

The Security of Salvation, Part 1

Scripture: Romans 5:1–2a

Code: 45-40

INTRODUCTION

A. The Debate on Eternal Security

The Salvation Army Handbook on Doctrine says, "Some truly converted people have fallen from grace, and the danger of doing so threatens every Christian" ([St. Albans, England: Campfield, 1969], p. 139). Throughout the years eternal security has been a hotly debated issue in theology. Many theologians say you can lose your salvation, and many claim you can't. The doctrine of eternal security is sometimes referred to as "the perseverance of the saints" or "once saved, always saved." Today many people believe a Christian can lose his salvation. Such a person is considered to have backslidden--to have fallen away from Christ.

The doctrine that claims a person can lose his salvation makes salvation conditional. It is to say that since God has saved us, we will maintain our salvation as we continue to match up with God's standard. But if we fail at any point we lose it. That is a works-righteousness perspective.

B. The Defense of Eternal Security

The apostle Paul addresses the issue of eternal security in Romans 5. Many treatments of this subject don't include Romans 5, yet it is arguably the most definitive text ever written on the security of our salvation.

Paul's purpose in the epistle of Romans is to affirm the gospel. In chapters 3-4 his thesis is that salvation comes by grace through faith.

1. The incomprehensibility of grace

That thesis was revolutionary to the Jewish people, who had been reared on a works-righteousness system of salvation. They believed that by doing certain works they would gain God's favor.

Virtually all other world religions teach the same thing: that man must live up to some religious code or ethical standard to be saved. Unredeemed man finds it difficult to comprehend that salvation is a free gift of God's grace, unearned and undeserved, appropriated by faith alone.

2. The insistence on works

Paul had the Jewish people in mind when he wrote Romans 5--he had just completed a treatise on Abraham as an illustration of justification by faith in the previous section, Romans 3:21[en]4:25. A Jewish person would tend to doubt that faith is all that is needed for salvation. It would be hard for him to believe that faith would be enough to save him from the condemnation of God on Judgment Day.

In Romans 5 Paul is speaking directly to that issue. Today if you espouse the doctrine of eternal security, invariably someone who doesn't believe it will ask you, "You mean that after you become a Christian there's no standard? Doesn't your salvation depend on your obedience?" Paul addresses those questions in Romans 5:1-11. He presents six links in a chain that eternally ties a true believer to the Savior.

LESSON

I. PEACE WITH GOD (v. 1)

"Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

A. A Righteous Relationship

The word "therefore" links verse 1 to the foundation Paul laid in chapters 3-4. Justification by faith--being made right with God through faith in Christ--initially ushers us into salvation. When you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ you obtain salvation and an inheritance in eternity filled with blessing. One of those blessings is security: you have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

B. A Reconciled Relationship

What is the peace we have with God? Some have suggested we have tranquility of mind--a psychological sense of security. But that is not the intention of the passage. It is not subjective peace; it is objective. It refers not to feelings, but to a relationship.

If we have peace with God because of salvation, what did we have prior to salvation? War, the opposite of peace. Christ changed our relationship to God dramatically. We were at war with God. He was our enemy and we were His enemy. But through justification by faith in Christ, God has brought us into a relationship of peace. That peace is not an attitude of psychological tranquillity or a calm mind. Peace with God means our war with Him is over.

1. The nature of the war

Most people think they've never been at war with God. But the Bible says that before you come to Christ you're at war with God (cf. Col. 1:21-22). Some non-Christians will claim to be religious--to believe in God and be concerned about what He thinks. They don't see themselves as enemies of God actively striking blows at God's kingdom.

a) Its reality The issue is not that they are at war with God, but that God is at war with them. The majority of people don't see themselves as fighting God. But God is their enemy, whether they are consciously His enemy or not. In fact, the war is so severe that God will someday cast the unbeliever into an eternal lake of fire to burn for eternity. God is at war with the sinner because He is the enemy of sin and sin's father, Satan. If you're not a child of God, you're a child of Satan (John 1:12; 8:44). The background of this concept is Romans 1-2, which describes the wrath of God.

Romans 1:18 says, "The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness." God is at war with the ungodly and the unrighteous--those who don't know Christ. First Corinthians 16:22 says, "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema [cursed]."

b) Its ramifications (1) Deuteronomy 32:21-22-- "They have moved me to jealousy with that which is not God; they have provoked me to anger with their vanities: and I will move them to jealousy with those which are not a people; I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation. For a fire is kindled in mine anger, and shall burn unto the lowest hell, and shall consume the earth with her increase, and set on fire the foundations of the mountains."

