



THE TEACHING ABOUT

# SALVATION

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church

**GROUNDED 1**

Talks 21-25 of Michael Eaton's Whole Counsel of God series

## OVERVIEW OF SECTION:

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SALVATION IN THE PERSON OF JESUS/BY GRACE/BY FAITH

From 8,5 minutes into Talk 21

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- Laying hold of salvation: salvation is all about Christ
- Laying hold of salvation: salvation is by grace
- Laying hold of salvation: salvation is by faith

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NEW BIRTH/JUSTIFICATION/ADOPTION/DIFFERENT BAPTISMS

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## THE TEACHING ABOUT SALVATION, PART 1

SALVATION IN THE PERSON OF JESUS/BY GRACE/BY FAITH TALK 21 (FROM 8,5 MINUTES INTO TALK)

Laying hold of initial salvation: introduction

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We tend to overcomplicate this. For example, theologians such as Theodore Beza and Williams Perkins get way too complicated in their teaching about the 'order of salvation'.

Though the Bible does give much multi-faceted information about coming to salvation, we should not throw all that detail at people all in one go. We should tell people to 'believe in Jesus' much like Paul said to the Philippian jailer:

Acts 16:31

'Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved'

We need to teach in a pastoral manner. We mustn't teach people what won't yet be helpful to them. That is why nowhere in an evangelistic message in the book of Acts is there mention of predestination. The one time predestination is mentioned it is mentioned by way of reflection on what had already happened, and not as part of the sermon itself.

Acts 13:48

When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honoured the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed.

Sadly, some people think they can't be saved, even though they'd like to, because they fear that they aren't predestined. The doctrine of predestination is a complex doctrine that a person should get round to after making sure they get the more basic doctrines in place.

## WHAT ARE THE THREE BIG THINGS THAT THE BIBLE TEACHES ABOUT LAYING HOLD OF SALVATION?

- 1) Salvation is all to do with Christ.
- 2) Salvation is by faith.
- 3) Salvation is by grace.

Notice that the doctrines of justification and regeneration are not even included in the most basic teaching on laying hold of salvation. In fact, the doctrine of justification only became clear in the early church once non-Jews started to get saved after about AD 44. Similarly, in the history of the church, great preachers often see one part of the gospel before they see another part. For example, Martin Lloyd Jones preached about finding God and newness of life years before he preached on atonement. And George Whitefield, in the beginning, incessantly spoke on the new birth before he discovered the cross.

## LAYING HOLD OF SALVATION: SALVATION IS ALL TO DO WITH CHRIST

Salvation is being given a person, Jesus. In Christ is salvation. Just trust in Jesus and you will be saved. Though you hardly know the gospel, yet you can be saved if you know Jesus. For example, Roman Catholicism is full of heresy, and yet many Roman Catholics know Jesus, even though they're muddled up about the gospel. They're saved, but the heresy stunts their spiritual growth. Salvation is Jesus. Jesus is salvation.

John 1:16

Out of his (Christ's) fullness, we have all received grace upon grace.

When we have received Christ, we have received a full package that we spend our lives unpacking, one blessing after another. Paul says the same thing.

Colossians 2:9-10

For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and in Christ you have been brought to fullness.

Once we have received Christ, then we need to learn to live on him.

Colossians 2:6-7

So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.

Paul says something similar elsewhere.

1 Corinthians 1:30-31

It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. Therefore, as it is written: “Let those who boast boast in the Lord.”

God saves us by giving us Jesus, and in Jesus he gives us wisdom, sanctification, righteousness, and final redemption. We live on Christ. We eat him and drink him, to use an analogy in his own teaching.

John 6:53

Jesus said to them, “Very truly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you

## LAYING HOLD OF SALVATION: SALVATION IS BY GRACE

Salvation is free. We do nothing but believe in God.

Romans 4:5

However, to anyone who does nothing but trusts God who justifies the ungodly, their faith is credited as righteousness.

Faith is putting out an empty hand and letting God give us something. Luther spoke of ‘passive faith’ referring to initial salvation. Even our faith is the gift of God.

Ephesians 2:8-9

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast.

We contribute nothing to our salvation. Even our capacity to believe is given by God. Think about Jacob and Esau. Though Esau was nicer, yet God chose Jacob. By sovereign grace, God called an ungodly man like Jacob.

John 6:44

No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.

Being saved says nothing good about us. By God's grace he draws us.

Think of William Wilberforce and William Pitt, two great friends. Pitt was the more able of the two. He was Prime Minister. One day they went to hear a preacher who was preaching with clarity and power. Wilberforce asked Pitt what he thought. Pitt said, 'I don't know what that man was talking about'. God wasn't drawing him. Being Prime Minister doesn't make you more able to be saved.

Eaton tells the story of a time when a tea lady without an education rejoiced in the message he preached, whereas a man who lectured in university just couldn't understand the same message.

Salvation is about God's sheer grace. All the glory goes to God. None of the glory goes to us. Think of the story of the rebellious son who returns home. Though he has a speech prepared about earning his way back, he never gets to give it. To his surprise, he is received by sheer grace:

Luke 15:17-24

<sup>17</sup> "When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! <sup>18</sup> I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. <sup>19</sup> I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.' <sup>20</sup> So he got up and went to his father. "But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. <sup>21</sup> "The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' <sup>22</sup> "But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. <sup>23</sup> Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. <sup>24</sup> For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.'

In the same we are saved by grace!

## LAYING HOLD OF SALVATION: SALVATION IS BY FAITH

Think of Abraham who worshipped the moon, and false gods. But God stepped into his life, and took him somewhere. Abraham simply believed God. And upon believing God, he was 'credited with righteousness' (Genesis 15:6). We get saved in the same way. We do nothing but believe. We are saved by grace and through faith. Faith is simply the channel or conduit along which grace flows to us.

Romans 11:5-6

So too, at the present time there is (amongst the genetic Jews) a remnant chosen by grace. And if by grace, then it cannot be based on works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace.

In fact, and this is quite controversial, we are saved by faith in Jesus' faith. The following verse is perhaps not the most accurate translation:

Galatians 2:16

So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ believes first, and we put our faith in his faith.

Eaton argues that the correct translation is that we are 'justified by the faith of Christ' or, better yet, 'justified by the faithfulness of Christ'. In other words Christ Same with Galatians 2:20.

Galatians 2:20

The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God

Eaton argues that this verse is better translated, 'I live by the faith of the Son of God' or better yet 'I live by the faithfulness of the Son of God'. How much better to live on Christ's faithfulness (which is strong and unchanging) than to live on my own faith (which is weak and changing). This encourages us – when our faith is weak, our little faith is faith in his big faithfulness. Christ has perfect faith and trust in his Father (see Hebrews 2:12-13, which are the words of Jesus). It's all his faithfulness!

