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**AN ARGUMENT
FOR ETERNAL
SECURITY**

Leroy Williams

Dip Th; BA

Two of the most debated views in Christendom concerning Salvation are John Calvin's *Perseverance of the Saints* (Eternal Security) and Jacobus Arminius' *Fall from Grace* (Saved & Lost). John Calvin (1509 – 1564) was one of the leading reformers; he developed the 5 point teaching known as Calvinism TULIP Theology. Jacobus Arminius (1560 – 1609) countered Calvin's arguments and presented 5 opposing views that gave rise to Arminianism.

Perseverance of the Saints is the last point in Calvin's TULIP Theology. This (eternal security) is the subject with which we are contending. Calvinism says once a person is truly saved, that salvation cannot be lost. On the other hand Arminians say it is possible to fall from Grace (lose your salvation). Both groups have salient passages of scripture to support their viewpoint. The key difference however between the two schools of thought is how they understand the act of salvation and also on whom the emphasis is placed.

Calvinists place the emphasis of eternal security on God's Sovereignty. They believe that God has to produce in us the decisive desire for Christ. The Apostle emphasizes this sovereign choice in *Romans 9:6 – 29*. He says in verse 6, "It does not, therefore, depend on human desire or effort, but on God's mercy." This act of Grace

moves a person from a condition of spiritual unbelief to a condition of heartfelt belief or faith in Christ; and from God's perspective it is lasting faith. There are several other passages in the New Testament lend support to this argument (we will look at some of these verses later).

On the other hand Arminians place the emphasis on man's responsibility. They believe man must produce in himself the decisive desire for Christ. God offers salvation to everyone; it is everyone's responsibility to choose that offer of salvation. That is the starting point of salvation they say. So, the big difference then is whether God produces the desire for Himself in man or whether man creates that desire in himself for God.

It is important to note that everything begins with God and ends with God. Before the beginning, ie before anything existed, God thought of creation then brought it into being (read John 17:5). Then He made man (Gen 1:26, 27), sinless, to have continual fellowship with Him. God placed Adam in the Garden of Eden to take care of it but commanded him not to eat of the tree in the middle of the garden or he would die (Gen. 2:16 – 17). Theologians say the moment Adam disobeyed and eat the fruit two (2) aspects of death took place. Firstly, man died spiritually, that is, he lost fellowship with God (*“Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned”* (Rom. 5:12). Secondly, the process of physical death began (man's body was now corrupted) the very moment man sinned (Gen. 3:19) and he would eventually die physically one day.

So everyone born after Adam is born spiritually dead (out of fellowship with God) and condemned to eternal death (Ps. 51:5; Rom. 6:23). Only God can change such a person's condition, so He made a plan to bring man back into fellowship (be made alive again) with Himself. This is what the bible calls an act of Grace. A careful reading of Ephesians Chapter 2:1 - 9 shows what God did and that He did it to last forever. He *“made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions”* (v. 5). *Then comes the most central verse in all of Ephesians concerning salvation; “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of*

God” (Eph. 2:8). Not only does this verse relate to salvation, it relates also to eternal security (*it is the gift of God*). It is important to note that God would never take back this “gift of Grace” He has given to us.

The Bible says, “The gifts and calling of God are without repentance” (Romans 11:29). This means He will not take back His gift of salvation. A number of Bible Commentators comment on this verse of Scripture, and in particular on the word “without repentance”. The following are some of the comments:

***Ellicott:* Not to be revoked or withdrawn, not even to be regretted**

***Gill:* “ without repentance; that is, they are immutable and unalterable; God never revokes them, or calls them in again, or takes them away from the persons to whom he has made such a previous donation”**

***Meyer:* “*Unrepented*, and so subject to no recall, *are the displays of grace and* (especially) *the calling of God.*”**

***Vincent:* Not subject to recall.**

All these commentators seem to support the point that salvation is a perfect work of God, not man, never to be altered. Someone cites a Quote from R.C. Sproul, “writing to the Philippians, Paul says, ‘*He who has begun a good work in you will perfect it to the end*’ (Phil. 1:6). Therein is the promise of God that what He starts in our souls, He intends to finish. So the old axiom in Reformed theology about the perseverance of the saints is this: If you have it—that is, if you have genuine faith and are in a state of saving grace—you will never lose it. If you lose it, you never had it.”

