

The Position of the Christian Life – Securing Grace for Enduring Faith.

A paradox is the Christian life has a number of apparent paradoxes. You must die to live; you must go down to come up; you must empty yourself to be full; you must surrender to gain victory; you must submit to reign and so on. One of the paradoxes of the Christian life has to do with a Christian's position. We've been studying the position of the Christian life for several weeks now, as part of a bigger series on the Christian life, knowing your position is fundamental to both the priority and the process of the Christian life.

The paradox of the position of the Christian life is that God's children are eternally secure, but they must endure to the end. Those who persevere, by God's grace, are kept. Those who 'fall away' from the faith reveal that they did not fall away from an *actual* position, but from an *apparent* one.

We want to examine this paradox today, as we close off looking at the matter of the position of the Christian life. To properly understand the position of the Christian life, we have to understand that the Bible very clearly distinguishes professors from possessors.

In the Bible, a professor is one who professes to know Christ with the mouth, but does not truly possess Christ's life. We read warning passages like Gal 5:19-21, I Cor 6:9-10 which clearly state that people who habitually evidence only the flesh, do not enter the kingdom. The book of 1 John confirms this. A pattern of life exists, which reveals that regardless of what someone says with his mouth, he cannot be considered one of Christ's. He is a professor, but a possessor.

We also see that professors often reveal that they are mere professors by turning away from Christ before they die.

1 John 2:19 ¹⁹ *They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us. By contrast, one of the repeated signs of a true possessor is that he keeps trusting in Christ to the very end.*

John 8:31 *Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed.*

Christ's disciples are those who continue in His Word.

Philippians 3:13-14 ³ *Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, ¹⁴ I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.*

In John 15:16, believers are described as those who go on to bear fruit that remains.

So if, as we have already seen in previous messages, we are accepted in Christ, completed in Christ and secured in Christ, how then can there be a requirement that we endure to the end? How can we reconcile this apparent paradox that we are secure, but we must endure?

We find the answer in Colossians 1:21-23.

Colossians 1:21-23 *And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled ²² in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight -- ²³ if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard, which was preached to every creature under heaven, of which I, Paul, became a minister.*

I hope you notice something fascinating. Paul packed the past and future into verses 21 and 22 and

it was all to do with God. He then brings the present into verse 23 and it is about us. And it is a conditional statement.

It begins with the words '**if indeed**'. It's followed by the word '**you**'. In other words, a condition is placed on all that has been said in verses 21 and 22, and it is a condition that is to be found in you. You were reconciled and you will be presented in heaven **if** verse 23 is true of you.

Now you might expect v23 to say – “if you have accepted Jesus as your Saviour; if you remember praying a prayer, signing a card, asking Jesus into your heart” – then verses 21 and 22 are true.

But what does the “if” statement say?

If you continue in the faith In other words, something happening at the present moment is the condition you must meet, to see if you have been saved, and if you will be saved.

Most people think in this category – if I did something in the past, namely pray a prayer, go forward at an invitation – then I know that I have been saved and will go to heaven. It doesn't really matter what I do in the present. My future is secured by what I did in the past. My future is never in doubt by my behaviour now.

And Colossians 1:21-23 comes up and smacks that thinking in the face, and throws a bucket of cold water over your head. It says – the only way you truly know something really happened in the past, and that your future is secure is by what you are doing in the present.

Let me tell you a wrong way to harmonise these thoughts. What many people do is they look at these verses, they see the condition in verse 23 and they say – “since there is an 'if' statement, it must mean that you can lose your salvation. Because if there is an 'if' there is logically an 'if not' – So if you do not continue in the faith, it means you lose your faith, and you lose your salvation and you go to hell.”

That is a wrong interpretation. The way we know that, is by what we have just seen – that Paul links the past and the future in one statement. The 'if' of verse 23 is not merely something which places a condition on the future presentation, it places a condition on the past reconciliation. Paul is saying 'if you continue in the faith' then verse 21 and 22 are true of you – you have been reconciled and you will be presented.

People who believe you can lose your salvation try to split up the past work of God and the future work of God. They wish Paul had written it this way: God reconciled you, and if you continue in the faith in the present, He will present you blameless before Him in the future. That would support their system. God does a work in the past, you must support and sustain that work, and then the blessed future will happen.

But you cannot do that to this passage. The Bible deliberately puts the past and the future together, letting the one cause the other - God's full and complete work in the past will result in His full and complete work in the future. God will not let anyone claim the glory for what He has done and will do – it is 100% God's work from start to finish. It does not depend on you to cause it at the start or complete it at the end.

You cannot lose true salvation.