In most translations, Romans 3:25 speaks of God as 'the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus'. Eaton says it should rather be translated that God is 'the one who justifies those who hold onto the faith / faithfulness of Jesus'. Translating it this way gives us great assurance! Amazingly, Jesus has lived for us. Jesus has died for us. But wonder of wonders: Jesus has even believed for us!

# THE TEACHING ABOUT SALVATION, PART 2

## BEING CALLED/THE NEW BIRTH/ JUSTIFICATION/ ADOPTION/ DIFFERENT BAPTISMS

### TALK 22

Contents:

- Salvation as calling, drawing and new birth
- Understanding the 'baptisms' of Hebrews 6

### SALVATION AS CALLING, DRAWING AND NEW BIRTH

There are all sorts of terms used to describe what happened when we were saved:

#### **WE WERE 'CALLED'**

1 Corinthians 1:9

God is faithful, who has called you into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Romans 8:30

And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

In the gospels, the word 'called' means to be 'invited' (see Matthew 22:14). But in the epistles it means to be 'summoned', which means 'to be powerfully brought by the Spirit into fellowship with Jesus'.

There is a general call that comes with the gospel to everyone who hears it. But over and above this general call, there is a specific call that comes to someone as they hear the gospel when the Spirit summons them powerfully as they hear the message preached.

#### **WE WERE 'DRAWN'.**

John 6:44

No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them.

We don't realize it's happening at the time, but God draws. We can only call and make Christ our Lord with the aid of the Spirit who draws us to this revelation of Jesus (1 Corinthians 12:3).

#### **WE WERE 'BORN AGAIN'**

The Bible speaks of us being quickened to new life. It speaks of us being made new creations

[2 Corinthians 5:17]. It speaks of us being resurrected spiritually from the dead (Romans 6:4).

The imagery of being born again is used in different ways in the Bible: 1) Sometimes it's put in terms of 'quickenings'. 2) Sometimes it is picturing conception or birth.

Ephesians 2:4-5

But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy,<sup>5</sup> made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. <sup>6</sup> And God raised us up with Christ.

Paul distinguishes between how God made us alive (i.e. 'how he quickened us') and how he raised us. Much like Lazarus' two step resurrection from the dead (step one, being quickened back to life, and step two, getting up and walking around), so we are quickened to life, and then enabled to walk in that new life.

On the topic of new birth, what comes first: faith in Jesus or experiencing the new birth? The answer is that the New Testament puts it both ways around.

In some places it emphasises that new birth precedes and leads to our faith:

John 3:3

Jesus replied, "Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born again.

1 John 5:1

Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Messiah has been born of God.

In other places it emphasises that faith precedes and leads to our experience of new life.

John 3:16

whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life

John, when speaking of the new birth, seems to refer to the work of conception or the regenerating work of the Spirit (see John 3:3-5). But Peter and James, when they speak of 'new birth', seem to refer to the regenerating work of the Word / the gospel.

1 Peter 1:23

For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.



James 1:18

He chose to give us birth through the word of truth

We are not saved by a decision, but by the regenerating work of the Spirit and the gospel. We can agree with a gospel without being saved. We are not saved by assenting to a doctrine, or agree with the teaching of a church, or being baptized, or signing a decision card.

We must be careful not to just preach justification by faith and not the new birth. That is what happened to early Lutheranism. We must preach the experiential side of salvation too – the new birth. George Whitefield read a book 'The life of God is the soul of man' and said of it, 'I never knew what true religion was until I read that book.' Whitefield wanted to know that he was born again. In 1735 he experienced the Spirit and he then started to preach with power, and revival broke out. It was only a few years later that he discovered that salvation is not just an experience, but a change of status in heaven (i.e. justification).

John 5:39-40

Jesus said, 'You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you possess eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life.'

In this verse above we see that the Pharisees had lots of Bible study but not the life of God. We must be careful not to assume our kids are saved just because they signed a decision-card. They must be born again.

The new birth takes place in us. Justification takes place in the courts of heaven. Justification is a change of status with God. New birth is the change of our state. We need to affirm both our justification and new birth. If we emphasise justification over new birth we could end up with little experience of 'life'. And if we emphasise new birth without justification we will lack consistent assurance, since our experience tends to go up and down.

Wonderfully, John teaches that the new birth makes us a child of God.

John 1:12-13

Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

As God's children we have great privileges. We have access to God. We are provided for and protected. We are disciplined in love (in the same way a loving parent disciplines their child - see Hebrews 12:5-11).

Above all, as children of God, we are given the Spirit who enables us to feel like God's child and to draw close to God as our Father.

Galatians 4:6

Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father."

Last note on this theme: Don't try work out an order of salvation. There is a basic order though: 1) Put faith in Jesus. 2) Then you're justified, and come to assurance of salvation. 3) Then start living the Christian life. Until you're saved, and know you're saved, don't bother trying to live the Christian life, though.

## F. UNDERSTANDING THE 'BAPTISMS' OF HEBREWS 6

Hebrews 6:1-2

<sup>1</sup> Therefore let us move beyond (the discussion about) the elementary teachings about Christ and go on, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God, <sup>2</sup> instruction about baptisms, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment.

What does he mean there by 'baptisms'? First we note that he was speaking to Jews who had a history of many 'cleansing rituals' or 'washings'. Then we note that he was addressing three pairs:

- 1) repentance and faith (the beginning of the Christian life),
- 2) baptisms and laying on of hands (immediately following the beginning of the Christian life), and
- 3) the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgement (the end of the Christian life).

We then note that there are many different kinds of baptism mentioned in the New Testament:

- 1) baptism into Christ, which simply means being 'placed' in Christ at the time of our salvation,
- 2) baptism with water,
- 3) baptism with the Holy Spirit (as prophesied by John the Baptist in Mark 1:8), and
- 4) the Jewish practice of 'cleansing rituals and washings'.

Let us focus on the first three, because they apply to us as Christians:

## WE ARE BAPTIZED INTO CHRIST AT THE MOMENT OF SALVATION.

Romans 6:3

... all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus

This is what happens at the moment of our salvation when the Spirit places us in Christ. We are joined onto Christ. We don't feel this happen. We are simply told this is true. Now that we are in Christ, we are also in the body of Christ (see 1 Corinthians 12:13). We simply affirm this to be true.

Many times the New Testament mentions baptism and we assume it to mean water-baptism, but in fact it refers to salvation, when we are put into Christ.

Ephesians 4:4-6

<sup>4</sup> There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; <sup>5</sup> one Lord, one faith, one baptism; <sup>6</sup> one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

This 'one baptism' refers to salvation. This makes us one. Water baptism tends to divide us, but salvation makes us one. We are placed by the Spirit into Christ, and into his body. That makes us one.

Galatians 3:26-27

<sup>26</sup> So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, <sup>27</sup> for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.

Baptism here refers to salvation not to water baptism. The same is true of Colossians 2:12.

1 Corinthians 12:13

13 For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body

So, the first kind of baptism is the work of the Spirit 'putting' us into Christ.