God is furious with sinners. (2) Isaiah 13:9, 13-- "The day of the Lord cometh, cruel both with wrath and fierce anger, to lay the land desolate; and he shall destroy the sinners out of it.... Therefore, I will shake the heavens, and the earth shall remove out of its place, in the wrath of the Lord of hosts, and in the day of his fierce anger." (3) Nahum 1:2-- "God is jealous, and the Lord avengeth; the Lord avengeth, and is furious; the Lord will take vengeance on his adversaries, and he reserveth wrath for his enemies."

(4) Ephesians 5:6-- "Let no man deceive you with vain words; for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the sons of disobedience." (5) Revelation 19:15-- When Jesus returns, "out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations, and he shall rule them with a rod of iron; and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God." (6) Psalm 7:11-- "God judgeth the righteous, and God is angry with the wicked every day."

That is the sum of God's attitude: He is at war with the wicked.

2. The nature of the peace

a) Past propitiation through the cross (1) The satisfaction for sin We have peace with God, and we didn't do anything to obtain that peace. God poured out His vengeance, anger, and wrath on Christ, and God was appeased. Our new status is peace with God, and it was accomplished by Christ's reconciling work on the cross. Christ made full payment for our sins, and God was propitiated--a theological term meaning He was satisfied. Colossians 1:20-22 speaks of His "having made peace

through the blood of his cross.... you, that were once alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblamable and unreprouvable in his sight." Jesus Christ so fully accomplished peace with God that from now on, you are forever holy and faultless in His sight. Why? Because Christ bore every sin you and I should have been punished for.

The Reality of Reconciliation

Justification and reconciliation are distinguishable as terms, but they are inseparable in reality. Justification embraces reconciliation (Rom. 5), sanctification (Rom. 6-7), and glorification (Rom. 8). When you embrace Jesus Christ by faith and are justified, inherent in that justification is the anticipation of glorification, the process of sanctification, and reconciliation to God (Rom. 8:30). We are no longer the enemy but sons, crying, "Abba, Father"--the Aramaic equivalent to "Daddy" (Gal. 4:6).

(2) The sacrifice of Christ The wrath of God, which ultimately could have consigned us to eternal hell, is removed. All God's fury was fully absorbed in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. We are left with the marvelous reconciliation accomplished "through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5:1). Ephesians 1:3 says that God has "blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ." Everything is ours because of Christ. He not only reconciled us to God, but also gave us the ministry of reconciliation, which is to preach the gospel to those in need of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18-21).b) Present peace through cleansing How does God maintain His relationship with us? Jesus not only reconciled us to God, but also maintains that relationship. That is His high-priestly work. He keeps on cleansing us from all sin (1 John 1:7). (1) The truths of reconciliation (a) Eternal peace We are forever at peace with God because every sin we will commit has already been paid for by Christ. Therefore nothing can destroy our relationship with Him. (b) Present peace Every day that we sin, the Lord keeps on cleansing us--maintaining our relationship with Him--through the past act of Christ on the cross and His present mediation at the right hand of God. In His high-priestly ministry "he ever liveth to make intercession for [us]" (Heb. 7:25). (2) The time of reconciliation How long does Christ make intercession? For as long as Jesus Christ lives--and He lives forever. When a person embraces Christ by faith, the spotless Son of God makes him one with God. (3) The tranquility of reconciliation I believe that peace with God produces a sense of tranquillity within us. That's not the meaning of Romans 1, but peace with God certainly makes me feel good. Theologian Charles Hodge called it "that sweet quiet of the soul" (Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974], p. 132). I'm a son of God and a brother of Jesus Christ. I'm in His family and God is at peace with me. Ephesians 2:14 says of Christ: "He is our peace." As long as He lives, which is forever, He will maintain our peace with God. God is satisfied with Christ's sacrifice for our sin, His wrath is gone, and we are at peace. Nothing can change that. In Hebrews 8:12 God says, "I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more."

II. STANDING IN GRACE (v. 2a)

"By whom [Christ] also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand."

We are not moving in and out of grace; we are standing in grace.

