

## THE DOCTRINE OF ETERNAL SECURITY

Nathaniel Branden, an esteemed psychologist and writer, says, "Self-esteem is the single most significant key to human behavior." According to psychologists, it is critical for children to grow up in an environment in which they can build a healthy character. Such an environment includes parents who "tell and show family members that they belong" (David E. Carlson, *Counseling and Self-Esteem*, p. 245 & 137).

One of the key ways that parents build self-esteem into their children is by communicating to them that they are thankful that they are part of the family. As Carlson writes: "Parents who share themselves with their children, and who share their ideas, feelings, hopes, wishes, frustrations, failures and successes, communicate to children that they are a vital part of the parents' lives" (p. 137).

Parents who continually criticize and cause their children to doubt their worth or value, and who cause their children to question whether or not they even belong or deserve to be in the family, devastate and ruin a child and it is very rare when a child is able to recover.

Just think for a moment what it would be like to have your mother or father say to you every other day - "You are not part of this family." Imagine what it would be like to grow up in a home in which your parents never gave you any assurance of the fact that you were loved or belonged. We would call such a parent a dysfunctional misfit who didn't deserve to have children. The end result would be children who had no self-esteem and no sense of value.

As difficult as it may seem to believe, there are those in the world of "theology" who desire to make God a dysfunctional parent. There are those who actually believe and teach that God at one moment will say that one is His child, and then at another moment will say he isn't His child. There are those who believe that God will say one is really saved at one moment and then say he isn't really saved at another moment.

It is no wonder that those who are taught and embrace such a belief system often develop into becoming a paranoid, unstable, dysfunctional group of theological misfits. It is no wonder that people who believe this, often doubt their spiritual value and worth. The ultimate tragedy of such a system is not just the effect it has on one's own self, it is a teaching that "robs others of that assurance which is so greatly needed by every one of God's children" (J. F. Strombeck, *Shall Never Perish*, p. 13). Even worse than this, it robs God of His glory!

We are living in a world of doubt, confusion, and insecurity. God does not want His people doubting or confused or insecure about whether or not they are His children. God wants His people to send a strong and confident message to this world that it is possible to know God and find meaning and security and stability in life. God does not want His people projecting an instability and insecurity over whether or not they really even do have a relationship with God.

The doctrine of eternal security is more than just an interesting doctrine to study; it is imperative to the welfare of the family of God.

## ETERNAL SECURITY (2)

**QUESTION #1** – What is the doctrine of eternal security?

A good way to understand what this question is asking is to ask a series of questions that pertain to the doctrine. 1) Is it possible for a saved person to ever be lost? 2) Can a person who has truly received Jesus Christ as Savior ever sin to such a level that he could lose his salvation? 3) Could a person be a believer heading to heaven one day and then be an unbeliever heading to hell the next day? 4) Is one who is once saved always saved? These are just a few of the questions that help us understand what the doctrine really is.

For a working definition of this doctrine, we suggest: **The doctrine of eternal security is the belief that once a person has been the recipient of the saving grace of God, he is so kept by the grace and power of God that he cannot ever fall from his saved status or ever lose his salvation.**

Dr. Louis Berkhof gave a good comment on this doctrine when he wrote: "... the doctrine is not merely ... that the elect will certainly be saved in the end ... but very specifically that they who have once been regenerated and effectually called by God to a state of grace, can never completely fall from that state and thus fail to attain to eternal salvation, though they may sometimes be overcome by evil and fall in sin" (Berkhof, p. 546). Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer said that this doctrine "contends that no individual once the recipient of the saving grace of God will ever fall totally and finally from that estate, but that he shall be "kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation" (I Peter 1:5) (Vol. 3, p. 267).

