

If You're Secure, You'll Endure

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.*

Jews for Judaism is an organization devoted to opposing Christian efforts to evangelise the Jews and to 'converting' Jews back to Judaism. On their website they have some testimonials of people who have been recovered. One of them is a Jewish man by the name of Jack, who says the following:

“For over a dozen years I was a Jewish Christian missionary. I believed in the Christian doctrine that everyone I knew and loved, who didn't believe in Jesus, was going to burn in hell for all eternity. I became adept at using the Holy Scriptures to prove that Jesus was the Jewish Messiah. However, last October, while browsing the Internet, I was challenged to speak with Mark, a staff member of Jews for Judaism. I started corresponding with him, because I figured this would be an opportunity to save his soul.

To my surprise, I couldn't answer some of the questions he asked me. However, he had very reasonable answers for all of my questions. He had made a crack in my armor and now the stage was set for many months of dialogue and careful examination. I did this with his help and the help of many other individuals on the Internet.

It was very difficult and scary for me, since I had so much invested in Christianity. But the facts were overwhelming, and with Mark's support and encouragement, I finally came to the conclusion that I had made a mistake. Thank God I have returned to my people to share in the inheritance others wanted to take from me.”

There are people today who will tell you that such a person is saved, but backslidden. They will say that there is no danger that such a person will go to hell because they are eternally secure.

This passage from Colossians says the opposite. It says – if you do not continue to profess Christ,— you will not go to heaven.

Likewise, there are people who will tell you about a daughter, a son, a spouse, a relative who professed Christ, was baptised, perhaps served Jesus for a time, but now lives in the world, like the world, and has little to no attachment to Christ at all – and they will say, but at least they are saved. And this passage replies, “Don't be so sure.”

This message is going to come as a shock to some of you, who are used to the way eternal security has been taught. Let me say at the outset, I believe in eternal security. I believe a true believer cannot lose their salvation. But I also believe this: that if you are not seeking to love Christ in the present – you will not go to heaven. And I aim to show you that those two thoughts are not contradictory, but complimentary.

There are two works we see in this passage. One is God's objective work of reconciling us; the other is our subjective work of being attached to that work by faith.

I. God's Work of Securing Salvation

Paul is carrying over the thoughts on reconciliation from v20. When we were still enemies, alienated from God – hostile in our minds, and proving it with evil works – He reconciled us.

How did He do that?

He did it through the body of His flesh, through death. Jesus reconciled us to God by dying in our place, by taking the penalty for our sins upon Himself. That is the work of God in the past.

But notice that verse 22 takes God's Work in the past and fast forwards it thousands of years into the future: *'to present you holy and blameless, and above reproach in His sight'*.

Ask yourself, *'When is that going to happen?'* When will Jesus present believers before Himself as perfectly holy, perfectly blameless, with no accusations sticking to them?

The answer is - *when He glorifies us in heaven* (when we reach our final destination, and we are in His presence, perfected and without blame).

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,*

^{KJV} **Ephesians 5:27** *That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.*

So as you read this, you should see the mighty power of Christ's work of salvation – from His work on the cross 2000 years ago, sweeping across history, catching you up in it, and presenting you in His presence. Notice it is unconditional – God does it, and He does not depend on us to do it. He saves in the past, and He saves in the future. You cannot separate the word *reconciled* from the words *to present* – they are linked. He reconciled you to present you.

There's eternal security right there. What God began, He will complete.

As **Philippians 1:6** says - *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;*

It is His work from start to finish, from the past to the future – he is the Author and the Finisher, the Beginning and the End.

This verse brings us to the second work.

II. Your Work of Enduring Faith

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 is followed by the word *'you'*. In other words, a condition is placed on what 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 verse 23 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, there is a condition you must meet, something must be happening at the present moment, to confirm 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 prayed a prayer, went 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 behaviour now does not cast any doubt on my future.’

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.’

That should make you tremble. There is not enough trembling in the modern Western church. Pastors are seemingly against people trembling; they are so desirous that everyone have full assurance that they disarm verses like this, or ignore them, or sweep them under the carpet. It messes with their neat theological categories so, instead of explaining, they try to explain it away. I hope not to do that.

Now there is a wrong way to harmonise these thoughts. Many people look at these verses and when they see the condition in verse 23 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 - 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 we can lose our 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.’ Those words would support their system, i.e. God does a work in the past, you must support and sustain that work, and then the blessed future will happen.

But we cannot interpret this passage in that way. 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.

There is nothing here which says – ‘He reconciled you, so the past is done, but the future stands in doubt, based on the present.’ No, the past action and the future action are tied together. If the one is true, so is the other. If the past reconciliation has happened, the future presentation will happen.

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**:

NKJ 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.

So many passages in Scripture have their warning and their bite removed by people who don't want anyone scared.

1 Corinthians 6:9-10 ¶ *Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, ¹⁰ nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God.*

And people today say – ‘Well, I know that I am a fornicator, and adulterer, a drunkard and a coveter – but I am an eternally secure coveter.’ No, no, no! God's Word is saying, if you continue in the faith you will fight adultery, you will struggle against your covetousness, you will battle your fornication – because that's what faith does. And if you don't do that, so that adultery or fornication or covetousness overwhelms your life until, at the end of your life, it shows you never had the faith to begin with and will not go to heaven.

