

SOTERIOLOGY (137)

In other words, when God decides not to remember the sin of a person, it includes all the sins and all the lawless deeds. There have been many times and many ways that we have sinned against God. The plurality indicates that sinless perfectionism is not a real possibility in the mind of God.

Now, of course the real question is what does one have to do in order to get into the position where God never remembers one's sins and deeds? The answer is found in the context of Hebrews 10. The context is the sacrificial work of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ came to do something that the blood of animals could never do—take away sin (Heb. 10:3-4, 11). Christ came and offered Himself once as a sacrifice for sin (10:12). The point of verse 17 is this—once one has entered into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ by faith, his sins have been forgiven (10:18) and there is nothing further anyone needs to do. God will NEVER remember the condemnatory sins or lawless deeds. They are washed away by the blood of the Lamb (10:19) and He who promises to do this “is faithful” (10:23).

Passage #7 - Hebrews 13:5

The promise to the believer is that God will NEVER (ou may) desert the believer or NEVER (ou may) forsake the believer. If a believer can lose his salvation, then God is a liar in this statement for He would leave or forsake the believer if the believer backslid or crossed some imagined line of sin. If God states that He NEVER will forsake or desert a believer, that believer cannot ever be lost, therefore, he is completely secure.

Passage #8 - I Peter 2:6

Here is another “ou may” construction and the statement is “he who believes shall NEVER be disappointed.”

The Greek word “disappointed” is one that refers to being in a state of dishonor, disgrace or shame (Smith, pp. 233-234). Logically speaking, there cannot be any worse state of dishonor, disgrace or shame than to have been one who, as those who teach you may lose your salvation suggest, was once in some state of salvation and then lost it. Such a one would be eternally disappointed forever.

The specific promise of this verse is that one who believes in Christ shall NEVER be eternally disappointed. Believing in Christ will NEVER leave one in an eternal state of dishonor, disgrace or shame. This immediately negates any possibility of a loss of salvation.

One who believes on Christ may be ashamed of his lack of dedication (I John 2:28) and he may lose his rewards (I Cor. 3:15), but he will NEVER be ashamed that he believed on Christ and will NEVER be disappointed with eternal life.

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Passage #9 - Revelation 2:11

According to John, the one who “overcomes” will NEVER (ou may) be hurt by the second death, which is the condemnation to hell, which is the judgment given to all unbelievers at the Great White Throne Judgment (Rev. 20:14). The Great White Throne Judgment is specifically a “works” judgment (Rev. 20:13). In John’s mind, one immediately became classified as one who overcomes the moment he believes on Jesus Christ (I John 5:5).

The promise of Jesus Christ Himself is that one who believes on Him will NEVER be hurt by eternal fire. It is impossible then for one once saved to lose his salvation.

Passage #10 - Revelation 3:5

The promise to one who believes on Christ is that he will NEVER have his name erased from the book of life. There is absolutely no doubt that this is a promise of eternal security. Once one has believed on Jesus Christ, there is no possibility of his name being erased from the book of life, which means there is no possibility of him losing his salvation.

Concerning the combination of “ou may,” William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich write: “ou may has the effect of strengthening the negation. Ou may is the most decisive way of negating something in the future” (*Greek-English Lexicon*, p. 519).

To again reemphasize the point—“ou may” guarantees that once one believes on Jesus Christ, he can NEVER lose his salvation. There is a “no, not ever” possibility for one who has come to Christ to ever be lost. It is impossible for one saved to ever be lost and that is precisely what the “ou may” combination means.

“Ou” it is a fact that one who believes will never be lost.

“May” it is an impossibility that one who believes can ever be lost.

“Ou May” combined means who believes is guaranteed eternal life and cannot possibly or potentially ever lose it—that is a fact.

The words God chose to use clearly support the doctrine of eternal security. Eternal means without end and never means without possibility. Together, as John 10:28 uses them—“and I give eternal life to them and they shall never perish” proves beyond any doubt the biblical doctrine of eternal security.

QUESTION #49 – What is the history of the controversy concerning eternal security?

The first known theologian to actually systematize and carefully expound this doctrine was Augustine, the great theologian and Bishop or Pastor of Hippo (A.D. 400). Augustine began with the premise that “man can do no true good without the help of grace.”

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It was this thesis that prompted Augustine to realize that the guarantee of eternal life had to be an unconditional work of grace. Augustine taught “perseverance which is also a result of grace...does not depend on human merits. Thus salvation is from beginning to end a work of grace” (Justo L. Gonzalez, *A History of Christian Thought*, Vol. 1, pp. 45-46).

About the same time an ascetic theologian from Rome, named Pelagius, attacked the teachings of Augustine. How this all happened is described in the following account:

“Pelagius...in A.D. 405, while at Rome, had his first encounter with Augustine’s theology, against which he reacted violently because it made everything dependent on God’s grace and seemed to leave no place for human effort and participation” (*Ibid.*, p. 28).