## WE NEED TO GET BAPTIZED IN WATER ONCE WE'RE SAVED

The topic of water baptism is mainly found in the book of Acts. We need to find out which verses speak of water baptism. The early church seemed to read water baptism into far too many verses. They were preoccupied with it. For example, Tertullian at the end of the second century, said 'Christians are like little fishes.

They are born in water.' They treated the water as some kind of magic. Salvation was not by faith, but by water. This teaching got into the Catholic church. So any reference to water was assumed to be about baptism (see the following verses which don't speak about baptism but people assumed they did: John 3:5, Ephesians 5:26, Hebrews 10:22).

But as the church went on, Christian teachers have realized this was poor interpretation. There are not that many references to water baptism in the Bible. In other words, water baptism is not as big a topic in the Bible as most people think.

So what verses do refer to water baptism? Answer: all those in the book of Acts. What is baptism for?  
1) It makes our faith public, and 2) It is a prayer for the experience of new life.

### 1) Baptism simply makes our faith public.

Faith in Christ is something unseen, so the New Testament gives us something to visibly express that faith. Baptism in the book of Acts is the immediate expression of faith. When we come to faith, even if at midnight, we should get baptized.

Acts 8:36-38

<sup>36-37</sup> As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the (newly saved) eunuch said, "Look, here is water. What can stand in the way of my being baptized?" <sup>38</sup> And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him.

### 2) Water baptism is a prayer for the experience of new life.

Let us start with the Pentecost water baptisms, which needs some commentary ...

Acts 2:37-38

<sup>37</sup> When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" <sup>38</sup> Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Peter had just proclaimed the gospel, and it appears people believed the gospel even while he spoke. Then, as a sign of their faith in Christ, they asked what they needed to do next. So Peter told them to repent (which means 'change your life'), and be baptized in water. When they did this, Peter said they would experience a) forgiveness and b) the gift of the Spirit.

a) Does Peter's reference to forgiveness refer to their justification in the sight of God? Answer: No. Justification is something that happens in heaven the moment we trust in Christ. It is not an experience. Forgiveness, however, is something we experience. On this point, remembering that forgiveness is not the same as justification (i.e. salvation) helps us to make sense of many verses in the Bible. For example, when Jesus says 'if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins' (Matthew 6:15) he is not saying that salvation depends on our ability to forgive others. Rather he is saying that our experience of God's forgiveness as a Christian is limited by our willingness to give other people an experience of our forgiveness.

b) Does Peter's reference to the gift of the Spirit refer to regeneration? Answer: No, it refers to their experience of the infilling of the Spirit. Peter and his friends had just received the gift of the Spirit's infilling (Acts 2:1-4) and he promised that they too would experience the Spirit.

Elsewhere Peter teaches on water baptism, and he does it in a way that seems like he suggests that water baptism can save us ...

1 Peter 3:21

baptism ... now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body (better translated ‘not the cleansing of the sinful nature’) but the pledge of (better translated ‘appeal for’) a clear conscience toward God.

Eaton explains that the phrase ‘the removal of dirt from the body’ is not the right translation of the Greek, which rather speaks of a ‘cleansing of the flesh / sinful nature’. ‘Cleansing of the flesh’ is a reference to the regenerating, cleansing work of God that happens at the time of salvation. In other words, according to Eaton, Peter is in effect saying, ‘baptism gives you an experience of salvation – I don’t mean that it has the power to save you (i.e. cleanse you of the sinful nature), but it is an opportunity to pray for the experience of a clean conscience before God.’ In other words, Peter is saying here more or less the same thing that he said in Acts 2:37-38, as referred to above.

Acts 2:37-38 and 1 Peter 3:21 teach us that baptism is a kind of prayer for the experience of forgiveness and the experience of the Spirit’s infilling. Said another way, it is a prayer for the experience of new life. This is why many, but not all, people experience the Spirit when they are baptized in water. This is what happened to Jesus.

Luke 3:21-22

<sup>21</sup> When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too. And as he was praying, heaven was opened <sup>22</sup> and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: “You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.

Notice that Jesus was ‘praying’ as he was baptized. Probably, he was praying for an experience of the Spirit, which is what happened. It happened to Paul too.

Acts 22:16

Ananias said to Paul, ‘And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name.’

Paul had already been saved for two days. But then he gets baptized. And as he does so, he calls on Jesus for an experience of forgiveness, the washing away of sins. He has been justified two days before, but now he asks for the experience of the cleansing of his conscience.

## WE NEED TO ASK GOD TO BAPTIZE US WITH THE SPIRIT

There is such a thing as an outpouring of the Spirit. All Christians have been born of the Spirit, and therefore have the Spirit. But this does not mean they have experienced the outpouring, or infilling, or baptism of the Spirit.

John 20:21-22

<sup>21</sup> Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." <sup>22</sup> And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit.

Notice that the resurrected Jesus regenerates the disciples with the Holy Spirit. The disciples here already are commissioned for ministry. But Jesus promised something more.

Acts 1:8

You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you

Then later, on the Day of Pentecost, God poured out a baptism of power on these disciples who were already born of the Spirit, and were already functioning as the church.

Acts 2:1-4

<sup>1</sup> When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. <sup>2</sup> Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. <sup>3</sup> They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. <sup>4</sup> All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

This outpouring of the Spirit is a baptism of power, and a gift of tremendous assurance of one's salvation.

The first time one is filled with the Spirit, the book of Acts seems to refer to this as one's 'baptism with the Spirit'. But we see in the book of Acts that there is the possibility of many subsequent infillings. For example, the same disciples who experienced the Spirit in Acts 2, ask God for, and experience, yet another experience of the Spirit's power.

Acts 4:31

After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.

# REPENTANCE/SECURITY IN SALVATION - THE TENSES OF SALVATION / SALVATION & REWARD/ THE BIBLE'S TEACHING ABOUT SECURITY

## TALK 23

### G. HOW REPENTANCE FITS IN WITH GETTING SAVED

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- G. How repentance fits in with getting saved
- H. Eternal security: the word 'salvation' can mean different things
- Eternal security: loss of reward but not loss of salvation
- J. Eternal security: once saved, always saved

We often tend to make too much of the doctrine of repentance. For example, the New Testament far more emphasizes faith. Think of the language we use: 'We need to call this nation to repentance'. Really? Aren't we meant to call the nation to faith rather? A radical emphasis on repentance is at the heart of Islam. Same as the medieval Catholic church. Luther got the surprise of his life when he, while studying the Bible, realized that the church, for 1000 years, had mistranslated 'repentance' as 'doing penance'. Then there were the Puritans who loved the phrase 'repent of all known sin'. They tended to put it before faith as God's first demand on our lives. They became quite legalistic. But think how, in contrast to all these examples, in John's gospel there is not one mention of repentance as a prerequisite of salvation. John only mentions the need for faith.