To state the doctrine in simple terms - **eternal security is the belief that once a person is saved by God's grace, he is forever and always saved by God's grace.**

Those who deny this doctrine usually make some allusion to the "backsliding" issue. I Howard Marshall, in his book *Kept By the Power of God*, writes: "This present book attempts to make a contribution to the study of the theological problem raised by backsliding" (p. 15). However, as Dr. Paul Enns observes: "This doctrine (eternal security) does not suggest that the believer will never backslide or sin. It means, however, that when a person has genuinely believed in Christ as his Savior from sin, he is forever secured by God by His keeping power" (*Moody Handbook of Theology*, p. 340).

**QUESTION #2** – What are the various titles that have been given to this doctrinal study?

There have been several nametags or titles which have been ascribed to this doctrine:

(Title #1) - "The Doctrine of Eternal Security." Title most recognized for this doctrine and most advertised.

(Title #2) - "The Doctrine of Eternal Security of the Believer." Title emphasizes that eternal security is only a doctrine for a real believer.

## ETERNAL SECURITY (3)

(Title #3) - “The Doctrine of the Perseverance of the Saints.” This emphasizes that once a person is a true believer, he will persevere in faith and is guaranteed eternal life.

(Title #4) - “The Doctrine of the Perseverance of the Lord.” This emphasizes the fact that once God has saved a person, it is God who keeps the person saved. The believer may have moments of unfaithfulness, but what guarantees eternal life is the faithfulness of God.

(Title #5) - “The Doctrine of Eternal Life.”

All of these titles are legitimate expressions of what this doctrine is about. However, the last title, “The Doctrine of Eternal Life,” is the most Biblical, for these words “eternal life” are doctrinal words that actually do appear some forty-three times in the New Testament.

From a pure Biblical standpoint, the question to be answered in this doctrinal study is **whether or not a person has eternal life?** Obviously, if one has eternal life one is eternally secure.

**QUESTION #3** – What is meant by the word “eternal?”

One of the key words associated with this doctrine of “Eternal Security” is the word “eternal.” Both the doctrine of “Eternal Security” and the subject of “Eternal Life” contain this word. Logically speaking, if we are to have some accurate perspective of this subject, we must have some basic understanding of words that surround it. Therefore, the word “eternal” is a very important word pertaining to this doctrine.

The actual word “eternal” is used some sixty-five times in the N.T. as an adjective, a word that defines, qualifies, or limits a noun. We would do well to remember the basic purpose and grammatical objective of an adjective - it is specifically to qualify or limit or modify a noun or substantive (*Habrace College Handbook*, p. 41). Adjectives are used to give a more specific understanding of something. For example, instead of it being a tree, it is a big tree. Instead of it being a house, it is a new house. When we do not want to specify something, we don't use an adjective; but when we do want to specify something, we do use the adjective.

Since the word “eternal” is used by God in His N.T. some sixty-five times, and since it functions as an adjective to say something specific about life, it is imperative that we understand its basic meaning. As an adjective, the word “eternal” is used to describe and qualify at least twenty-one subjects:

- 1) It is used to describe “eternal fire.” **Matthew 18:8; 25:41; Jude 7**
- 2) It is used to describe “eternal punishment.” **Matthew 25:46**
- 3) It is used to describe “eternal sin.” **Mark 3:29**

#### ETERNAL SECURITY (4)

- 4) It is used to describe “eternal dwelling.” **Luke 16:9**
- 5) It is used to describe the “eternal God.” **Romans 16:26**
- 6) It is used to describe an “eternal weight.” **II Corinthians 4:17**
- 7) It is used to describe “eternal things.” **II Corinthians 4:18**
- 8) It is used to describe an “eternal house.” **II Corinthians 5:1**
- 9) It is used to describe “eternal destruction.” **II Thessalonians 1:9**
- 10) It is used to describe “eternal comfort.” **II Thessalonians 2:16**
- 11) It is used to describe “eternal dominion.” **I Timothy 6:16**
- 12) It is used to describe “eternal glory.” **II Timothy 2:10; I Peter 5:10**
- 13) It is used to describe “eternal salvation.” **Hebrews 5:9**
- 14) It is used to describe “eternal judgment.” **Hebrews 6:2**
- 15) It is used to describe “eternal redemption.” **Hebrews 9:12**
- 16) It is used to describe “eternal Spirit.” **Hebrews 9:14**
- 17) It is used to describe “eternal inheritance.” **Hebrews 9:15**
- 18) It is used to describe the “eternal covenant.” **Hebrews 13:20**
- 19) It is used to describe “eternal Kingdom.” **II Peter 1:11**
- 20) It is used to describe “eternal Gospel.” **Revelation 14:6**
- 21) It is used to describe “eternal life.” **Matthew 19:16, 29; 25:46; Mark 10:17, 30; Luke 10:25; 16:9; 18:18, 30; John 3:15, 16, 36; 4:14, 36; 5:24, 39; 6:27, 40, 47, 54, 68; 10:28; 12:25, 50; 17:2, 3; Acts 13:46, 48; Romans 2:7; 5:21; 6:22, 23; Galatians 6:8; I Timothy 1:16; 6:12; Titus 1:2; 3:7; I John 1:2; 2:25; 3:15; 5:11, 13, 20; Jude 21**

Obviously the adjective “eternal” is used the most to describe “life.” The words “eternal life” occur 43 times in the N.T. Of those 43 times, 23 of the uses are by the Apostle John (**Gospel of John** - 17 times; **I John** - 6 times) and in a single chapter this combination is most used in John 6 (5 times).

## ETERNAL SECURITY (5)

This immediately gives us the right to expect that in order to have a true understanding of “eternal life,” we will have to spend some time clearly understanding the writings of John.

A critical and logical question which naturally arises from the adjectival use of “eternal” is, “What does the word actually mean?” Why wasn’t God content with just using nouns alone such as fire, punishment, or life? Why did God think it necessary to use the adjective “eternal” before these nouns?

**The word “eternal” actually means without end** (William F. Arndt & F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, p. 28). Joseph Thayer adds that the word “eternal” refers to something that will never cease, something that will always be (Joseph Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, p. 20). Moulton and Milligan, two highly esteemed grammarians who trace N.T. Greek words in secular usage say, “In general, the word (eternal) depicts that of which the horizon is not in view ...” (Moulton & Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament*, p. 16). Plato, in his literature, used this word “eternal” to describe that which is timeless (G. Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. 1, p. 198). Certainly, we are very close to the proper meaning of “eternal,” according to the greatest linguists and grammarians who have ever studied the Greek language when we understand the meaning to be without end !

If we accept the fact that the Scriptures are inspired by God to the very word (**II Timothy 3:16** “verbal inspiration”), we must conclude that God chooses to use the word “eternal” because He wants to communicate a non-temporal, non-ending time element in whatever noun He chooses to place this adjective with. There is clearly one text that verifies this conclusion - **II Corinthians 4:18**. From this verse we may observe that “eternal” is contrasted with “temporal”; something without an end is contrasted with something that has an end.

Based on these observations, we may legitimately and honestly conclude that **when God refers to something as being “eternal,” He is referring to something that will not end; something that will always be.** When applied to “life,” “eternal life” must be a life that will always be; a life that will never cease to be.

When one takes a salvation text which promises “eternal life” (**i.e. John 3:15, 16**), the statement is “whoever believes in Jesus Christ will have eternal life.” Since God is specific to qualify the kind of life with the word “eternal,” the statement means, “whoever believes in Jesus Christ will have a life that will never end, a life that will always be, and a life that will never cease.” The addition of the adjective “eternal” negates the possibility of the life being temporal. Once one believes on Jesus Christ, one has “eternal” life. This particular word is used to nullify any temporal association. If the life is temporal, it is not eternal; and if it is eternal, it cannot be temporal. Therefore, if a person believes on Jesus Christ, there is no possibility of a temporal life based upon one’s faithfulness or one’s backsliding. Based solely upon the Word of God, one who believes has **eternal life. If eternal life can be lost in time, it is temporal; and since God stresses it is eternal, it cannot be lost in time.** Any position contrary to this is not accurate and true to the actual written Words.