After this episode, Pelagius and his close friend Coelestius did everything they could to discredit the teachings of Augustine. These two not only emphatically denied the doctrine of eternal security, but actually taught that salvation is earned by good works and is maintained by good works. They taught that one needed to believe on Christ, but also needed to keep the Law. They went on further to suggest that a state of sinless perfectionism was possible in this life (*Ibid.*, p. 31).

Finally, all key pastors and teachers met in a special council meeting in A.D. 431 in Ephesus. It was concluded that Pelagius was a complete heretic and he was denounced at this meeting. History tells us: “Finally, after a long series of African synods that condemned the doctrine of Pelagius...it was finally condemned in A.D. 431 by the Council of Ephesus” (*Ibid.*, pp. 28-29).

Ephesus had been a place of great biblical and doctrinal instruction from men like Paul, Timothy and John. It was only fitting that Pelagius be deemed a heretic in this city.

Shortly after this famous “Council of Ephesus,” the Catholic Church of Rome began to stress the concept of the “free will” of man. The Church concluded that coming to salvation depends totally on the will of man and maintaining salvation depends totally on the will of man.

By the end of A.D. 431, the Roman Catholic Church was teaching that everlasting life was totally based on the obedience of man.

Augustine himself died in A.D. 430 and from the moment of his death, Rome began to dominate the world of theology with her distorted religious views and beliefs that were unbiblical. During the next 1,000 years, God did keep His elect, but, doctrinally speaking, things were very dark. It is no wonder this era is referred to as the “Dark Ages.”

The Catholic Church hid the truth from people and kept them locked in a man-made works system that taught they could have everlasting life if they stayed true to the Church and stayed faithful in their works. Priests purposely taught that the works they were prescribing were the works that would save them.

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All of this changed in A.D. 1517 with the surfacing of Martin Luther. Through a careful study of the Bible, specifically Romans and Galatians, Martin Luther was raised up by God to publicly speak out against and publicly denounce the heretical teachings of the Church of Rome. One of the key doctrines that Luther once again clearly reaffirmed, as Augustine had affirmed, was the doctrine of eternal security. With Luther paving the way, the “Reformation” began to “reform” doctrine and beliefs and by the year A.D. 1560 there had been a complete revival of the precious doctrine of eternal security.

A few citations from Martin Luther give us great insight into his theology:

“The article of justification, which is our only protection, not only against all the powers and plottings of men but also against the gates of hell, is this: by faith alone in Christ, without works, are we declared just and saved.”

“By the one solid rock which we call the doctrine of justification we mean that we are redeemed from sin, death and the devil and are made partakers of life eternal, not by ourselves...but by help from without, by the only begotten Son of God, Jesus Christ.”

“Nothing more is required for justification than to hear of Jesus Christ and to believe on Him as our Savior.”

(All quotations are taken from *The Wisdom of Martin Luther*, Concordia Publishing, pp. 7-8.)

Another great theologian raised up by God at this time to help revive true doctrine along with Martin Luther was John Calvin. Calvin, through his careful study of every book of the Bible, taught: “God, who is rich in mercy, from his immutable purpose of election, does not wholly take away his Holy Spirit from his own, even in lamentable falls; nor does he so permit them to glide down that they should fall from the grace of adoption and the state of justification; or commit the “sin unto death,” or against the Holy Spirit; that, being deserted by Him, they should cast themselves headlong into eternal destruction.

So that not by their own merits or strength but by the gratuitous mercy of God, they obtain it, that they neither totally fall from faith and grace, nor finally continue in their falls and perish” (Paul Enns, *Moody Handbook of Theology*, p. 485).

Just as in the case of Augustine, an opponent surfaced against Calvin who rejected him and his teachings. This man’s name was Jacob Arminius. It was not really Arminius himself who so vehemently rejected the doctrine of eternal security, it was Arminius’ followers.

Arminius’ followers produced a doctrine that attacked eternal security in A.D. 1610. This document was called “Remonstrance.” The “Remonstrance” outlined the entire doctrinal system of Arminianism. In response to the “Remonstrance,” a major synod meeting was held in the city of Dordrecht. Skilled pastors and teachers met to determine exactly what the Bible taught in connection to what the Arminians were claiming.

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The result of this meeting was a document known as the “Canons of Dort” (A.D. 1618-1619). This document clearly affirmed and reaffirmed the doctrine of eternal security.

As one might expect, just a few years after the release of the Canons of Dort, an opposing group who called themselves Arminians, surfaced and emphatically denounced the doctrine of eternal security (A.D. 1625). This group made eternal security totally dependent upon the works and the will of men. It was a repeat of church history and the battles between Augustine and Pelagius, between Protestantism and Catholicism.