Which comes first - repentance or faith? Martin Lloyd Jones always claims that repentance comes first. And John Calvin argues the opposite: faith comes first.

Other people argue that they are two sides of the same coin - they argue that repentance is turning from sin, while faith is turning to God. How do we approach the question then? Answer: we need to make sure we use the right words. We need to realize that there are two Greek words used that are both translated as 'repent' in the English language, but mean two different things.

First, there is the word 'metanoia' which is usually translated as 'repent'. It means 'change of mind' and that's all it means. Remarkably, it is always placed before the word 'faith' in the New Testament. So whenever we read 'repent and believe' (e.g. Mark 1:14) it means, 'change your mind and believe'. In this sense, 'metanoia' is the first breath of our faith. To change our viewpoint is part of faith. Some people may say, 'Are you saying that we don't need to turn from sin?' Answer: no, of course we need to turn from sin, but that is not what the word 'metanoia' means.

Second, there is the word 'epistrepha' which means 'turn around'. This refers to a change of life. Interestingly, this is always used after the mention of faith. There is one verse in the Bible where 'metanoia' and 'epistrepha' are found together, and in this verse the word 'metanoia' comes before 'epistrepha'. They clearly mean different things.

Acts 3:19

Repent (metanoia), therefore, and turn to God (epistrepha), so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord ...

Why is it so important that we understand that 'turning around one's life' (i.e. epistrepha) is something that follows faith? Answer: if we suggest that someone needs to turn around their life before they can trust in Christ, we totally obscure the message of salvation. It is like saying, 'clean up your life and then you can get saved.' In reality, salvation is something that happens to us while our lives are still in a mess (see Romans 4:5). Besides, we can't really turn from sin until we're saved. Turning from sin apart from salvation is impossible. Faith in Jesus precedes a changed life.

This has been a historical controversy. For example, if a teacher said that all you need for salvation is to believe, they were often called heretical 'antinomians' (which means those who are against the law). But the truth is that the real heresy was 'preparationism': the belief that you need to turn from all known sin in order to receive salvation.

In summary, the New Testament doctrine of repentance is this: changing our viewpoint (i.e. metanoia) is part of coming to trust in Jesus, and then, once we're saved we are enabled, as a result of that faith, to start changing our behaviour (i.e. epistrepha). Of course, when we call people to trust in Jesus, it is helpful to tell them that this faith will begin to change them. But the change of life flows out of faith, it doesn't precede it.

On this point, it is helpful to pick out another bad use of vocabulary that is rife in the church. Many people teach that in order to lead people to salvation, we need to make them feel guilty by preaching the law, and then, only then, must we preach the gospel to them. But using the language of 'preaching the law' is problematic. What do we mean by 'preaching the law'? Do we mean preaching the law of Moses? Certainly we don't need to preach the law of Moses to help a person find Jesus! After all, Abraham was saved before the law of Moses came. Probably the better language is 'preaching God's righteousness'. If that is what is meant by 'preaching the law', then there is some truth to this. It is logical that part of leading someone to trust in Christ for salvation is to first persuade them that they're sinners in need of salvation. And preaching about God's righteousness is a way of revealing a person's unrighteousness.

## H. ETERNAL SECURITY: THE WORD 'SALVATION' CAN MEAN DIFFERENT THINGS

Notice that when the Bible speaks of salvation, there are three tenses: Past tense: We have been saved. Present tense: We are being saved. Future tense: We shall be saved.



Usually when we use the word salvation, we tend to use it only in the past tense. But the reality is that the Bible uses it in all three tenses, and we must each time discern what tense is being used to figure out the specific meaning in that context.

When we read, 'We have been saved' this includes much of what has been spoken of in the previous talks: we have been justified, born again and adopted for example. When we read, 'We are being saved', this speaks about how God is currently and progressively rescuing us from the power of sin in our lives, so that we are being made more and more in Christ's image. When we read, 'We shall be saved' it does not bring into question our past salvation. It refers to the final phase of our salvation, as well as heavenly reward.

There are two phrases we must be careful of, because their truthfulness depends on what definition of 'salvation' is being used: 1) The phrase 'once saved, always saved'. What do we do with this phrase? Well it depends on which tense we're referring to. If we're referring to past salvation (i.e. justification and regeneration) it is true. If, however, we're referring to our current level of godliness, or our current heavenly reward, it is not true. 2) The phrase 'salvation is not by works'. It is true that justification is not by works. But it is not true that the process of 'being saved' and becoming more like Jesus is without works. Works (effort) is certainly involved in 'being saved' (i.e. becoming more like Jesus). And it's not true that heavenly rewards come without effort. Rather, effort is involved, since, as Christians, our works will get judged. This leads to the topic of reward and the loss of reward ...

## ETERNAL SECURITY: LOSS OF REWARD, BUT NOT LOSS OF SALVATION

We cannot lose our salvation (i.e. justification, heaven etc), but we certainly can lose our reward. There are many verses that speak of this:

1 Corinthians 3:11-15

For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.<sup>12</sup> If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw,<sup>13</sup> their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person's work.<sup>14</sup> If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward.<sup>15</sup> If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved—even though only as one escaping through the flames.

Notice that the foundation of Christ cannot burn. If we're justified and heaven-bound, we won't lose our salvation or the promise of heaven. But the superstructure of our works will be judged by fire. It is possible to go to heaven and yet be 'as one escaping through the flames'. Saved, but with the loss of reward.

Some people might say in response to this, 'All that matters is that I am saved; reward and the loss of reward means nothing to me.' But it is easy to say that now, but we won't say that then. We will 'suffer loss' which must be a terrible experience. If on Judgment Day, God dries all tears, we might

ask, 'What are we weeping about?' Some Christians will weep with regret because of missed opportunity to live all-out for Christ.

Revelations 2:11

He who overcomes will not be hurt at all by the second death.

The second death refers to the final judgment. Though we, as Christians, will not be ultimately destroyed at this judgment, yet there is a possibility that we will still face severe hurt or loss in it. This surely refers to the loss of reward.

Ephesians 5:6

<sup>6</sup>Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things (immorality, greed etc) God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient. Therefore do not be partners with them.

Here Paul is warning Christians of the wrath that is coming on the sin of the world. And he warns them because they too can be hurt by the wrath of God's final judgment. On this point, does the Bible ever threaten Christians with hell? The answer may surprise you: yes, but not a permanent hell, but rather a taste of hell's fire.

#### **There are two extreme positions here:**

- 1) Once saved, always saved, and you can't lose anything, and
- 2) you can lose your salvation.

The truth is somewhere in the middle: once saved, always saved, but not inevitably rewarded. We can't lose what God has given us (i.e. justification, adoption, new birth) but we can lose what God wanted to give us over and above this (i.e. reward or inheritance).

