

Is Salvation for Keeps or for Keeping? , 1

By David de Bruyn

Is salvation for keeps or for keeping? This is an issue which has occupied Christians for many a year. Can you lose your salvation? Once you are saved, are you always saved? Am I responsible for keeping myself saved? Or is it all in God's hands? In short, is salvation for keeps, or for keeping?

Those who believe that salvation can be lost call the idea of once saved always saved 'cheap grace'. They say to believe such a thing makes salvation 'too easy' and opens the door to people abusing the grace of God. Those who believe salvation is forever counter by saying that such people believe that salvation is by works. Obviously this is a crucial issue.

I want to deal with it from the perspective of what we call 'eternal security'. Eternal security refers to the security of the believer in Christ. Eternal security is somewhat different from what people call 'assurance of salvation'. Assurance of salvation is linked to eternal security, but it is not exactly the same. Assurance of salvation has more to do with a believer who, by the witness of the Spirit in his heart, and by comparing the fruit of his life to the Word, and by believing the promises of eternal security comes to the conclusion that he is indeed saved. It is in some senses more of a subjective thing, not in the sense of its reality, but in the sense that it is something that the individual believer must check according to 2 Corinthians 13:5. We'll touch on this a bit more later. But what we want to look at is eternal security. This is a far more objective thing, because it involves what God does when He saves us. Is it permanent or not? What is the nature of salvation? What happens?

Let us see what salvation is, by examining it under 4 headings: the nature of salvation, the nature of the Father's work, the nature of the Son's work, the nature of the Spirit's work.

Let us begin at the most obvious place, the **nature of salvation**.

Scripture has gone to great pains to explain to us the nature of our salvation.

- 1) Firstly, we know that salvation is often called 'eternal life'. Most often, such as in I John 5:12, this eternal life is spoke of us something we presently possess, not only as something we will one day have. Eternal life, therefore is the life of Christ within us, the eternal life of God inside us. Now, if you can lose your salvation, it begs the question, was it eternal? How can something that is eternal end? Eternal means no beginning and no end, the life of God. If the life of God were to cease in you and I, it would perhaps be the greatest contradiction of the universe: that the life of God should end somewhere.
- 2) Secondly, Ephesians 2:8-9 reads: "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: *it is* the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast". Clearly salvation is by grace, and no works of ours play any part in accomplishing or earning our salvation. It is a gift. Someone may say, 'Well,

salvation is a gift, but then I must work hard to keep it! God's no fool!" But Scripture does not say that. If you did not receive your salvation by your own works, who told you that you are required to keep your salvation by your own works? That's a contradiction: how can salvation be by grace at the start, but by works till the end? Listen to Colossians 2:6: "As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, *so* walk ye in him". Scripture further tells us who will keep us saved, I Peter 1:5: "Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time". Jude 24: "Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present *you* faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy". Yes, God is no fool, and we'll look a bit more at how this doctrine is abused, but we do not have to change the terms of the Gospel and the nature of salvation to scare people into obedience.

- 3) Listen to I Peter 1:4: "To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you." Now, I'm interested as to how God can reserve me a place, if my place is still in doubt. Why reserve seats for someone whose arrival is conditional upon his own merits, works or ability? You only reserve seats for those you know will be there! It's God who saves, and therefore He will finish what He started. He can reserve a place in heaven for you, because His grace can keep you.
- 4) We know that Jesus told Nicodemus in John 3:3 that salvation is a new birth; it is being born from above. If God has chosen to illustrate salvation this way, the question is : how does one get unborn? How do you reverse a birth? Someone says, "Well, you can't be unborn, but you can die!" But that takes us back to what we said earlier, if eternal life dies, then was it eternal to begin with?
- 5) One of the aspects of our salvation is called by the legal term 'justification'. Justification refers to the judicial verdict of a judge in a court, where he would pronounce, 'not guilty'. It was a legal sentence, an acquittal. Now, once again, this is the illustration God has given us to explain the nature of our salvation. Even in our day, a man declared innocent by the court cannot be tried again for the same crime. Once he is declared innocent, that's it, he's declared righteous before the law. So with our salvation, we are declared innocent, not *made* innocent, but declared innocent, by God. Why? Because our sentence, what we deserve is imputed to Jesus Christ. If we were to lose our salvation, then it would have to mean that God would have to reverse His original verdict on us, not guilty, which He cannot and will not do and furthermore, it would cast doubt on the sacrifice of Christ. God cannot declare guilty one whom He has already declared innocent, otherwise the efficacy of the death and resurrection of His Son is in doubt.
- 6) Ephesians 2:6 is a fascinating verse: "And hath raised *us* up together, and made *us* sit together in heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus:" According to that verse, believers are already seated in heavenly places. Now, this again raises the question, can you seat someone in heavenly places who actually will lose his salvation and never finally or totally end up there? How terrible to imagine all these saints in heaven, suddenly disappearing, as if through cracks in the floor, because they could not hold on to their salvation.