Concerning saved and lost, some of those who hold to the teaching of Arminians say that although God will not take back his salvation, one can voluntarily fall from grace. They say if you backslide and do not return to the Lord you will lose your salvation and end up in hell. Those who hold to Eternal Security use as a key passage of scripture Jesus’ words, “*My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow*

me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. I and the Father are one" (John 10:27 – 30). It stands to reason that if no one can pluck us out of the Father's hands, then we cannot jump out either. Other passages that support Eternal Security are John 3:16 (think of what the word *eternal life* connotes); John 6:38 – 39, 65; 11:25 – 26.

Some theologians use the parable of the Loving Father (*The lost/prodigal son*) in Luke 15:11 – 32 to show the spiritual relationship between God and the Christian. Although the son in the story went off track he still remained SON of the father. The question is, If the son had died before he returned to the father, would he still be the son of the father? Those who hold to eternal security answer this question in the affirmative. The difference here is *relationship* as against *fellowship*. One can be a son (related to the father) but yet out of fellowship with the father. So is it with the Christian who is born of God, irrespective of the condition, that person is still a child and God will never condemn His children. Nevertheless, unconfessed sin can keep the Christian out of fellowship with God.

Fellowship with God is an important feature in a Christian's relationship with Christ. Look at John's argument in chapter one of his 1st Epistle to Christians. He says, "***God is light ... (and) ... if we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth"*** (vv. 5 & 6). He further says, "***If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us"*** (v.8). We can conclude then, that sin keeps us out of fellowship with God. So the key to remain in fellowship with God is to confess our sins. "***If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness"*** (v.9). So the point is this: To be related to God and continue in fellowship with Him is to acknowledge that we are not without sin, appropriate the blood of Jesus (confess sins) and thus walk in the light (fellowship with God). "***But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin"*** (v.7).

Regarding the dynamics of fellowship and relationship I wish to use a two-sphere imagery to illustrate the argument of eternal security. Imagine there are two spheres. Sphere one is called “the age”, whose god is the Devil. Only unbelievers are in this sphere. The bible says, *“The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God”* (2 Cor.4:4). Sphere two is called the Kingdom of Light (Col.1:12) and heavenly realms (Eph.1:3, 20; 2:6). The God of this sphere is Christ Jesus, and only believers reside here. Scripture says, *“For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness (sphere 1) and brought us into the kingdom (sphere 2) of the Son he loves”* (Col. 1:13).

So here we have two separate spheres, those who have been transferred by the Spirit to sphere two cannot go back over to sphere one. Every person in sphere two is bound for heaven because the Spirit has brought them into a relationship with God. We read in Ephesians, *“And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus”* (Eph.2:6). However, not everyone is walking in fellowship with God, although bound for heaven. Seated in Christ Jesus speaks of being in a relationship with Christ and having God as our Father. Nevertheless, we can be living away from God – out of fellowship with him. Christians living in disobedience to God can attract discipline, although not condemnation (in hell). The Apostle Paul bears out this aspect of Christian discipline in his letter to the Corinthians.

In 1Corinthians 11 Paul was addressing the communion service (vv. 23 – 34) and issued a warning. You would recall that the Corinthian church seemed unashamed about their sinful behavior (living out of fellowship with God). They failed to examine themselves, so Paul said, *“That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep”* (1Cor. 11:30). The “fallen asleep” is actually physical death. Paul says they should examine themselves and confess their sins or else be judged. *“But if we were more discerning with regard to ourselves, we would not come under such judgment. Nevertheless, when we are judged in this way by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be finally condemned with*

the world (vv. 31 – 32). Sickness and death can be a form of judgment/discipline for the sinning believer (but they will not be condemned).