God cannot and will not go back on what He has done. He will not justify you – declare you innocent – and then reverse that and declare you guilty. He will not redeem you – buy you out of slavery – and then reverse that and sell you back into sin. He will not forgive you – cancel your debt - and then reverse that and debit you with all the sins Jesus paid for. He will not regenerate you – resurrect your dead heart and breathe His living spirit into your soul – and then spiritually kill you by removing it. He will not adopt you – make you one of His children – and then disown you. He will not wed you and then divorce you. If He truly saves you – you are saved forever. This passage

will not allow you to separate God's past act and His future act. If God has done it in the past, the future is as good as if it were the past.

But then what does the 'if' statement mean? If we are eternally secure, why place that security in doubt?

Verse 23 is not speaking about *retaining* your salvation; it is speaking about **possessing** your salvation. It is not a condition to *keep* yourself saved; it is the condition you must meet to *prove* yourself to be saved.

In other words, your failure to live out verse 23 not only says He will not present you in the future, it means He *never* reconciled you in the past. If verse 23 happens in your life in the present – then the past event happened, and the future event will happen. Another example of this is found in:

Hebrews 3:14 For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end,

Notice – we have [past tense] become partakers, if we hold [present tense] our confidence steadfast to the end. It is not saying, “This is how you keep it”, it is saying – “this is how you know you already have it.”

Once God has saved you, He will certainly save you. But the way you are to know and check that is not by looking into the past at a supposed decision you made, but by looking at your present. I think that thought is absolutely crucial for modern Christianity to grasp. God wants us to experience the sense of warning in passages like this. You must continue in the faith, or you will not turn out to have been saved. You must look to your life right now to see if you possess eternal life.

Many people hold to automatic eternal security. That is, they believe that at one point in time you believe in Jesus. Having done that, it doesn't matter what you do or what you believe, because you will still go to heaven. You simply need to gain admission in the first place, and then you have a lifetime season ticket to go to heaven, whenever you die. It is automatic, as if there is a giant escalator going to heaven. And as long as you get on that escalator at some point in your life, it doesn't really matter what you do after that because it will automatically end up in heaven.

But the Bible does not teach that. It teaches dynamic eternal security. God promises to save and glorify those who trust His Son. But the way you know that you truly believed to salvation is by a present-tense faith which continues to trust and obey. If that faith is absent, there is no reason to think you are going to heaven. Salvation is not like an escalator, it is like a river running downstream to the waterfall of hell. Upstream is heaven. To swim against the current is faith. If you coast, you drift downstream to destruction.

But if you are a believer, God will keep you swimming upstream all your life, till eventually He takes you out the downstream current of your flesh and the world and Satan and places you safely, blamelessly in His presence. But if you are a believer, your responsibility is to swim now with all your life.

One way to understand this is to simply reflect on salvation. Which Christian would say they got saved because of themselves? None of us, we all say that it was God's grace. At the same time, which Christian would say that there was no condition they had to meet to be saved? None of us, we would all say we had to trust Christ to be saved.

So in the same way, which Christian would say we make ourselves secure and get ourselves to heaven? None of us, we would all say it is God who will secure us and glorify us. At the same time which Christian would say there is no condition on final salvation? Hopefully, when we read these texts, none of us. It is all God's grace, but God gives man a responsibility. Meeting that responsibility is not what saves you, God saves you – but it is what God requires to save you. And just as there was a requirement at the start, there is a requirement throughout your Christian life.

So what does verse 23 require of us to show that we have been and will be saved?

Let's look at it closely. **if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard,**

There are really two things there:

- 1) Continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast.
- 2) Do not be moved away from the hope of the Gospel.

Positively, we must continue in the faith. Faith is what saves us. Therefore, the faith that saves us at the start is the faith that saves us to the end. Colossians 2:6. You must continue to trust Christ as your Lord and Saviour throughout your life. Be grounded, settled on Him as your sufficient foundation. Be steadfast and unmoveable, so that all heresy, temptation, false doctrine, worldliness does not sway you.

Hebrews 4:14 ¶ *Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.*

But since faith is an internal, invisible thing, what is the external evidence of faith?

Works.

James 2:17 *Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.* ¹⁸ ¶ *But someone will say, "You have faith, and I have works." Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.*

Therefore, we must earnestly desire to have these works, not because they save us or keep us saved, but because they reveal that we possess a living faith. Apart from these fruits, we should not presume that we have faith.

These works can also function negatively.

Titus 1:16 ¹⁶ *They profess to know God, but in works they deny Him, being abominable, disobedient, and disqualified for every good work.*

Perpetual disobedience, perpetual unrepentant worldliness, perpetual living for the flesh is an act of denying Jesus Christ. Oh, that people today would hear and tremble. That they would consider themselves in danger when they love money, or look at pornography, or go into the nightclub, or begin dipping their feet into the marriage bed before they are married, or neglecting prayer, or never reading the Bible, or forsaking the assembling of ourselves together. What zeal, what vigour, what earnestness would return if people realised - my soul is at stake – continually. I must not coast, because true faith does not coast.