This new system known as “Arminianism” became very popular and very powerful. By the mid 1700’s, this doctrine swept through the United States, particularly with a group who called themselves Wesleyan Arminians (A.D. 1730-1740). John Wesley, according to Wesleyan historians, is said to have taught that a believer could lose his salvation and, as a result, several churches sprung up, both Methodists and Wesleyans, who dogmatically taught that the doctrine of eternal security was an unbiblical doctrine. (See Richard S. Taylor, *Historical and Modern Significance of Wesleyan Theology*, Vol. 1, p. 63.)

What is known is that Methodism was never established by John Wesley. In fact, “Methodism was never established as a separate, organized dissenting group until 1808, following the deaths of both Wesley’s” (Kenneth W. Osbeck, *Singing with Understanding*, p. 176). What is also known is that both John and Charles Wesley were prolific writers of hymns and many of their hymns do seem to promote the doctrine of eternal security, i.e. “Jesus, Lover of My Soul.”

In response to this movement, once against several serious preachers and teachers of God’s Word were forced to carefully search the Bible in an attempt to once again understand precisely what the Bible says concerning these doctrines. There was, at this point, a great awareness of the controversy between Augustine and Pelagius, and the controversy between Calvin and Arminius. Primarily, this group of ministers carefully studied both the “Remonstrance” and the “Canons of Dort” to see which system adhered most to the Word of God. Out of this study, both the Reformed and the Presbyterian theologians confirmed that the doctrine of eternal security was a biblical doctrine that was to be believed, taught and defended (A.D. 1740).

As of today, generally speaking, churches fall into one of two theological camps, either classifying themselves as Arminians or Calvinists. A better historical perspective would be to use the classifications of Pelagians or Augustinians.

From this brief historical sketch, we may make the following objective observations:

- 1) The history of the belief that one may lose his salvation is dark. The roots lie in the Roman Church, who, to this very day, teaches a works system of salvation. It is a known historical fact that the Church of Rome literally hounded, imprisoned and executed many faithful believers including Huss, Tyndale, Wycliffe, Luther and Calvin. To accept the doctrinal belief system of a group that has the historical track record of corrupting doctrine and executing those of the faith is to accept a system that is highly suspect and corrupt.

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2) The man who initially rejected the doctrine of eternal security, Pelagius, was deemed a heretic by the greatest Bible teachers alive at the time. To hold to the view of Pelagius, is to hold to the views of one judged evil and corrupt by the greatest biblical teachers who lived in his era.

3) Those who have defended the doctrine of eternal security throughout history have been known to be serious, systematic students of God's Word. Augustine, Martin Luther and John Calvin were known and still are known for their serious, systematic approach to Bible books and Bible doctrines. In fact, all three still have their writings and commentaries preserved to this very day. The conclusions that these men came to were obviously based upon careful analysis of God's Word, whereas we know in the case of Pelagius that his conclusions were primarily based upon his emotional reaction to Augustine.

4) Great defenders of the doctrine of eternal security have generally been recognized as some of the greatest Bible students to have ever been used by God. All of them are known for their systematic study of the books of the Bible and Doctrine. For example, Martin Luther is known for his famous commentaries on Romans and Galatians. God used Luther to begin the Reformation. John Calvin has written a commentary on practically every book of the Bible and he also wrote a Systematic Theology, Institutes of the Christian Religions. Any sober-minded thinker must ask why is it that men such as Donald Grey Barnhouse, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, H. A. Ironside, Lewis Sperry Chafer, C. I. Scofield, and Jonathan Edwards, all concluded that the doctrine of eternal security was a valid doctrine? Why can't we find the great expositions of the Bible by Pelagius or Arminius? Why is it that today's recognized systematic teachers of God's Word defend the doctrine of eternal security? Men like J. Vernon McGee, John Miles, John Walvoord, Charles Ryrie and Chuck Swindoll. We cannot help but observe that those who systematically study the Bible and Bible doctrine are those who come to the realization that eternal security is a true and valid doctrine of the Bible.

5) Those that reject the doctrine of eternal security are not recognized, generally speaking, as being serious, systematic students of God's Word. In fact, it may be generally observed that those who reject eternal security neglect systematic study of the Bible. It is no coincidence that serious, systematic students conclude eternal security is a valid doctrine and those who are not serious about systematic study reject it.

Based upon the history of the doctrine, one is on very solid ground when one accepts the doctrine of eternal security. On the other hand, one is in a very unstable theological arena when one rejects it.

QUESTION #50 – What passages do those who claim you can lose your salvation use to try to support their position?

Before examining the key passages used by those who claim you can lose your salvation, some preliminary matters need to be considered. We begin with an accurate statement by Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer: