

**WORD OF CHRIST INTERNATIONAL CHURCH
POSITION PAPER**

Topic: Eternal Security

INTRODUCTORY STATEMENT

We must agree that Scripture is our final authority in settling questions of faith and practice. But when born-again, Spirit-filled Christians, following proper biblical principles, come to reasonable but differing interpretations; we do well not to become dogmatic in support of one position. We affirm the inerrancy and authority of Scripture and we desire to know for certain what God expects of us. When we come to a sure understanding of His divine Word, we are committed to declaring and obeying those clear instructions.

In the following position paper we address one of many topics that have raised a fair degree of discussion, and, at times, arguments among the brethren. It is not our intention to fuel these arguments but rather to state our position based on our earnest understanding of the Scriptures. With this said, we also exercise caution in not stirring unnecessary strife or division among the brethren, and have made every reasonable effort to base our positions on Scripture, not personal opinion or conjecture. We respect and love our brothers and sisters who hold alternative interpretations on issues that are not critical to our salvation or standing before God.

ETERNAL SECURITY

In view of the Biblical teaching that the security of the believer depends on a living relationship with Christ (John 15:6), in view of the Bible's call to a life of holiness (1 Peter 1:16; Hebrews 12:14); in view of the clear teaching that a man may have his part taken out of the Book of Life (Revelation 22:19); and in view of the fact that one who believes for a while can fall away (Luke 8:13); we do not believe in the unconditional security position which holds that it is impossible for a person once saved to be lost.

In order to explain our position, three points need to be emphasized:

1. Salvation is available for every man (2 Peter 3:9; John 3:16; Romans 10:11-13).
2. Salvation is received and kept by faith (Ephesians 2:8; Philippians 3:9; Hebrews 10:38; 1 Peter 1:5; Romans 3:28; Galatians 2:20, 21).
3. The believer's salvation is forfeited by rejecting Christ (John 17:12; Hebrews 10:38; 1 Timothy 4:1; 5:12, 15; 1 John 5:16; 2 Peter 2:20; Hebrews 10:26, 27; 6:4-6).

SALVATION FOR ALL

Two questions may be asked: "Are some predestined to be saved and others to be lost?" and, "Who are the elect?" The answers are clear when it is recognized that the message of the gospel is one of "whosoever will." No one reading the New Testament can miss the impact of this great truth.

However, in Romans 9-11 there are some statements that seem to imply that man's free will is excluded in the matter of the believer's salvation and that God in His choice of the elect exercises His divine sovereignty entirely apart from man's volition. For example:

"Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated.... I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy.... Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth" (Romans 9:11, 13, 15, 16, 18).

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When this passage is considered in the light of all that God's Word teaches concerning election, however, it is evident that man's will is involved in his election. Jacob was chosen before having done good or evil, but God's choice was on the basis of what He foreknew Jacob would do.

This truth is brought out in Peter's letter to "the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia." These believers were recognized to be "elect according to the foreknowledge of God" (1 Peter 1:1, 2).

This same truth is stated in Romans 8:29. Paul wrote, "For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son."

God determined beforehand the conditions on which He would show mercy. And on the basis of His foreknowledge believers are chosen in Christ (Ephesians 1:4). Thus God in His sovereignty has provided the plan of salvation whereby all can be saved. In this plan man's will is taken into consideration. Salvation is available to "whosoever will."

SALVATION KEPT BY FAITH

The Bible clearly states that we are saved by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8) and that the just shall live by faith (Hebrews 10:38; Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11; Habakkuk 2:4). As the believer's salvation is received, not by an act of righteousness but by an act of faith, so the believer's salvation is maintained, not by acts of righteousness but by a life of faith!

Being a Christian then is not a matter of works; it is a matter of faith. This must be emphasized. In no case is the sinner accepted by God on the basis of any good that he has done. He is saved totally and solely by grace through faith. By faith he accepts the fact that Christ died in his stead. By faith he throws himself upon the mercy of God and accepts Christ as his Savior. By faith he sees himself clothed with the righteousness of Christ--a standing imputed to him through no merit of his own (Philippians 3:9). He knows that he is accepted through faith, and this knowledge gives him peace and joy.

The believer's state must not be confused with his standing, however. He stands secure because of faith. His standing is the result of God's grace which he has accepted by faith. He stands justified, clothed with the righteousness of Christ!

The believer's state, or the working out of the righteousness of Christ in the believer, is another matter. It involves spiritual growth, a progressive sanctification by obedient cooperation with the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:5-7; Romans 6:12, 13; 8:13; Colossians 3:1-5). During this maturing process the believer must learn by his mistakes as well as by his victories. Nevertheless, his security is never in doubt as long as his faith in Christ is steadfast, for he is kept by faith.

His spiritual growth varies in excellence and degree according to the yieldedness and attention he affords to the Spirit who is at work within him. Yet all the while as the perfecting processes go on, he is credited with the perfection through the imputed righteousness of Christ by faith. Through the process of "becoming conformed" he is secure; his salvation is sure. "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1).

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The believer's security, then, is solely through faith, both in the receiving of salvation and in the keeping of salvation. This security is made possible through the mercy of God in imputing the righteousness of His own Son to the fallible and faulty believer as long as he maintains a living faith in Christ. "For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him" (2 Corinthians 5:21).

SALVATION CAN BE FORFEITED BY REJECTING CHRIST

God does not let anyone go easily. (See Romans 10:21 where Paul was speaking of Israel, but the principle applies.) But a believer can be lost if he disregards the continuing checks of the Holy Spirit and reaches the point where he rejects Jesus as his Savior.

It is possible to believe for a while and in time of temptation to fall away (Luke 8:13). It is possible for the weak brother to perish for whom Christ died (1 Corinthians 8:11). It is possible for a name to be written in the Book of Life and then removed from the Book (Revelation 22:19).

It is not always possible to determine whether a person has already turned his back on Jesus as his Savior. Therefore it is well to leave judgment of these matters in the hands of the omniscient God. Of this we can be certain, however; if God does not give up in His efforts to bring the prodigal back, neither should the church of Jesus Christ. Too often people write off an individual when God has not written him off at all.

CONCLUSION

The Bible does recognize the possibility of forfeiting salvation, but it never ceases to offer hope for anyone who wants to respond to the entreaty of the Holy Spirit. Jesus' invitation is without qualification. He speaks to all when He says, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). Again the Bible speaks to all when it says, "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Romans 10:13).

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