## ETERNAL SECURITY: ONCE SAVED, ALWAYS SAVED

Once we are saved, we are always saved! This is the teaching of the Bible, as well as the implication of the Bibles' teaching. Think, for starters, about the promise of the New Covenant.

Jeremiah 32:40-41

I will make an everlasting covenant with them: I will never stop doing good to them, and I will inspire them to fear me, so that they will never turn away from me.

The new covenant that Christ mediates between God and us is an eternal, unbreakable covenant. He will not turn from us. He will so work in us that we will not turn from him. That sounds like once saved, always saved, doesn't it? Then there is the verse that reveals Christ's ability to give us an indestructible basic faith:

Luke 22:31-32

“Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift all of you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.”

Jesus prays that Peter’s faith will not fail. Though he knew he would sin seriously, he would not lose his underlying faith in Christ. That is what Jesus is praying for us. Will God turn down the prayer of Jesus that we will get to be where he is in glory (John 17:24)? Certainly not. Amazingly, if we’re saved by faith, our underlying faith is indestructible.

Think of Christian children that fall away from God, but though they are far from God, they still believe the gospel! When a person comes to true saving faith, they never cease to believe that Jesus is the Saviour. There are so many stories of people who leave God, but eventually they come back. They tell of how God ‘chased’ them. They realize that, though they moved from God, God never moved from them. On this note, what happens when a Christian commits suicide? Answer: if he truly has put his faith in Jesus, he goes to heaven. Though he loses something (i.e. reward) yet he doesn’t lose his salvation.

John 6:39-40

<sup>39</sup> And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all those he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. <sup>40</sup> For my Father’s will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life (should be translated, ‘shall never be thrown out’), and I will raise them up at the last day.”

In John 9:34 a story is told of a man who was ‘thrown out’ of the synagogue. The same Greek word that is translated ‘thrown out’ in John 9:34 occurs here. Jesus is saying that he will never throw out anyone who looks to the Son and believes in him! Jesus will never throw us out. If we ‘backslide’ it is not that God leaves us. It is we who leave him.

Good parents don’t threaten to withdraw their love and commitment from their child just because the child makes bad decisions. How much more does God, the perfect parent, say the same? There is a poem called ‘the Hound of Heaven’ written by a backslidden drug addict who felt ‘hounded’ by Christ, and he knew that he could, even at the worst times, call on Christ who would be there for him. This is the reason that we mustn’t give up on a person who drifts from Christ. They may wonder a long time, but Christ has the power to draw them back.

John 10:27-29

<sup>27</sup> My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. <sup>28</sup> I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand. <sup>29</sup> My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand. <sup>30</sup> I and the Father are one.”

The Father and the Son together work to hold onto us. Once we put our faith in Jesus, he will never throw us out. Though we may drift from Christ, he will never loosen his grip on us! Once saved, always saved.

## THE TEACHING ABOUT SALVATION, PART 4

### SECURITY IN SALVATION -

### WHAT ABOUT PEOPLE WHO FALL AWAY? / WHAT ABOUT THE WARNINGS OF SCRIPTURE? / PREDESTINATION

#### TALK 24

##### Contents:

- Eternal security: making sense of converts who fall away
- Eternal security: making sense of the warning Scriptures
- Eternal security: the doctrine of predestination

##### Introduction:

There are two reasons that people doubt whether they truly have eternal security of salvation:

- 1) They see people who seem to have been Christians, but who then fall away;
- 2) They read many warning verses in the Bible that seem to be saying that we can lose our salvation, especially in the letter to the Hebrews. Let us deal with these two things that cast real doubt on the belief that once saved, always saved.

### K. ETERNAL SECURITY: MAKING SENSE OF CONVERTS WHO FALL AWAY

The first of two reasons that people doubt whether there is such a thing as eternal security of salvation is that we see many people who seem to have been Christians, but who then fall away. How do we make sense of this?

First, we must not put too much trust in our ability to figure out whether a person has really trusted in Jesus. But second, we must distinguish between two kinds of so-called backsliders: the Judas-type and the Peter-type. Compare Peter and Judas. Both turned their back on Jesus at the time of his arrest. But Peter was a true believer and was eventually restored. While Judas was a true unbeliever.

**There is the Judas-type backslider who claims to have become a Christian and yet really hadn't ever trusted in Christ at all.**

Interestingly, in the 1830s a man called Charles Finney introduced a theology and practice that produced many people of this kind. He was an evangelist with an extreme view on the power of free will. He pressurized people to come forward and 'make a decision'. Still today, many evangelists use manipulation methods to get a person to respond to Christ. Then we need to 'follow up' new converts with pressure. Because we used pressure to get them to 'decide for Christ', we end up having to keep using pressure to keep them. But this approach introduced by Finney caused the church for the first time to experience large numbers of people falling away. (Finney even once said, 'My converts are a disgrace'.) Before Finney, most Christians believed that you could not lose your salvation. Generally, people didn't fall away in large numbers. But after Finney introduced so much pressure to make a decision for Christ, we have experienced large numbers falling away after evangelism efforts. And so people have changed their theology to fit their experience.

The solution to this problem is to affirm that people are not regenerated simply because they responded to pressure to put their hand up, or sign some form, or to give Jesus a try, or to make a decision for Christ. It is wrong to pressurize people, especially our children. Yes, we can expose our kids to opportunities to be saved, but we must not pressurize them. Eaton says that the vast majority of his converts have stuck around because he has refused to pressurize people. It is sad that we can have huge evangelism meetings but not one person gets added to the church in the long term.

The one caution we should heed in evangelism is this: 'Don't attack the will directly. Rather, get at the will through impressing the truth of gospel upon the mind.' If we pressurize people we will simply create short-term so-called converts who in times of testing fall away, because there is no root of real faith (Luke 8:13).

**There is the Peter-type of backslider who is really saved, even though they fall away for a time.**

There is a wonderful story of a man who became a Christian under the ministry of Lloyd Jones. But then he fell away. But Lloyd Jones affirmed that he was really saved, and that in time he'd come back. Having shipwrecked his life because of bad decisions, he was about to commit suicide off the Westminster Bridge. Suddenly Big Ben struck 18h30 and he remembered that Lloyd Jones would be preaching around the corner. He decided to go to church one last time and then commit suicide. As he walked in the back door, he heard Lloyd Jones praying the words, 'Lord, have mercy on the backslider.' He was instantly restored to faith and his broken marriage was restored.

## ETERNAL SECURITY: MAKING SENSE OF THE WARNING SCRIPTURES

There are so many verses in the Bible that seem to be warning that we can lose our salvation, especially with regard to the letter to the Hebrews. But the solution is to look at each and every verse carefully, and ask what is being warned against.

In reality, there is no verse that warns that we might lose justification, or new birth, or eternal life, or being God's child. They don't exist! There is no verse that says that we can lose our salvation.

