. PRACTICE

The Bible teaches a simple truth about the difference between the position we have in Christ and the daily practice of living for Christ. Our position is fixed and unchanging, our practice is often fluctuating and is definitely a process. Failure to heed the biblical distinction between these two concepts is a primary reason why some sincere Christians are confused about eternal security. Let's start with definitions:

POSITIONAL RIGHTEOUSNESS

This speaks of our legal standing before God. The Christian is seen by God as having perfect righteousness. How can this be? It is because Christ's perfect righteousness is applied to our account (see II Corinthians 5:21; Romans 3:20 - 4:24; I Corinthians 1:30). God sees me through Christ. This wonderful concept is also the basis of the present ministry of Jesus as our intercessor (see Hebrews 7:25). It is because of my union with Christ that I can be presented before God as faultless (Jude 24). This positional righteousness is the basis of eternal security. It is why in Romans 8:28-31 Paul can switch back and forth between past and future verb tenses when describing salvation. Our glorification is yet future, but in Romans 8:29 it is so certain that Paul can use the past tense. Our position in Christ, a position of perfect faultlessness before God, is so secure and fixed that Paul summarizes the wonderful doctrine of our eternal security in Romans 8:31-39. **Positional righteousness is the heart of eternal security because it testifies not of human performance, but of God's gracious and perfect provision.** My position is not changed by my failures. If maintaining my position depends on how well I perform then I have no hope because God only accepts perfection (see section V, The Folly of Human Effort). The many passages which teach eternal security in such strong terms ["guarantee" = Ephesians 1:13; "confident" = Philippians 1:6; "He will do it" = I Thessalonians 5:24; "Him who is able" = Jude 24) do so because positional righteousness is achieved instantly and permanently the moment we are born again and placed into the body of Christ (I Corinthians 12:13). This is not our righteousness, it is the righteousness of Christ applied to our account. This is why we are eternally secure - because Christ is perfect and unchanging (Hebrews 13:8). Our entrance into Heaven is based on His righteousness, not ours. I am convinced that my Christian brethren who believe salvation can be lost have fundamentally misunderstood the nature of Christ's righteousness as it

applies to the believer.

PRACTICAL RIGHTEOUSNESS

The Christian life is all about growing and being transformed with the goal of bringing our lifestyle [the practical] into conformity with our position as God's children. **Practical righteousness is the arena where human effort and works do matter.** It is in our practical righteousness, or lack thereof, that heavenly rewards or loss of reward are determined. Remember, the issue is not whether Heaven is lost - it isn't (see I Corinthians 11:29-32), but whether we have any lasting rewards upon arriving in Heaven (I Corinthians 3:11-15).

The New Testament uses many metaphors to explain spiritual truths. Christians are called brothers and sisters because we belong to the family of God. He is our Father. I have six children and they will always be my children. They were conceived and formed within their mother and they will always be our children. No failure on their part can change that. There are, however, degrees of blessing and privilege they experience or forfeit within our family based upon their obedience.

This biblical distinction between our position and our practice is simple and is plainly stated in Scripture. But when we fail to understand the distinction we end up being confused. This confusion is seen in the contradiction between the many passages that teach eternal security and the belief of some Christians that salvation can be lost.

Christians are called upon to live (practical) a life that reflects their lofty position. The whole discussion of Romans 6 is based on this calling to a holy lifestyle. Paul simultaneously deals with the believer's position (verses 1-10, 22-23) and his practice (verses 11-14, 19). Both position and practice are closely related, but they are also distinct. Failure to notice the distinction leads to the false conclusion that salvation can be lost.

One of the best places to see both the relationship and the distinction between positional and practical righteousness is in Philippians 1:6 and Philippians 2:12. The skeptic might even suggest that these two verses prove there are contradictions in the Bible, for at first glance they seem to be contrary to one another. Actually, they serve as wonderful examples of both positional and practical righteousness. In 1:6 Paul wrote, *"being confident of this, that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus"*. In this verse it is made very clear that our salvation began with God and that He will see to it that we get to Heaven.