- 7) Roman 8:38-39: “For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, ³⁹Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Those verses explicitly tell us that not our death, nor our life, nor angels, nor governments, nor Satan and demonic forces, nor anything present, nor anything to come, nor any other created being will be able to break the connection between us and Christ. I think Paul was trying to be pretty all-inclusive as he tried to disqualify any possible cause of a permanent separation between us and Christ.
- 8) Finally Hebrews 6:4-6. “For *it is* impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, ⁵And have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, ⁶If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put *him* to an open shame”. This is often quoted to support the idea that salvation can be lost. We’ll deal with its interpretation a bit later, but suffice it to say now, that the verse very explicitly teaches that if salvation is lost, it cannot be gained again. This is because Jesus Christ would have to die for you again, and this would also cause great shame to God, for what good could be His original sacrifice if He had to repeat it over and over again? So those who reject one saved always saved, must agree then that once lost, always lost.

Thus we see in Scripture that the very nature of salvation is something that God does, it is eternal, and it cannot be earned, or therefore maintained by man’s efforts.

But Scripture further emphasises the security of the believer as we see **the work of God the Father in salvation.**

- 1) First, God is sovereign. *Sovereign* means God accomplished what He purposes to do, nothing will stop Him, and no one can thwart Him. If he sets out to save you, He will finish what he started. Philippians 1:6 puts it gloriously: “Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform *it* until the day of Jesus Christ.” I Thessalonians 5:24 says: “Faithful *is* he that calleth you, who also will do *it*.” Now, if you genuinely got saved, then you must be on the list of those God promises to complete the work in. So, if you lose your salvation, then what happens to God’s sovereign power to finish what He started? It would be a contradiction; it would mean that you, a puny human, have the power to overthrow God’s sovereignty. Listen to Romans 8:30: “Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified”. How could God glorify those who are not yet in heaven? Surely, if their status is not yet decided, if it hinges on their own performance, then to glorify them is somewhat premature? No, it shows that God secures the believer, because He is Sovereign and will finish what He begins in us.
- 2) God is also truthful. Listen to Titus 1:2: “In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began;” Now, I am puzzled as to why the Lord will promise something to someone if He knew they would ultimately fall short of the prize. No, God makes this promise, which Paul points out is for all

believers, knowing that all true believers will certainly inherit this eternal life. God, being truthful, could not make a blanket promise to all believers of eternal life, if a good number of them would eventually turn out not to inherit it. This would make His promise to them invalid. The words in that verse 'before the world began' leads us to another point.

- 3) God is omniscient or all-knowing. God made this promise of eternal life before creation even began. We have this thought repeated in Revelation 13:8: "And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world". God has all future knowledge of all events. Listen to I Peter 1:2: "Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied". Now without getting into the hugely mind-twisting notions of election and predestination, it seems clear enough that God had names in His book of life before the world began. My question is, why write these names in there, if they are actually going to lose their salvation and thus you must erase their names. Why choose some that never make it?
- 4) Finally, God the Father is faithful. 2 Tim 2:13: "If we believe not, *yet* he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself." God is not open to being abused, and no, God is not mocked, what a man sows, he will reap, but God's mercy and faithfulness far outstrip what we could ever imagine. Read Psalm 103 if you have any doubts. Some say, well, I must remain faithful or God will leave me. No, God is faithful even when we are unfaithful. That is not a license to sin, it proves again that salvation must rest squarely in His hands, or none of us would make it.

We now move on to the **nature of Christ's work in salvation.**

- 1) Perhaps one of the greatest proofs that the believer is eternally secure came when Jesus made His second to last cry from the cross, 'It is finished'. This Greek phrase is 'tetelestai', which literally means, "paid in full". It was often used when a person paid off their debt: the word 'tetelestai' were written over the item. Likewise when a slave was completely purchased 'paid in full' was written of the slave. When Christ uttered these words, He was saying 'the entire sin debt has been paid. Past, present and future sins, all paid for by His blood and death there on Calvary.