Think of the Israelites who were redeemed out of Egypt, and across the Red Sea. They sinned persistently in the desert. This caused most of them to not arrive in the Promised Land, but God did not take away their redemption out of Egypt. He didn't take them back to Egypt! They lost the reward and inheritance that God wanted to give them, but they did not lose their salvation. They lost what God wanted to give them, but they didn't lose what they already had, namely their freedom from slavery.

### So, when we look at these warning verses, what is being warned against?

Some warning Scriptures warn against certain people

<sup>15</sup> "Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. <sup>16</sup> By their fruit you will recognize them ...<sup>21</sup> "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only those who do the will of my Father who is in heaven. <sup>22</sup> Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?' <sup>23</sup> Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'

We tend to read verses 21-23 as a warning that many Christians will think they're saved, but they're not. But actually this is not what is being taught. Jesus is not speaking about his disciples, but about the false prophets. After all, Jesus has been speaking about false prophets since verse 15. He speaks of 'them' (v16,21) not 'you'. And notice that he never knew them. They never were saved. So, its not like they lost their salvation.

Some warning Scriptures warn an entire group of people, not an individual

Revelations 2:5

If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place.

This verse addresses an entire church, not a single Christians. God is threatening to close a church down, not remove someone's salvation.

There are also many verses in the Old Testament that speak of a new generation rising up that don't know God. It is not like they lose their salvation; they never were saved. The Scripture is warning about the deterioration of a nation not the loss of an individual's salvation.

Most warning Scriptures warn us of the possible loss of our inheritance / reward

1 Corinthians 9:27

No, I strike a blow to my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.

### Philippians 3:14

I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

In both these verses, Paul is speaking about the potential loss of final reward (which he calls 'the prize') not the loss of salvation. Then there are these two difficult verses:

In both these verses, Paul warns that Christians might not inherit the kingdom of God. But we need to realize that he is not speaking about the loss of salvation in these verses. The key word is 'inherit' which is a reference to reward, to something over and above salvation. The point Paul is making is not that we could lose salvation, but that, because of sin that we won't repent of, we can damage our reward, and that we can damage our experience of the kingdom.

### 1 Corinthians 6:9-10

Or do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor practicing homosexuals<sup>10</sup> nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.

### Galatians 5:19-21

<sup>19</sup> The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; <sup>20</sup> idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions <sup>21</sup> and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

What about Hebrews 12:14 where it says, 'without holiness no one will see the Lord'? The key is to read Hebrews 11:27, where it says that Moses 'endured because he saw him who is invisible'? In other words, the writer of Hebrews is not warning against not seeing God in heaven one day. He is saying that compromise in our lives undermines our ability to see God now. Similarly, the Beatitudes (in Matthew 5:3- 10) don't speak only of future blessing, but of present kingdom blessings that can be potentially lost through lack of obedience in our lives.

### John 15:6

If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned.

In this verse Jesus does not speak about the loss of salvation, but rather about how our lives as disciples are wasted when we don't remain in Jesus through persistent faith, dependency and obedience.

Then we have the letter to the Hebrews, especially chapter 6 and 10 which are often misunderstood to be speaking about the loss of salvation:

#### Hebrews 6:4-12

<sup>4</sup> It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, <sup>5</sup> who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age <sup>6</sup> and who have fallen away, to be brought back to repentance ... <sup>9</sup> Even though we speak like this, dear friends, we are convinced of better things in your case—the things that have to do with salvation. <sup>10</sup> God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them. <sup>11</sup> We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure. <sup>12</sup> We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised.

Verse 6 speaks of Christians who have 'fallen away'. We are told that their falling away is so serious that they cannot be 'brought back to repentance'. This does not mean that they never return to God, but that they can never regain what they lost. They have damaged their inheritance. But then the writer quickly affirms that the recipients of this letter, in contrast, have not fallen away ('Even though we speak like this, dear friends, we are convinced of better things in your case—the things that have to do with salvation' (v9)). Then in verse 10-12 he affirms that God will reward them (notice the word 'inherit' (v12)) because they haven't fallen away, but rather have persevered. The point is this: this section does not speak of the loss of salvation, but rather about the loss of reward. The same is true of Hebrews 10:

#### Hebrews 10:26-36

<sup>26</sup> If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, <sup>27</sup> but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God. ... <sup>35</sup> So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. <sup>36</sup> You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised.

The writer is warning Christians that if they persist in rebellion they will experience judgment and raging fire. Is this a reference to eternal damnation though? No, it is a reference to being punished by God for disobedience. Again, as we keep on reading we see that the writer is urging them to persevere, not because of the danger of the loss of salvation but because of the danger of the loss of reward (v35-36).



## Hebrews 12:16-17

<sup>16</sup> See that no one is sexually immoral, or is godless like Esau, who for a single meal sold his inheritance rights as the oldest son. <sup>17</sup> Afterward, as you know, when he wanted to inherit this blessing, he was rejected. Even though he sought the blessing with tears, he could not change what he had done.

These verses warn that persistent sin can cause us to not inherit our blessing. Esau as the example used. Esau lost his inheritance, and could not get it back. But he didn't get kicked out of the family. Same with us: we can lose some of the inheritance that God wants for us, but we should not fear being kicked out of the family. Once God's child, always God's child.

So the warnings in Hebrew are terrifying. Each of them warn about the loss of reward, but not the loss of salvation. And each one of them is immediately followed by encouragement.

The dominant metaphor used in the letter to the Hebrews is the comparison between the Christian life and the ancient nation of Israel. Ancient Israel had been redeemed from Egypt, but many of them, including Moses, failed to enter the Promised Land because they persisted in faithlessness and sin. In the same way, Christians, once redeemed may fail to inherit all that God has for them. This does not mean we can be unredeemed. It just means we lose our reward, which of course is tragic. Moses was one of the people who failed to inherit the Promised Land, and yet he went to heaven when he died.

Then there is the example of King Saul. God said to him, 'I rejected him as king.' But God did not say to him, 'I have rejected you.' He was rejected as king. He ruined all that God had for him to achieve and receive. But did Saul go to hell? Answer: no. We're told that Samuel told him that when he died, he would be with him. King Saul had a good beginning, but he had a bad end. He hardened his heart to God's voice. He lost God's voice in his life. What a tragedy. But he did not lose his salvation.

## ETERNAL SECURITY: THE DOCTRINE OF PREDESTINATION

The greatest reason that we can be sure that we will never lose our salvation is the doctrine of predestination. The great declaration of Romans 8 is that 'there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ' (v1). Similarly, we're told 'nothing can separate us from God's love' (v39). These verses describe the eternal security we can enjoy in Christ.

**The chapter of Romans 8 gives us several reasons we can be sure of this eternal security:**

- 1) the law is dealt with (v2-3),
- 2) we have the Spirit (v4-13),
- 3) we have been adopted (v14-17), 4) the sufferings of this world are nothing compared to the world

to come (v18-21),

4) when we're weak, God by his Spirit is praying within us (v26-27),

5) God is working all things for good (v28). But then the very last argument Paul brings in is predestination.

