

Eternal Security

By Gordon C. Olson

An answer to a friend's inquiry

The term *eternal security* a doctrine whose view is commonly held by many believers is generally applied to the belief that all who have ever believed will enter heaven regardless of their walk following such an act of faith. Thus, it is said to be just as certain as though they were already there; that such a one will enter heaven and is not dependent upon any conditions whatever. This is an entirely different doctrine from the perseverance of the saints, which holds that all who do know the Lord through faith will persevere in faith and obedience to the end of life and finally be saved. The many scriptures that teach that all who do exercise true faith in the Lord Jesus do continue or persevere have been misapplied, because of other doctrinal errors to be spoken of later, to infer the teaching that the saints cannot be lost.

Many arguments can be put forth from the Bible to prove that the true saints do persevere in holiness to the end of life through great care and grace on the part of God (Jn. 10:27-29). (27) "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: (28) And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. (29) My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand. (30) I and my Father are one." The proof of true faith is works. It is the faith that "worketh by love" that is saving faith (Gal. 5:6), "For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love." And so "by works a man is justified, and not by faith only (James 2:24) "Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only." Peter says that we are to "give diligence to make (our) calling and election sure" (II Pet. 1:10). "Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall:"

If I understand the bible correctly, not one soul will be found in heaven throughout eternity who has not persevered in holiness to the end of life, except it be a case of saving faith exercised at the instant of death. Upon reflection, it will be found that the opposite doctrines of *eternal security* and "the perseverance of the saints" are doctrines of opposite systems of theology, both which, of course, cannot be right. It is apparent that the doctrine in question bears a direct relation to the nature or supposed nature of regeneration and justification.

The idea of *eternal security*, or "once saved, always saved" is the only consistent conclusion if the following view of justification (which appears to be the common opinion), is correct. There is said to be presented in the bible a threefold imputation or a doctrine of imputation having three branches, as follows:

1. *the sin of Adam* is said to have been imputed to all his posterity;

2. *the sin of those who believe* or shall believe is said to have been imputed to Christ; and
3. *the righteousness of Christ*, or His obedience while on earth, is said to be imputed to the believer.

If asked when this imputation took place, it must have been in the councils of eternity, "before the foundation of the world." The whole human family, according to this, stands condemned in Adam and are condemned for Adam's sin and not their own. Justification is in some sense a governmental act, pronouncing a sinner just. It is said that justification is a forensic or judicial proceeding, a court scene. It is said that the sins of the believing sinner are all literally imputed to Christ so that Christ suffered the literal penalty, the Father punishing the Son precisely as much as all the elect deserved. This would be retributive justice. This is called the negative side of justification.

The positive side is said to be the imputation of Christ's righteousness to the believer, or that the believer stands "in Christ" in such a way that Christ's obedience while on earth is set down to the sinner's credit, or that God looks at the justified sinner as though he had always obeyed the law. This is said to be his standing "in Christ" and is unchangeable. Thus, since Christ is said to have perfectly obeyed the law for him, he is not under the law, and can never be condemned by the law, do what he may. Thus, there may be broken fellowship by sin, but never condemnation.

Is it not evident that *eternal security* follows consistently if this be the true doctrine of justification? Since Christ once suffered for sin, if that suffering was on a basis of retributive justice, then He must have borne not only the past sins of the believer but also his present and future sins as well. If this be so, how then could he possibly be lost, do what he may? In passing, I might add that this theory must require a belief either in a partial atonement, or that Christ did not die for the whole world which the bible plainly tells us that He did; or in universal salvation.

This theory of justification holds that sinners are saved by grace on principles of justice, or that all the grace of God is found in two things: the provision of His Son to be a sin-bearer and the acceptance of Christ's suffering in place of the sinner. I cannot see how it can be said that God pardons or forgives sin, since the sinner is regarded as suffering as much as he deserved to suffer in his substitute and at the same time to have always perfectly obeyed, for this is what imputation means. I will now hasten to what I regard as the true view of justification and salvation. Justification consists in a governmental decree of pardon in setting aside the execution of the penalty of the broken law and in restoring to favor the sinner, treating him as though he were righteous. In the atonement Christ removed an insurmountable obstacle, thus rendering it possible for God to forgive sinners. He died to satisfy public justice or to render it safe for God to forgive sins. As far as God the Father is concerned, He could have on certain conditions forgiven sinners without the atonement because He has a heart of love. The atonement was not rendered to satisfy God's justice or holiness but to enable Him to act justly in the forgiveness of the sinner. I trust you get the distinction, which is a very beautiful one, between an atonement being made to God so that He would be disposed to forgive sins and an atonement being

made for God to enable Him to do what His love wanted to do, but which His wisdom forbade under any other circumstances. Thus, Jesus Christ is not any more the friend of sinners than God the Father or the Holy Spirit. The whole Godhead loved sinners equally well and sought their salvation through the whole plan of redemption in which all took part.

There are certain conditions of the justification of sinners which are not arbitrary. A condition should be distinguished from a ground of justification as being that without which the sinner could not be justified. The ground of justification, or the source of fundamental reason back of the movement to save sinners, was the love of the whole Godhead. The following may be said to be the conditions of justification:

FIRST, the suffering or atonement of Christ, apart from which God could not exercise wisely His mercy. It would not be safe to forgive sin without a suitable public expression of its horror which would enable God to uphold His holy law. Since Christ obeyed the law, its wages of sin was not upon Him. Therefore, he could die for us who receive him in particular and for the entire world in general. The atonement makes it possible for God to extend mercy to all men.

SECOND, repentance is also a condition of justification. Not that there is any merit in repentance, but it is a state of heart in breaking with the course of sin that renders it possible for God to exercise His mercy.

THIRD, faith in Christ and toward God which accepts the work of the entire Godhead and embraces them as actual facts.

FOURTH, present sanctification or a state of full present consecration to God. This is involved in repentance and may be thought of as a positive state while repentance is a turning from sin, taking God's side against ourselves as sinners. To sanctify is merely to set apart. This condition then is a present state of devotion to God (I Cor. 6:11; "And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God." II Thess. 2:13) "But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth:"

FIFTH, perseverance in faith and obedience, or continuing in a state of consecration, is a condition of pardon or acceptance with God at any moment in the Christian walk and of final acceptance. The saint as well as the sinner is condemned whenever he sins and needs to repent or be lost (James 5:19-20; (19) "Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; (20) Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins." Rev. 2:4-5) (4) "Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love." (5) "Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out

of his place, except thou repent." But I must leave many things unsaid in order that I may make the last mail. May the Lord bless you and teach you.

Your friend and brother, in Christ,

Gordon C. Olson