Jesus says in **Matthew 7:21** - *Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.*

And people say – ‘Well, I know I don't do the will of the Father, but I am eternally secure anyway.’ No!

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, until eventually He

takes you out of 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? Not one 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? Not one 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? Not one 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, not one of us would say this. It is all God's grace, but God gives man a responsibility. Meeting that responsibility is not what saves us, God saves us – but it is what God requires from us to save us. 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 2:6,7:** *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 immovable, 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 let me ask, 'Since faith is an internal, invisible thing, what is the external evidence of faith?' The answer is *works*.

James 2:14-26 *What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? ¹⁵ If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, ¹⁶ and one of you says to them, "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled," but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? 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. ¹⁹ You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe -- and tremble! ²⁰ But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead? ²¹ Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? ²² Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect? ²³ And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." And he was called the friend of God. ²⁴ You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only. ²⁵ Likewise, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out another way? ²⁶ For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.*

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.

Let us imagine you needed to have chicken pox to enter a certain country. If you wanted to enter that country badly, you would long to see red spots break out on your body, because it would be the sign you have the real disease. So, you should long for, and fight for, and aim for, all the works which are evidences of true faith, which show the grace of God has truly saved you and will truly save you.

Christian, fight! Fight for your faith. Fight for evidence of faith. Those who coast, die; those who endure, win.

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."*

There is another way we deny Him. Just as works reveal faith, so works reveal unbelief.

Titus 1:16 *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.

How can we then have assurance?

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?

Well, the Bible wants you to know. The Bible does not want you to exist without assurance. But the

Bible is not going to give you a kind of assurance which encourages unbelief and complacency.

Some people want a form of assurance that is like a one-time blood test. Go in, check your blood type – ‘Oh, I’m A positive. Great, I’m in.’ Have I got ‘born-again’ blood? Great, I’m going to heaven, no matter what.

That is never how God gives 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.

Why would you need anything else? Why would you want anything else?

Actually, the reason we sometimes want more assurance than for the present moment is so that we don’t have to keep trusting and keep depending. If I have guaranteed assurance for the next five decisions, or for another week, or a month, or a year, or even all my years - does it matter what I do with those decisions?

Can Christians sin and start to slip back? Yes, but at those points, their assurance has to be shaken a bit, to motivate them to get back up and seek Christ.

Even the old Westminster Confession talks of how Christians can temporarily fall into sins:

“They may, through the temptations of Satan and of the world, the presence of corruption remaining in them, and the neglect of the means of their preservation, fall into grievous sins, and, for a time, continue therein: whereby they incur God’s displeasure, and grieve His Holy Spirit, come to be deprived of some measure of their graces and comforts, have their hearts hardened, and their consciences wounded; hurt and scandalize others, and bring temporal judgments upon themselves.”

But how do I know I will keep believing?

Answer – *Because God promises He will keep you believing.*

Jude 1:24 *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 *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.*

The New Hampshire Baptist Confession says it this way:

‘We believe that such only are real believers as endure unto the end; that their persevering attachment to Christ is the grand mark which distinguishes them from superficial professors; that a special Providence watches over their welfare; and they are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation.’

Perhaps we could say it this way: *God’s grace secures through a faith that endures.*

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 *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.*

Where do I get assurance from? That I am a pastor? Countless pastors have been used mightily in preaching and evangelizing and then turned away from Christ, ran off with their secretary, and disowned the faith. Is it because for 22 years I have considered myself to be a Christian? There are many who have named Christ for twice that long and ended up turning away. My assurance is that right now, I love and trust and cherish Jesus Christ, and want nothing more than to obey Him. I know that is not natural, it is supernatural. And I trust that for the next moment and the next, God will keep me believing, and enable me to fight the fight of faith. I see evidence now, and that is what I need. So I fight with all my heart to see that the faith I have is the real thing. And I will never, on this side of heaven come to a place where I say, 'Phew, finally. I don't need any further evidence.' Since faith endures to the end, the fight for faith will endure to the end, and God has promised to sustain me that far. I also believe that, if I turn around and deny Christ, I will go to hell, no matter what I say I believe. If I deny Christ, it will prove I never had salvation. But from my side of the coin, I don't want that to be true, so I fight for faith. When my faith dips, my assurance dips – it doesn't disappear, but it dips – as it should – and helps restore me to a faith which brings with it assurance.

Perhaps you might say, shouldn't love for God, and not a fear of hell motivate us to obey? The answer is, don't oversimplify the Christian experience. Overwhelmingly, we are to live assured that the faith we are exhibiting is supernatural and proof of God's love for us, which we return. But in seasons of sin and rebellion, we are meant to fear, not remain complacent in our unbelief and sin, but out of a sense of love for our own souls, fight for faith.

So let's sum it up:

Take heed of the warning.

Take heart from the promise.

Take heed – your responsibility is to continue in the faith, by which you evidence your possession of eternal life. Never give up persevering, lay hold on eternal life, or it will not be yours. Do not be one who presumes on a former decision, and never examines your life for evidence of faith. God's objective work of securing you is true of you as you see your subjective work of being attached to Him by faith.

Take heart – whoever He truly reconciles, He will keep and preserve till the day of presentation before Him. He will not let you fall, He will not let you apostasise.