#### Romans 8:29-30

<sup>29</sup> For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. <sup>30</sup> And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

God foreknew people. This means that he set his love upon them before he even created the universe. He fore-loved people. Let's imagine there are 100 such people. Then he planned in advance that he would conform all these 100 to the image of his Son. This refers, in part, to his plan to take them to resurrection glory in the new heavens and the new earth. Of those 100 fore-loved people, how many did he call (i.e. summon to salvation)? Answer: 100! And of those 100 called ones, how many did he justify? Answer: 100! And of those 100 justified ones, how many did he glorify?

Answer: 100! How many were lost? None!

In the rest of Romans 8 Paul answers some likely questions that will come to people's minds with regard to his claim that we will get to heaven (i.e. be glorified) and in fact we already are in heaven (i.e. have been glorified (v30):

#### Romans 8:31-39

<sup>31</sup> What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?

<sup>32</sup> He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? <sup>33</sup> Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. <sup>34</sup> Who then can condemn? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. <sup>35</sup> Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? <sup>36</sup> As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered." [ao] <sup>37</sup> No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. <sup>38</sup> For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, <sup>39</sup> neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

There is nothing that can stop those who are in Christ from getting to be with God forever in heaven! God is committed to making it happen (v31). He has already given us his Son – what else won't he be prepared to give to let us be with him forever in heaven (v32)? If God has declared us not guilty, what can possibly overrule his declaration (v33)? Jesus' death, and resurrection, and intercession for us have done the work of eternal salvation on our behalf (v34). Nothing – absolutely nothing – can

separate us from God's love (v35-39)! Is there anything I can do to ruin my eternal salvation? No. Once Christ has taken hold of us in salvation (John 10:28), we cannot loosen his grip on our lives. How wonderful!

### Some guidelines in applying the doctrine of predestination

1) It should motivate us to pursue holiness. We can affirm that God is committed to making us more like Jesus (Romans 8:28). This encourages us and lets us know that with God it is possible.

2) It should motivate us to give God all the glory.

Ephesians 1:3-6

<sup>3</sup>Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. <sup>4</sup>For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love <sup>5</sup>he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will— <sup>6</sup>to the praise of his glorious grace

3) We should use it for assurance of eternal salvation (as we see Paul doing in Romans 8).

4) We must be careful not to let it cancel out prayer and evangelism. We might think that if God has already chosen who will be saved, why should I pray for the salvation of specific people, or why should I preach the gospel to them? But notice that Paul, after speaking about predestination in Romans 8 and 9, immediately tells us that he prays for the salvation of people (Romans 10:1) and that he preaches the gospel to as many people as possible (Romans 10:14-18). Paul is not fatalistic in his application of the reality of predestination, and we shouldn't be either.

5) We must be careful to not let it cancel out responsibility for wickedness. Sometimes predestination and responsibility are in the same verse:

Genesis 50:20

'You meant to do evil to me, but God used it for good'

Acts 2:23

By the hands of wicked men, you crucified him, but this was done by the definite purpose and foreknowledge of God.

In these verses we see that predestination is God's control of everything. Even though we are doing things willingly and freely, yet God is back and behind it all. We are still responsible for the wicked things we do. And God is not the source of that wickedness. But God over-rules the evil in the world to accomplish his good. None of God's purposes are thwarted by evil (Job 42:2).

6) We should only try recognize God's predestination looking backwards not forwards. The plans that God has predestined are more recognizable looking backwards than forwards. We look back and see the guiding hand of God.

7) We should resist the temptation to creatively get rid of the doctrine of predestination. There are some creative ways we try get rid of the doctrine of predestination: 1) we say that God looks forward to what is going to happen, and then in light of that he decides that it will be so, 2) we say that God predestines big-scale things like nations, but not the events of individual lives, 3) we say that God predestines us to big things like ministry and service but he is not controlling the details of daily events. (After all, in Romans 8, everything is individual and personal. So predestination applies to our individual and personal lives.)

8) We should also be careful not to say that God predestines some people to hell. The Bible does not teach this. The Bible tells us that we land up in hell because of our sin, not because of God's predestination.

9) We should not claim to understand the doctrine of predestination. The Bible leaves many questions unanswered. We can only by faith affirm what the Bible teaches about predestination, and leave the mysteries to God. We should not try to make the doctrine of predestination into a logical system or philosophy, when the Bible does not present it in this way.

## THE TEACHING ABOUT SALVATION, PART 5 SECURITY IN SALVATION - HOW YOU CAN BE SURE OF YOUR SALVATION

### TALK 25

Contents:

- Three ways to know that we really are saved

## N. THREE WAYS TO KNOW THAT WE REALLY ARE SAVED INTRODUCTION AND RECAP

Salvation is the receiving of a person. Out of Christ's fullness, we receive everything. And salvation is by grace. If you try to earn salvation, you actually block your salvation. For example, think of the Jews who for centuries had been asking God to send his promised Messiah. But when he came, they stumbled over the concept of grace. They believed that salvation could be earned by their good deeds. How wrong they were.

Romans 10:2-3

For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge. Since they did not know the righteousness of God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness.

Eaton tells a story of how he once offered his watch for free to a crowd. But they couldn't believe it was true, so no one for a long while took it. Similarly, people can't believe that it can be true that salvation is free, given by sheer undeserved grace.

So what is this salvation? It is justification, regeneration, sonship, transfer and redemption. And nothing can separate us from God's love.

## BUT HOW CAN WE BE SURE THAT WE HAVE RECEIVED THIS SALVATION?

If you were to die, would you go be with Christ in glory? Are you sure? And on what basis are you so sure?

Luke 18:9-14

<sup>9</sup> To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable: <sup>10</sup> "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. <sup>11</sup> The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. <sup>12</sup> I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.' <sup>13</sup> "But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.' <sup>14</sup> "I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."

Two men: one is sure he is saved (v11-12) based upon his own righteousness, while the other one is not sure (v13) based upon his own unrighteousness. But here is the surprise: the one who was sure he was saved, was not saved at all! And the one who was not sure, was! It turns out we can be sure we are saved, when we are not. And we can be not sure that we are saved, and yet we are! So how can we be sure we're saved? There are three ways we can have deep assurance we're saved:

## WE GET ASSURANCE THAT WE'RE SAVED BY CASTING OURSELVES ON THE PROMISES OF GOD IN SHEER FAITH.

Here are some wonderful promises to hold onto:

John 1:12

Yet to all who did receive [Jesus], to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God

Acts 16:31

Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved

Romans 10:9-

If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. 10 For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved.

Part of casting ourselves on the promises of God is renouncing ourselves. Think how many times the self-righteous man in Luke 18:11-12 uses the word 'I'. There is nothing in ourselves, and there is nothing we can do to make ourselves worthy of salvation. The only contribution we make to having our sins forgiven is to provide the sins that he forgives. We must not talk about ourselves, but rather about him who can save us.