Yet look at Philippians 2:12. Here Paul wrote *"Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed - not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence - continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling"*. Does this contradict what Paul wrote just a few sentences earlier in 1:6? Not at all. It simply illustrates that

righteousness has two aspects. First, we have a position of righteousness (our legal status before God). This is fixed and unchanging because it is completely the work of God on our behalf. Second, there is the practical application of God's holy standards to our daily lifestyle. In this arena we are sometimes successful and at other times we fail (see Galatians 2:11-14; James 3:2A). Also, don't overlook the fact that after Philippians 2:12 comes 2:13, where once again it is the faithfulness of God which is at work in true believers (not those who merely profess Christ, but those who truly possess Christ).

The only consistent way to harmonize all of these related passages is to conclude that the Bible teaches eternal security. Eternal security stands upon the promise that we have been placed in a new position - that of perfect righteousness before God. Because it is the gracious work of a faithful God we are assured that our position will never change.

A **position** of righteousness brings with it a call to the **practice** of righteousness. We must never minimize the biblical commands to be faithful followers and servants of Jesus Christ. God is interested in how we live and how we respond to His commands. Although God provides the help that we need, at times we choose to reject His help and we take a sinful path. If we chronically stay on this path of disobedience and even go to the extreme of renouncing Christ, by this defection we demonstrate that our failure to practice righteousness stems from the failure of not having ever truly possessed that which we outwardly professed.

PRELIMINARY SUMMARY

We still need to look at various passages that some Christians have interpreted as teaching the possibility of losing salvation. Before doing that let's summarize what has already been discussed.

1. The Bible teaches that salvation is a gift. To be consistent with the concept of a gift, it seems unlikely that salvation (either to initially receive it or to keep it) depends upon human effort. If human works are required then salvation moves out of the realm of being a gift and into the realm of being a reward.
2. We have looked at verses that emphatically declare that God has done a work which guarantees our salvation. The certainty of that inheritance is rooted in God's power and character, not man's. No man can break what God has sealed.
3. When a Christian does fall into prolonged sin, or walks away from the Christian community, God will send corrective discipline. In some cases, such as with the Corinthians, this discipline can even be physical death. But such a person is still saved. For those who walk away but seem to go without discipline the problem is not that they once possessed salvation and then lost it, the problem is that they once

professed salvation but never truly possessed it.

4. The doctrine of eternal security, rightly understood, does not encourage sinful living. To really understand grace is to desire holiness. The motivation to please Him is one of gratitude, not the fear of losing salvation. In his epistle to the Romans, Paul anticipated and answered the objections of those who do not understand grace.
5. Where performance is required God only accepts one level - absolute perfection. This shows both the danger and folly of basing our hope upon our own efforts. Even the best among us fall incredibly short. This is why Jesus lived a perfect life and offered himself as a perfect sacrifice. Nothing else would do. Not only are we saved by a perfect Savior, we are perfectly kept by that perfect Savior. Those who trust in human merit do a great insult to the holiness of God and the sacrifice of Christ.
6. Eternal security is based on our positional righteousness, a position which is fixed and unchanging because it depends on Christ's righteousness, not ours. Certainly God cares about how we live and we are called to be holy. **But if keeping our position depended upon our practice none of us could keep our position.** Ironically, we could have no assurance of salvation, only assurance of condemnation.

VII. THE ENDURANCE PASSAGES

The material presented thus far points to the doctrine of eternal security as being the view taught by Scripture. Someone might argue, however, that everything stated up to this point is nullified by passages which teach that endurance to the end is a requirement for salvation. An example of this is seen in Matthew 24:12-13, "*Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved*" (see also Matthew 10:22; Revelation 2:10).

Of this passage in Matthew 24, Dr. John MacArthur observes,

"The ones who persevere are the same ones who are saved – not the ones whose love grows cold (verse 12). This does not suggest that our perseverance secures our salvation. Scripture everywhere teaches precisely the opposite: God, as part of His saving work, secures our perseverance. True believers are 'kept by the power of God through faith for salvation' (I Peter 1:5). The guarantee of our perseverance is built into the New Covenant promise. God says: 'I will put My fear in their hearts so that they will not depart from Me' (Jeremiah 32:40). Those who do fall away from Christ give conclusive proof that they were never truly believers to begin with (I