Is this salvation by works? No. We are justified by faith alone. But the works are there to give evidence of the faith that justifies, and the faith that justifies is never alone.

And then negatively, we are told we must **not be moved away from the hope of the Gospel**. On one level that means, do not deny Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour. Do not turn from Him as your righteousness and only hope. Do not go back to Judaism, Buddhism, humanism, Islam, legalism.

2 Timothy 2:11-13

It is a trustworthy statement: For if we died with Him, we will also live with Him; If we endure, we will also reign with Him; If we deny Him, He also will deny us; If we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself.

People who deny Jesus after they have claimed Him as Saviour will not be saved when they die, unless they repent of their denial of Him before then.

2 Peter 2:20-22 *For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the*

Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning. ²¹ For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them. ²² But it has happened to them according to the true proverb: "A dog returns to his own vomit," and, "a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mire."

This explains the warning passages of Hebrews 6 and Hebrews 10. The writer is warning his readers against apostasy; against turning back to false systems of religion.

If a continual faith evidenced by works is what reveals if I am saved or not, how can I have assurance? How can I know I am saved?

Assurance – like you do a test, and if you score well, then you can have perfect assurance the rest of your life.

If this passage is saying the past and the future hinge on what you do in the present – then the truth is – God gives us assurance one moment at a time; one moment in the present. As you see evidences of faith, you rejoice that your name is written in the Lamb's book of life. As you see real works of faith happening now, you claim and enjoy all the promises of security for the future.

But how do I know I will keep believing?

Answer – because God promises He will keep you believing.

Jude 1:24 ²⁴ Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, And to present you faultless Before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy,

Philippians 1:6 ⁶ being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ;

1 Peter 1:4-5 ⁴ to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, ⁵ who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

Perhaps we could say it this way:

God's grace secures through a faith that endures.

Because in reality there is no other kind. That's the point of the parable of the sower. The seed which fell on all the other ground died. Only the last soil brought forth fruit which remained – that's the illustration of faith.

NKJ Luke 8:13 "But the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, who believe for a while and in time of temptation fall away. ¹⁴ "Now the ones that fell among thorns are those who, when they have heard, go out and are choked with cares, riches, and pleasures of life, and bring no fruit to maturity. ¹⁵ "But the ones that fell on the good ground are those who, having heard the word with a noble and good heart, keep it and bear fruit with patience.

So the parallel truths are: God will keep you believing, and you must fight the fight of faith to continually confirm that you are saved.

2 Peter 1:10 ¹⁰ Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble;

1 Timothy 6:12 Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.

You are to hold fast your profession of faith. You are to lay hold on eternal life.

So here we see how these apparent contradictions are actually two sides of the same coin.

God keeps us (Jude 24) but we must keep ourselves in his love (v21). God keeps us by His power, but one of the means He uses is our faith (I Peter 1:5). God's sovereign power will not fail (Romans 8:29-30), but eternal security is not passive or mechanical. We are to fight the good fight to the end. It is an absolute priority that we would fight to know and love Christ to the very end.

Our security is found in God's promises. We experience those promises to the degree that we have present-tense faith. Present-tense faith, which is manifested in works, gives me the subjective assurance that God's promises of eternal security are mine. This delivers us from the two errors of complacency on the one hand, and servile fear on the other. People who are complacent about assurance do not feel the need to fight for faith. However, people who live in perpetual fear that they will be cast off from Christ cannot trust Him or love Him.

This is why understanding our position in Christ is so crucial to the whole Christian life. You cannot love God ultimately if you doubt that He loves you. You cannot live in His presence if you doubt that He wants you in His presence. You cannot commune with God boldly if you are plagued by an accusing conscience. You cannot live by grace if you are leaning on human merit and human works. The position of Christian life is a matter of living by faith in grace. The grace that came to you in salvation is the same grace you are to continue to look to, believe in, and hope in. You place your confidence in what you are in Christ, not in yourself. You hope in what He is before the Father, and who you are in Him. There is security, there is confidence, there is glad acceptance and love. You trust that his presence in you proves that you are in Him, and from that position you keep on living in His presence by faith. As you keep living in His presence by faith, you are enduring, one moment at a time, one day at a time, with the confidence that you are secure and will keep believing till the end. This is the grand and glorious position of the Christian life.

Next week, we return to considering what it is to live in God's presence, as we begin the fourth part of this series – the posture of the Christian life.