

## Is Eternal Life Always Eternal?

Scripture: John 3:16

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## Is Eternal Life *Always* Eternal?

I remember exactly where I was when I discovered some Christians believe eternal life may not always be eternal. The moment is still etched in my memory.

Shortly after I was saved, a friend invited me to a midweek Bible study at a local church. During the course of our study, one fellow asked, “How can someone know if he has lost his salvation?” As discussion ensued, it became clear he was talking about himself. This poor man thought he was in danger of losing his salvation.

That was the first time in my Christian life I had personally encountered someone who was sincerely afraid of losing his salvation. And even as a young believer, I believed once you were saved, that was it—your hope of eternal life is secure and certain. I mean, it is *eternal* life, isn't it?

Over the years I've been repeatedly confronted with the sad fact that the biblical teaching of an eternally secure salvation is not a common doctrine. In fact, many groups claiming to be Christian have codified in their doctrinal statements the fear of losing your salvation. Roman Catholicism, Wesleyan Methodists, Free Will Baptists, Church of Christ, and many Pentecostal denominations are just a few of those that teach a Christian can lose his salvation.

A more formal name for the belief that a Christian can lose his salvation is *conditional security*. That may sound academic and austere, but it reveals the fundamental issues at stake. The doctrine of conditional security teaches that as a Christian, your salvation is secure, but only if you are consistently obedient to Jesus Christ.

Think about that for a moment. If your hope of eternal life is tied to the consistency of your earthly obedience, what hope is that? When you compare your obedience to the divine standard, when you compare yourself with the holiness of God, how do *you* measure up? A thousand lifetimes wouldn't enable me to perfect holiness before an absolutely holy God; a thousand lifetimes would only reveal how utterly corrupt I truly am.

There's no hope in the doctrine of conditional security. None at all. In fact, ever since that first encounter with someone who believed he could lose his salvation, I've met a number of people with the same fear. They constantly fret over the possibility they've unwittingly forfeited their salvation, having committed a sin so bad that God has disowned them.

So, is that possible? Can a true Christian really forfeit his salvation? Is that what the Bible teaches? On the other hand, if you think a Christian can't lose his salvation, does that mean he can sin and not worry at all about what God thinks?

I'll have more to say in answer to those questions in upcoming articles, but for now, consider just a couple of doctrinal ramifications. First of all, if you are a true Christian, and you can lose the salvation God gave you, then what does that say about the saving work of Christ? If you can lose your salvation, then Christ's "saving work" didn't really save you at all; it may have made you *savable* in some sense, but it didn't actually *save* you.

Let's trace that out a bit further. If the death of Jesus Christ only made you savable, and didn't secure your salvation completely, then that means it's up to you to save yourself. Denominations that teach conditional security are actually consistent on this point. Many of them teach that your salvation depends on your first believing, and then continuing in your faith, cooperating with God to perform good works.

That means if you fail to perform in that little partnership, you put your soul in eternal peril. According to their teaching, God has done His part, making you savable, and you need to uphold your end of the bargain to seal the deal. If you don't maintain good works, if you fail to avoid disobedience, don't blame God; blame yourself.

What a tremendous and tragic burden! Having been justified and set free by faith, are you now held bondage to maintain your salvation by works? That's just another form of works righteousness, which the Bible categorically condemns (see Ephesians 2:8-9 and Romans 3:27; 4:4-5).

Beyond the impossible burden of maintaining personal salvation, the doctrine of conditional security also strikes a blow against the power of God. To say you can lose your salvation—which the Bible says God accomplished through the death of Jesus Christ—is to make God into an impotent deity with no actual power to save anyone. The full exercise of His divine power is at the mercy of a weak, finite, and sinful creature who may or may not cooperate with Him.

So, can we believe God or not? When John 3:16 says God loved the world and gave His Son to provide eternal life for all who believe, can we take Him at His word?

Yes, absolutely. John 3:16 stands, immovable and unshaken. But to say you can lose the salvation He grants is to say you can nullify God's promise by your faults, sins, and spiritual missteps. In effect, you've subverted the promise and power of God.

Rest assured—none of us can truly subvert the will, power, and promise of God. The Bible presents eternal life with God as the consummation of all the doctrines of salvation. The whole point of God decreeing His plan of salvation, electing a people to be called by His name, sending His Son to redeem those people, and then sending forth His Holy Spirit to empower them to live righteously—His overarching purpose in all of that—is to bring those people into eternal life. God will accomplish what He set out to do.

Now, that's just an introduction to what we'll cover in this short series, and I can't possibly say all that could be said. But let me state this as strongly and as clearly as I can:

*Not only do I believe the doctrine of conditional security is false, I would even dare to say it is blasphemous. The idea that you could lose the salvation God gave you slanders God and runs*

*contrary to a number of the Bible's core doctrines.*

As my mind goes back to that first encounter with the guy who feared he was losing his salvation, I wish I could have told him all that—unpacking the greatness of the gospel, elaborating on the power and wisdom of God's plan of salvation. The Bible could've equipped him and assured him in the gospel of an eternal life that truly is eternal and secure.

That's what I intend to do with this series, so stick around!

Fred Butler  
Volunteer Ministries Coordinator

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