John 2:19). To say that God secures our perseverance is not to say that we are passive in the process, however. He keeps us 'through faith' (I Peter 1:5) - our faith. Scripture sometimes calls us to hold fast to our faith (Hebrews 10:23; Revelation 3:11) or warns us against falling away (Hebrews 10:26-29). Such admonitions do not negate the many promises that true believers will persevere (John 10:28-29; Romans 8:38-39; I Corinthians 1:8, 9; Philippians 1:6). Rather, the warnings and pleas are among the means God uses to secure our perseverance in the faith. Notice that the warnings and the promises often appear side by side. For example, when Jude urges believers, *'keep yourselves in the love of God'* (Jude 21), he immediately points them to God, *'who is able to keep you from stumbling'* (Jude 24).*

Basically the endurance passages serve four purposes. First of all, they serve as an encouragement to genuine Christians to hang in there during hard times. Don't give up because in the end it will definitely be worth it. We will never regret making the choice to endure (II Timothy 4:6-8).

Second, the endurance passages remind us of human responsibility. Our salvation and security are the gracious gifts of God yet He calls us to live a life consistent with the new life we have been given. God's call upon us to live holy lives and to serve Him (Ephesians 2:10) places us under obligation to Him. The endurance passages reinforce the serious nature of our obligations.

Third, the endurance passages serve as a warning to those who have professed Christ but are not truly in possession of Christ. Their inclination to defect indicates that the power of God is absent from their lives. These are the empty professions described in Section III.

And fourth, these passages heighten our awareness of the goodness of God's grace by warning us what would happen if we were to fall away, even as they assure us that God will finish the work He began in us.

* This material is found in the MacArthur Study Bible.

There is an old saying that God's callings are His enablings. We are called to persevere and the overwhelming testimony of Scripture is that God will enable us to endure. Those who do not endure were either never saved to begin with (I John 2:19) or, if they are saved, God will discipline them according to His wisdom. Here again we see why there is no room to boast. It is God's work and He alone deserves the credit.

Because of the error that I am attempting to refute (that a person can lose his salvation), this paper leans heavily on the side of God's work rather than man's. In so doing I recognize the possibility that I have minimized the importance of perseverance and the place for human responsibility. I hope this present section (section VII) provides the balance. Note well, however, that I think Dr. MacArthur has expressed the truth accurately - **our perseverance does not secure our salvation, our salvation secures our perseverance** (Philippians 1:6; 2:12).

There are additional reasons to conclude that the glorious transaction of salvation also secures our perseverance or endurance. The Bible identifies over fifty supernatural benefits given to the believer at the moment he is saved. It is all but impossible to think that all of these benefits would have to be reversed if salvation could be lost. The following excerpt is from Dr. Gromacki's Salvation Is Forever.

"However, many Christians only have a vague idea as to what their salvation involves. To most, getting saved just means keeping out of hell or just getting into heaven. They only see their salvation in terms of eternal destiny. But salvation is far more than that! Paul wrote, *"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ"* (Ephesians 1:3). The child of God has already been blessed with all spiritual blessings. It is not that he will be blessed in the future or that he has received a few divine favors. All blessings are his now! That is the message of this verse. These "blessings" do not refer to the daily blessings that God gives to His child who obeys Him and walks in His will. These are the blessings of his position before God as a saved person. They belong to him now, and they are abundant.

When one realizes the guilty, lost condition from which he has been saved and the blessed position to which he has been brought by salvation, then he will better understand the divine purpose behind the program of salvation: *"That in the ages to come he (God) might show the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus"* (Ephesians 2:7). The riches of God's grace can be seen in the spiritual blessings that God has bestowed upon us. Throughout eternity, God will be glorified for what He has done for man.

Scripture reveals about fifty of these spiritual riches, although, doubtless there are more. They could only be known by studying the Bible, because they are not experienced. The joy and peace of salvation are experienced, but these are not. Just as a child cannot remember what happened at the moment of conception or birth, so a child of God must be told what happened at the moment of his salvation. This is why salvation rests upon what God has done, not upon our feelings at the moment it was done for us. **These spiritual riches became ours**

instantaneously at salvation; they are not given to us gradually during our lifetime. They are not given as rewards for faithful Christian living. They are grace gifts, conferred by God apart from any merit within us. They are an integral part of the eternal salvation that God has given, not an accessory or a fringe benefit. They constitute the character of salvation. They are the permanent, eternal possession of the believer. If a person could lose his salvation, then all of these riches would have to be lost or surrendered. Not just a few, but all! Since they were not gained as the result of practice or human merit, so they cannot be forfeited by the lack of practice or lack of human favor. These spiritual riches of divine grace manifest the glorious position of the child of God. They are true of every believer, regardless of whether he is aware of them." (Gromacki, pages 34-35)

