

Which Believers Are Eternally Secure?

Colossians 1:23

Sermon by Don Emmitte, Grace Restoration Ministries

So, tonight I am going to begin with a very important statement. You must listen to it and give me the chance to fully explain it before you "click off." Here it is:

GOD DOES NOT SAVE ALL BELIEVERS.

Hang on for a moment and you will see the truth of this statement. God does not save all believers. All believers are not going to heaven. Only a special group of believers will finally be saved. This probably sounds like a neat piece of heresy to many of you, but this is exactly what is taught in the New Testament. **LET'S RETURN TO THE SAME PASSAGE WE SAW LAST WEEK AND CONCENTRATE ON THE LAST FEW VERSES:**

TAKE YOUR BIBLES, PLEASE...

And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, **if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard**, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister. (Colossians 1:21-23 ESV).

Remember that in the New Testament even the Devil is identified as a believer. James tells us that his faith in God causes him to "tremble" before God (cf. James 2:19). Every demon our Lord confronted during His earthly ministry acknowledged in confession His unique relationship to God. They quickly confessed Him to be the Holy One of God. Yet not one demon will be saved in the end. James is writing in that familiar passage about a faith that will not save. His specific concern is a faith that does not produce any works. The question is which believers will be saved in the end?

Our generation has corrupted a precious Biblical truth. **The Bible does teach that there is an eternal security for those God has really saved.** They are kept by the power of God unto salvation. But this has been watered down in our day to include everyone who ever made any kind of statement of faith. It is broadened to include anyone who has ever at any time had any kind of relationship to the church. Though in later life both by example and words they may deny all that they earlier professed, we still hold on to hope for them.

So, we must ask: Which believers are eternally secure? They are identified in our text. The purpose of God in the reconciling work of Christ has just been set forth. It is the divine purpose to present us "holy and unblamable and unreprouvable in His sight." This God will do. This He will do because of the sufficiency of the work of Christ upon the Cross. There is just one catch, His doing this is based upon our having the right kind of faith in Him. "If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the Gospel." "If" does not suggest doubt. The words used by Paul could be translated, "Assuming that", or "if so be that". Paul assumed that they would do that which he was describing. He assumed this because these are the very marks of true saving faith. Salvation has always been by faith. It is a divine work in response to the faith of guilty sinners. But the faith that brings salvation is a particular kind of faith.

Three unmistakable qualities of this faith are before us in this verse.

First, the Eternally Secure Believers Have Persevering Faith.

The key phrase is "...if indeed you continue in the faith" (Colossians 1:23 ESV). Faith is used here in the sense of personal trust and commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. It is not used in the objective sense of the Christian faith or doctrine. It is faith as being exercised in the Christian Gospel.

The Gospel confronts man with an imperative that says, "Believe". It promises him, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shall be saved." (cf. Acts 16:31). This Gospel calls for an act of faith. It calls upon man to exercise his faith in Christ Jesus in a once for all kind of way. However, this must not be misunderstood. It does not say that the saving act of faith is just one act. The mark of true saving faith is that it keeps on believing with the same trust that it first turns to Christ. There is no wavering in the commitment to Him as Lord and Savior. If the faith does not continue, it was never truly saving faith.

This becomes obvious when you begin to turn through the Greek New Testament just looking at the use of the verbs translated "to believe" or "to have faith." Most often when it is used in connection with salvation it is in the present tense, which calls attention to it being a process, its continuance. A more obvious place is in the familiar words of the Gospel of John. The first time the verb appears in the Gospel of John is this way. "The ministry of John the Baptist is for the purpose that men "through him might believe." (cf. John 1:7) It means to go on believing in Him. The first connection with salvation is in this setting. "But as many as received him, to them gave the power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name." (cf. John 1:12) "Believe" is a present tense verb. It means who continue to believe on His name. It is the same way in the most familiar verse in the Bible, John 3:16: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes in him should not perish, but has everlasting life." The English tends to hide it, but it means to continue to believe in Him. Throughout that passage the verb has that force. Another verse in John's Gospel that we often use as a proof text for eternal security is of the same force. "Verily, verily I say unto you, He that hears my word, and believes on him that sent me, has everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death into life." (cf. John 5:24). "Believes" is a word that means "continue to believe."

So, our question becomes what about those who once believed, but now no longer have faith in Christ? Simply stated they were never saved. The only faith that God honors in salvation is that which perseveres. It will continue to rely upon and trust in the Lord Jesus throughout all of life. By this we are not questioning the eternal security of the believer. Rather we are just identifying the believer.

Second, the Eternally Secure Believers Have Settled Faith.

This may be understood as a positive explanation of how they continue in faith. Paul employs a very familiar Biblical figure of speech: "If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled." Grounded is better translated "having been founded". The word has the picture of laying a foundation, and thus to establish a building upon a foundation. The tense of the verb in the Greek is perfect. This would suggest that at some point in the past the faith has been placed upon a firm foundation and consequently is now resting upon the same foundation.

This is a mark of true saving faith. It is founded upon the solid, unshakable rock of Christ Himself. This is another emphasis of the New Testament. It does not teach that believers are saved, but that believers on the Lord Jesus Christ are saved. The Gospel of John regularly points to Christ Jesus as the foundation upon which the house of saving faith is settled. It is not placed in the church of Christ, or the ministers of Christ---but in Christ. This is the reason so many fall by the wayside. Many professing believers never really founded their faith upon Christ. It was placed on some friend who told them about Christ, or some experience, or some other notion, or sometimes even on faith itself. Such were never saved. Only those who trust in Christ and Christ alone are ever saved, and consequently are ever eternally secure.

Third, the Eternally Secure Believers Have a Settled Faith.

This is the other side of the settled faith. Like a house it is placed upon a solid foundation, this is the positive side. But like a house, neither can it be moved from the foundation; this is the negative side. It is stable and steadfast. It cannot be moved away from the hope that it has found in the Gospel message.

This is the heart of the message of Paul to the Colossian Christians. Paul is not saying that there will not be forces that will try to blow you off of the foundation. Your faith will be tested. But true saving faith will endure the test. It will not be true faith because it endures; rather, it endures because it is true saving faith. This distinction is important.

False teachings are one of the forces that test the steadfastness of our faith. Such teachers were now blowing against the faith of the believers in Colossae like a mighty wind. If their faith was truly saving faith, it would stand the test of the false teachings. When such teachings blew through the churches later, John wrote that those who followed the false teachers had never truly been of the faith. "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us." (cf. I John 2:19). **NO ONE CAN BE DRIVEN OUT... THEY LEAVE ON THEIR OWN.**

Persecution will test the steadfastness of our faith. In a great passage in which he talked about faith in the midst of tribulation, our Lord said, "But he that shall endure to the end, the same shall be saved." (cf. Matthew 24:13). They are not saved because they endure, but they endure because they just have that kind of steadfast faith. In the parable of the sower Jesus pinpointed such tribulation or persecution as being the cause for many not being saved. (cf. Matthew 13:21).

Worldly things also test true faith. In the same parable of the sower Jesus also pointed to the "cares of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches" as being forces that choke the word in life. It is my conviction that such that do not move on to fruitfulness were never truly saved. Which believers are eternally secure? It is only those who have the quality of faith that can endure the storms that blow against it. Jesus so pointed to this truth in the parable of the foolish and the wise builder. The faith of every man will be tested by the storms, but only those who stand the storms will truly be saved in the end, or better, those who are truly saved will stand with steadfastness in the storm. The Lord God will so keep them.