John's letter to the church at Laodicea in Revelation 3:14 – 22 also highlights the importance of fellowship with God. One of the central verses (v.3:20) in the passage is used by evangelists to invite sinners to Christ. However that interpretation does not seem consistent with the passage. It seem clear that the passage is addressing the church (Christians). The picture is Christ standing at the door of the church (believers), desiring that we would open the door so He can come in again and have fellowship with us: "***Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me***" (Rev.3:20 KJV). One of the most controversial questions regarding the doctrine of eternal security is the question of someone who does not come back into fellowship with God making it to heaven?

This question is best answered by the Apostle Paul's argument about the ***Judgment for Christians*** at the Judgment Seat of Christ (the Bema). Paul says, "***For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad***" (2 Cor 5:10). Good and bad works are in view here. 1Cor. 3:10 – 15 elaborate on the experience at the judgment; this is where all works will be tested. The works are represented by "***...gold, silver, costly stones; wood, hay or straw***" (v.12). They will be tested by fire. It must be noted that the first set of works (gold, silver, costly stones) are not generally burnt up by fire. However, the second set of works (wood, hay, straw) can be burnt up. "***If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward. If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved—even though only as one escaping through the flames***" (vv.14 &15). Specific mention is made of the man living in sexual immorality and not repenting. Read 1Corinthians 5:1 – 5. Paul says to, "***hand this man over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved on the day of the Lord***" (v.5).

Bible Scholars say the builder whose work represents gold, silver and costly stones is the Christian who remains faithful to the Lord. His work survives and he receives a reward. On the other hand the builder whose work represents wood, hay and straw is the Christian who once ran well but fell out of fellowship with God. His work is burnt up and he loses his reward, *“but yet will be saved ... only as one escaping through the flames”* (v.15). Of course the one escaping the flames represents the one who is truly born again, the one whom the Holy Spirit confirms/testifies with his spirit that he is a son of God (*Rom.8:16*). The Holy Spirit is the central Witness confirming a person’s genuine relationship to the Father. *“For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, “Abba, Father.” The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children* (*Rom.8:14 – 16*).

Notwithstanding the convincing arguments for and against eternal security from several theologians who have defended their views with careful exegetical studies, the contending views will, I believe, outlast this age. However, in my opinion it is good to hold to one of these views without claim that the other is in error. Hebrews 6:4 – 6 is one of those central passages heavily debated on the subject. For what it’s worth I will present a footnote on the passage from Dr. Charles C. Ryrie. *“It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age and who have fallen away, to be brought back to repentance. To their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace”* (*Heb. 6:4 – 6*).¹

CONCLUSION:

¹ On this passage, see the Ryrie Study Bible.

One of the most important arguments communicated in the foregoing is the correlation between relationship and fellowship. Relationship with God is formed only once and cannot be broken or come to an end. On the other hand fellowship can be broken. A person can go off track or off the path and then return to fellowship with God a number of times within that person's Christian journey. From the perspective of relationship, two salient points have been made. One is about Jesus' words of assurance, "*My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand*" (John 10:27-28). The other is his parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15:11-32. God produces in the unbeliever the decisive desire for Christ, and brings that person into a relationship Himself. This act of sovereign Grace is purely on God's part.

After discussing God's sovereign choice of both Jews and Gentiles in Romans 9 to 11, The Apostle Paul concluded: "*Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!*

How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor? Who has ever given to God, that God should repay them? For from him and through him and for him are all things.

To him be the glory forever! Amen. (Ro.11:33 – 36).

Finally, I would presume that those who hold to the teaching of Saved and Lost ought to be unsure if they will make it to heaven seeing one cannot guarantee that one will NOT be tempted by the world, the flesh or the devil and fall away. As 1Corinthians 10:12 states, "*So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!*" This thought must create a measure of fear and uncertainty. On the other hand my encouragement to those who hold to the other view, is not to see the doctrine of Eternal Security as a free pass to gain heaven, although heaven is already secured for the believer (if he is truly born again), but rather remain faithful so they will receive a reward (a prize, a crown) and not have their works burnt up and lose the reward (1Cor. 9:24 – 27.