Here are just a few of the benefits given to the believer the instant he is saved:

- a) Justification ... Romans 4:1
- b) Eternal life ... I John 5:13
- c) United with Christ ... Philippians 2:1
- d) Crucified with Christ ... Galatians 2:20
- e) Buried with Christ ... Romans 6:4
- f) Raised with Christ ... Colossians 3:1
- g) Made a new creation ... II Corinthians 5:17
- h) Adopted into God's family ... Romans 8:15
- i) Sealed by the Holy Spirit ... Ephesians 1:13
- j) Indwelt by the Holy Spirit ... Romans 5:5
- k) Made alive in Christ ... Ephesians 1:7
- l) Forgiveness ... Ephesians 1:7
- m) Redemption ... Ephesians 1:7
- n) Seated with Christ ... Ephesians 2:6
- o) Regenerated ... Titus 3:5
- p) Baptized by the Holy Spirit ... I Corinthians 12:13
- q) Placed in the Body of Christ ... I Corinthians 12:13

Consider again at what Dr. Gromacki wrote in the above excerpt: "Since they were not gained as the result of practice or human merit, so they cannot be forfeited by the lack of practice or human favor."

The reason true Christians do not fall from grace is that God graciously keeps them from falling. Perseverance is what we do. Preservation is what God does. We persevere because God preserves.

As believers, we know there are no contradictions in the Bible. When we remember the promises in the Bible that genuine Christians are eternally secure, and the warnings

against false professions (external, lacking internal reality), we can make sense of passages that are misunderstood by those who think salvation can be lost.

VIII. PROBLEM PASSAGES

In all fairness to those who reject eternal security, there are some passages which seem to indicate that salvation can be lost.

Let's begin with II Peter 2:20-21. This passage seems to teach that some people at one time knew Jesus Christ and then left him for the world and were worse off (lost). But we must remember that other biblical authors have addressed the same issue. Peter is saying the same thing John said in I John 2:19. False teachers will arise from within the church. These false teachers know the gospel and are active within a community of genuine believers. This compounds the wickedness of their sin. They can't plead ignorance when it comes to the gospel. They had heard it, they outwardly professed it and they associated with those who truly believed it. Eventually, however, the fruit of their false profession/non-possession had come to the surface. They departed from even the profession of sound doctrine and had begun to teach heresy, causing others to follow them. Of this entire group John said, "they went out from us, but they were not of us" (I John 2:19).

Also, don't overlook II Peter 2:22. These people are identified as **never having had a true internal change**. Consequently it was only a matter of time before they returned to their old ways. Such is the pattern of false professions.

“Of them the proverbs are true: ‘A dog returns to its vomit’, and ‘A sow that is washed goes back to her wallowing in the mud’.”
(II Peter 2:22)

The description of a washed sow is graphic. The external dirt may have been removed, but no change took place **within** the sow. The sow was still a sow and it was only a matter of time before the sow returned to her mud. The Bible teaches that when someone is truly born-again, he receives a new nature (II Corinthians 5:17). Christians still do battle against temptation, but a fundamental and permanent change has taken place internally.

The writer of Hebrews also describes this phenomena in Hebrew 10:26-39. This passage, thought by some to teach the non-security position, actually reinforces eternal security. Here the writer reminds us that there will always be those who at one time profess Christ and identify themselves as Christians, yet they are never truly born again. **Just as a genuine possession of Christ bears fruit, a false profession also bears a certain kind of fruit.** The defections warned of in these passages are the fruit of false professions. The degree of moral culpability of these people is heightened because they had heard the truth, professed the truth and then intentionally distorted and rejected it. In

its worst form these false professors could become false teachers and lead others astray. These are the same type of people Peter exposes in 2 Peter 2:1-22.