Now, consider what this means. If all my sins are paid for, which sin is it that causes me to lose my salvation? Then surely that particular one must not have been paid for by Christ. See, I often ask the following question to Christians who respond with bewildered expressions: Suppose you are somewhere today, and you think a single proud thought. You sin. The very next moment, you are hit by a car, and die. Do you go to hell? Do you know suffer eternally because you sinned just before you died? If you say yes, you betray how little you think you sin. There is no way that the majority of believers will be found having confessed all their sins directly to Him as I John 1:9 teaches just before they die. No, the truth is that the sacrifice of Christ pays your entire sin debt, past present and future. Otherwise, the implication is that Christ's death on the cross pays for only those sins up to the day and time you receive Him, and from there- you're on your own to keep confessing hoping you don't die

unexpectedly. In that case, your sin debt is ‘half paid’, not paid in full. No, Christ’s death was either paid in full or it wasn’t. Why do we confess our sin? To restore and maintain the *fellowship*, **not the relationship**. The relationship is settled finally, like a slave totally bought, by the blood of Christ, paid in full. Jesus taught Peter this when washing his feet. Peter said, Okay Lord, since you want to wash my feet, wash all of me. Jesus replied spiritually speaking, he that is clean needs only his feet washed. One who has experienced salvation does not need to get saved again and again, he needs daily cleansing from the sin he commits during the day, but the once-for-all bath is complete when we come to Christ at Calvary.

- 2) Consider Jesus own words in John 10:27-29: “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: ²⁸And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any *man* pluck them out of my hand. ²⁹My Father, which gave *them* me, is greater than all; and no *man* is able to pluck *them* out of my Father’s hand.” Did you ever think that the words ‘no one’ include you? You yourself, are not able to wrest yourself from His hands. Some say, “I don’t know if I’m saved , but I’m holding on!!” No, Christ teaches, it’s not you holding on to Me, it’s Me holding on to you. If it were up to us keep holding on, the best of us would have fallen off a long time ago.
- 3) Listen to Christ’s words in John 6:39: “And this is the Father’s will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day”. Christ is explicit: all the true believers that the Father promised the Son He will receive, not a single one will be lost. In other words, if one of them are lost, then by Christ’s own words , they could never have been saved in the first place. You cannot be one of the ones Christ receives from the Father, and lose your salvation otherwise Christ’s words become untrue.
- 4) Something often overlooked is Christ’s present ministry in heaven. Listen to Hebrews 7:25: “Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them”. Christ can save you and I completely and totally because He is an ever-living, unchanging intercessor , who prays for us. For those who think Christ will turn against them, recall His words in Hebrews 13:5: “*Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.*” Romans 8:34: “Who *is* he that condemneth? *It is* Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us”

Christ’s work indicates salvation is eternal, and the true believer is secure.

Finally, we wish to look at **the Spirit’s work in salvation**.

- 1) Notice the Spirit *baptizes* all true believers. I Corinthians 12:13: “For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether *we be* Jews or Gentiles, whether *we be* bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.”. Not a select few but all of them had been baptized into the Spirit, and please remember, Corinth was a carnal, sinful church. But the Spirit had baptized them all into Christ. He had joined them into the death and resurrection of Christ, as explained in Romans 6. Now, the question is, how do you somehow be ‘un-joined’ from the death and resurrection of Christ? How can you undo your death with Him, and

- your resurrection with Him? That would mean you'd have to kill your new life, and resurrect your old man. Impossible.
- 2) The Spirit *seals* all true believers. Ephesians 4:30: "And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption". Notice until when: the day of redemption, that's the day we see Christ. Now sealing, in those days, was an act of sealing up the contents of a package as protection against tampering or corrupting till it reached its intended, final destination. If I lose my salvation, then something happened to the seal, and frankly, who is able to break the seal of the Holy Spirit Himself?
 - 3) The Spirit indwells all believers. He comes to make us His abode. Where in Scripture does it ever say He will leave this abode? Some often quote David's cry in Psalm 51, 'take not thy holy spirit from me', but in that dispensation, the Spirit did not indwell anyone. He came upon people for service, and left again. This is clearly seen in the book of Judges. David was crying out for usefulness, not salvation, that why he asks God to restore to Him the joy of his salvation, not salvation itself.

Indeed, salvation is eternal. The nature of salvation says it, the work of the Father in salvation says it, the work of the Son in Salvation says it and the work of the Spirit in salvation says it. The believer is saved eternally, and cannot lose his salvation.

I understand that some of this may go against the grain of what you perhaps have always believed. Let us believe what we believe only because Scripture teaches it. For some it sounds like a 'cheap grace' But that's a contradiction in terms, because grace cannot be cheap, for it cannot be bought. That's precisely the issue. Grace cannot be earned by my works, and it cannot be kept by my works. It is a gift, one I receive humbly. It is not cheap, it was extremely costly on the part of the giver.

Yet there are still many issues to tackle, and we will do so next week. For instance, what of the Scriptures that seem to teach that salvation can be lost? What of the practical implication? Won't believers sin because of this doctrine? Won't we give unbelievers a false assurance with this doctrine?