And part of casting ourselves on God's promises is to risk one's whole life in the process. It is to bank one's life on this being true. It is like Esther who approached the king with a request for mercy. She said, 'If I perish, I perish' (Esther 4:16). We need to say, 'If I perish anywhere, it is here at the feet of Jesus, casting myself upon his promises, banking my life on his promises!'

There is something a bit argumentative about it. It has logic on it. God, in his Word, makes a promise that I will be God's child if I trust in Jesus. So I come and trust in him. Now I am God's child. Why would God's promise not be true? God's word says it. I believe it. That settles it.

## SOME HELP FOR THOSE WHO DOUBT

Maybe there are some people who have difficulty with believing at this point. We need to ask people, 'What are you not sure about?'

Some people doubt the gospel. Are you doubting whether Jesus really is the Son of God, who died for your sins? If this is the case, you're doubting the gospel. This is a very serious problem. If this is you, then there is some advice that Jesus gives. This is what is advised: go to God in prayer, be real with him and say, 'God, show me whether the gospel really is true?' Approaching God with doubt is what a man once did, as he said to Jesus, 'I believe, help my unbelief' (Mark 9:24). It is also what John the

Baptist did (Matthew 11:3). When we doubt Jesus the best thing we can do is to speak to him about it. If we approach God with our doubts about the gospel, God makes an offer to us, but it is an offer with a condition.

John 7:17

Jesus said, 'Anyone who chooses to do the will of God will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own.'

This verse shows us that his offer is this: 'If I were to reveal to you that the gospel is true, would you be willing to do my will.' In the same way Jesus helped John the Baptist in his doubts (Matthew 11:4-5), so he will help us get through our doubts and difficulties – if we'd be willing to do his will upon the revelation of the gospel's truthfulness.

Other people believe the gospel but doubt themselves. They are like the tax collector who because of their sin feel unworthy of salvation (see Luke 18:13). Here is the good news: you're saved not on the basis of your worthiness (you're not worthy anyway), but on the basis of Christ's grace. Even if you have weak faith, if that weak faith is in Christ, you are saved. Your doubts are totally unnecessary! You need to stand on the promises of God. Come empty-handed and receive his grace. Bank your soul on the promises of God. The tax collector doubted himself, but what he did get right is that he went to God and cast himself upon his mercy – and was justified as a result (see Luke 18:13-14). We are not saved by how good we are, nor by how strong our faith is. We are saved by faith in Jesus. That's it!

## WE GET ASSURANCE THAT WE'RE SAVED BY THE OUTPOURING OR BAPTISM WITH THE SPIRIT

Romans 8:15-16

<sup>15</sup> 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." <sup>16</sup> The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.

The Holy Spirit gives us the assurance that we really are children of God. He gives us a deep experiential certainty that this is so. This is the witness of the Spirit with our spirit. Notice that this is not based on intellectual argument, but personal experience. This is God himself saying to us, 'You are my child.'

Whenever the Spirit gives us this experience, we call that the infilling or outpouring of the Spirit. Think about how even Jesus needed this:

Matthew 3:16-17

<sup>16</sup> As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. <sup>17</sup> And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."

Jesus, of course already knew that he was God's son. When he was 12 he already knew this ('I must be about my Father's house' (Luke 2:49)). Yet it seems that God, through the outpouring of the Spirit, was intensifying his assurance that he was God's Son. It is the same with us. The moment we trust in Christ, our spirit can start testifying to ourselves that we are God's child. But there is more: the Spirit, when poured out upon us, intensifies that conviction. The Spirit testifies along with our spirit that we are God's child. And, of course, when God speaks to our hearts no discussion is needed. We have certainty!

It is the most natural thing in the world for a Christian to call God our Father. We don't just hope God is there somewhere. We don't struggle to know that God is our Father. We are meant to know this. It is possible to be a Christian, of course, to not have experienced the Spirit's witness in this way. But this witness that comes with the Spirit's outpouring is something God wants all his children to experience. The Ephesian church had experienced it.

Ephesians 1:13-14

Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, 14 who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession — to the praise of his glory.

As we experience the outpouring it is like we're hearing a voice: 'You're my child'. And wonderfully, it sets us free from bondage to fear (see Romans 8:15). Our doubts are swept away.

Do all people experience the Spirit's infilling in the same way? No, some people have mighty experiences, and others not so mighty – and they're in no way inferior. What matters is not how dramatic the experience is, but how meaningful and real it is to us. We tend to love the stories of people who had very dramatic experiences of the Spirit, but they are not always helpful, because God chooses to pour out his Spirit on many of his children in far gentler ways. Eaton's maxim on the matter is this: 'I don't care how you get there, as long as you get there'. Get to the place where the Spirit testifies with your spirit that you are God's child, where you experience a natural intimacy with the Father. We don't pray to a distant God.

## SOME HELP FOR THOSE WHO LONG TO FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT IN THIS WAY

This is the advise you need: ask God for this experience because he promises it to you. The Holy Spirit's outpouring is described as 'the promise of the Father' (Acts 1:4). Whenever you have a promise from God, and God doesn't seem to be keeping it, you need to take the promise to God in prayer. Turn the promise into prayer. Plead the promise to God: 'You promised me you would pour out your Spirit on me.' Almost every time we see people being filled with the Spirit it happens in response to prayer (Luke 3:21, Acts 1:14, 2:1-4 and Acts 4:11-13.) Jesus taught us to come to him and receive the Spirit.



John 7:37-39

Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. <sup>38</sup> Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them.” <sup>39</sup> By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive.

Paul takes it for granted that every Christian in Rome had already experienced the Holy Spirit in this way (Romans 8:15-17). Every one of us should seek God for this experience. If we haven't experience the deep assurance of the Spirit, we are lacking something. We need to turn the promise into prayer. Thomas Goodwin said that when God promises something he has not yet given we need to 'sue God'. Like little children reminding their dad about what he promised, so we need to go to God and ask him to pour out his Spirit in us.

## WE GET ASSURANCE THAT WE'RE SAVED BY NOTICING THAT WE'RE NOT THE PERSON WE USED TO BE

1 John 3:14

We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers.

This verse tells us that one assurance that we're saved is that we now love people in ways we never used to love. A changed life is a kind of confirmation to the fact we're saved. A new desire to love people who are different to us is an evidence of our salvation. We start to love fellow-believers who are different to us. Some times we love a fellow Christian even more than we love our own family.

But, very importantly, this is the last way of getting assurance of salvation. It does not come first, or even second, but third. Notice that we're not trying to detect our salvation by the degree of our godliness. If we do that, we're doomed to undermine assurance of our salvation. However, just as John said in 1 John 3:14, all new Christians will notice a new love and affection, however small or imperfect it is, towards fellow-Christians. This serves as a confirmation of our salvation.