Interestingly, a close look at Hebrews 10:38-39 shows that this is an eternal security passage. In Hebrews 10:36 the author writes, *“You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what He has promised.”* What is the nature of the author’s challenge to his original readers? Is he telling them they can lose their salvation? He answers that question in 10:38-39 when he writes this:

“But my righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him.’ But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved.”

The writer issues a warning against empty professions and reaffirms the security of those who truly possess Christ. Compare this with Hebrews 6:9 and you find the same pattern - a warning against falling away and then the reassurance that a genuine Christian won't do this.

We can make sense of the passages that seem to teach the loss of salvation if we interpret them in light of 1 John 2:19, Matthew 7:22-23, Hebrews 6:9, 10:39. We don't have to embrace a contradiction (remember, contradiction is the hallmark of error). By using the eternal security passages as our foundation we can provide a very consistent and reasonable interpretation of alleged "non-security" passages.

However, the same cannot be said if we use the non-security passages as a foundation. If they are our foundation and starting point, when we come to security passages such as I Thessalonians 5:23-24, Ephesians 1:13-14, Jude 24, Philippians 1:6 and John 10:25-30, intellectual honesty would require us to say that the Bible contradicts itself. Such a conclusion should be left to the darkened minds of unbelievers.

Speaking of contradictions, did Jesus teach in John 15:1-8 that a believer can lose his salvation? Not at all. Based on all we have already looked at we can safely and consistently interpret this as another warning against those who profess belief but do not possess it. Remember the immediate context of John 15. This was the night of Jesus' betrayal at the hands of Judas Iscariot. Judas was one of the disciples and a professing believer. He associated with believers - the other disciples. Earlier that evening Jesus had identified Judas as the betrayer in John 13:21-30. In John 17:11-12 Jesus made it clear that Judas was an impostor - not a believer who later lost his way. This diagnosis of Judas is confirmed in John 6:70-71 and John 12:4-6. His defection only confirmed his condemnation.

Whenever you read John 15:1-8, you should read Isaiah 5:1-7, the passage upon which it is based. In the case of Old Testament Israel, there was a mixture of those who truly knew and loved God, and those who did not. The unbelieving Jews still participated in the national blessings of Israel based on Genesis 12:1-3 and the promises made to Abraham. But not all Jews living in Israel, although participating in national blessing and being counted as Abraham's descendants, were really saved (Romans 9:6). Today in the church it is possible for people to be outwardly known as Christians, and such people even participate, to some degree, in God's blessings upon the church. But they will, like Judas, ultimately be lost. This is because they professed faith but never truly possessed it.

Another possible interpretation of John 15:1-8 is that it is similar to I Corinthians 3:10-15. In the Corinthian passage Paul is talking about genuine believers who do not faithfully serve God with pure motives. Their works are judged and destroyed by fire, but they themselves are saved. It is possible that in John 15 Jesus' teaching about fruitless branches being thrown into fire refers to the tainted works of genuine believers. Personally, I think the better interpretation is the first - that Jesus is warning against false professors such as Judas. Either way, both interpretations support eternal security and are free of contradiction. There is simply no support for saying that John 15:1-8 teaches the loss of salvation - especially in view of the surrounding words of Jesus in John 10, John 13 and John 17.

CONCLUSION - WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Is the question about eternal security even worth the effort of writing this paper and reading it? Absolutely! Here are some reasons why:

1. Sound doctrine is a concern upon which the Bible places great emphasis.
2. Eternal security raises questions about the very nature of the salvation - the gospel of Jesus Christ.
3. Our knowledge of God should keep us from any boasting (1 Corinthians 1:27-31), yet if my salvation being preserved is due to my effort then I deserve some credit for being saved. This is a revolting thought to me (Luke 18:9-14).
4. I have seen the bondage of people who are trying to earn their salvation or are working to keep it. Works-righteousness makes slaves, makes hypocrites, or makes Pharisees. It does not give true joy.

It is my hope that this short paper has contributed to your understanding of and commitment to Eternal Security. If you are still uncertain or opposed to eternal security I want to once again recommend Dr. Gromacki's book Salvation is Forever. It is not my desire to fan the flame of controversy. I suppose that if someone wanted to debate me on this issue just because he loves to argue, he would need to look elsewhere.

May God bless and protect

Grace Community Church