A. The Mediation of Christ

The key to this passage is the mediation of Jesus Christ. Through His death He brings us to God.

1. Inaccessibility to God

Verse 2 says, "By whom also we have access by faith." The Greek word translated "access" was used two other times to speak of access to God (Eph. 2:18; 3:12). That would have been a shocking, incomprehensible concept for the Jewish people of Paul's day to comprehend, and to some extent it still is. They had been taught that God was holy and unapproachable. They knew

from the past that if they ever came close to God they would be consumed.

a) The unapproachable One Exodus 19:9-25 illustrates the Jewish concept of approaching God. As God prepared to give Israel the law from Mount Sinai, "the Lord said unto Moses, Lo, I come unto thee in a thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with thee, and believe thee forever. And Moses told the words of the people unto the Lord. And the Lord said unto Moses, Go unto the people, and sanctify them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their clothes, and be ready on the third day; for the third day the Lord will come down in the sight of all the people upon Mount Sinai. And thou shalt set bounds unto the people round about, saying, Take heed to yourselves, that ye go not up into the mount, or touch the border of it. Whosoever toucheth the mount shall be surely put to death: there shall not an hand touch it, but he shall surely be stoned, or shot through; whether it be beast or man, it shall not live: when the trumpet soundeth long, they shall come up to the mount." And Moses went down from the mount unto the people, and sanctified the people; and they washed their clothes. And he said unto the people, Be ready on the third day: come not near your wives. And it shall come to pass on the third day in the morning, that there were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the mount, and the voice of the trumpet exceedingly loud, so that all the people that were in the camp trembled. And Moses brought forth the people out of the camp to meet with God; and they stood at the lower part of the mount. And Mount Sinai was altogether in a smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in fire; and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mount quaked greatly. And when the voice of the trumpet sounded long, and became louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered him by a voice. "And the Lord came down upon Mount Sinai, on the top of the mount; and the Lord called Moses up to the top of the mount, and Moses went up. And the Lord said unto Moses, Go down, charge the people, lest they break through unto the Lord to gaze, and many of them perish. And let the priests also, who come near to the Lord, sanctify themselves, lest the Lord break forth upon them. And Moses said unto the Lord, The people cannot come up to Mount Sinai; for thou chargedst us, saying, Set bounds about the mount, and sanctify it. And the Lord said unto him, Away, get thee down, and thou shalt come up, thou, and Aaron with thee; but let not the priests and the people break through to come up unto the Lord, lest He break forth upon them. So Moses went down unto the people, and spoke unto them." b) The unholy people After God led His people out Egypt, He established that they had only limited access to Him. Why? Because He is holy and man is utterly unholy. (1) The limitations Even after God established the Tabernacle and then the Temple, the people could come only so close. There were different limitations for Gentiles, for Jewish women, for Jewish men, and for priests. Only the high priest could enter into the presence of God, and then only one day a year. After going through rigorous cleansing rituals, he entered the Holy of Holies, sprinkled blood on the altar, and left as fast as he could. There were bells on his robe so the other priests would know his condition. If the bells stopped ringing, they would know he had been struck dead. (2) The lesson Those who tried to approach God apart from His procedure died on the spot. Nadab and Abihu "offered strange fire before the Lord" and were killed immediately (Lev. 10:1-2). Korah, Dathan, and Abiram challenged the leadership of Moses and Aaron and tried to function as priests. However, the ground swallowed them up (Num. 16:1-35). The Jewish people knew God was unapproachable. Access was not a word in their religious vocabulary. Even today sinful man has no access to God.

2. Accessibility through Christ

Christ's death changed the Old Testament view of access to God. Matthew 27:51 says that the moment Christ died, the veil of the Temple was torn from top to bottom--a symbol that access to God was now possible.

a) Hebrews 4:16--"Let us, therefore, come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need." b) Jeremiah 32:38, 40--These words reflect God's promised New Covenant with His people: "They shall be my people, and I will be their God ... I will not turn away from doing them good, but I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from

Me." c) Hebrews 10:19-22--"Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh, and having an high priest over the house of God, let us draw near."

A frequent secular use of the Greek word translated "access" is of a haven or harbor for a ship in distress. Similarly, God is both a haven and a harbor for us in our distress.

B. The Medium of Grace

When we enter into the presence of God, we stand in grace (Rom. 5:2). That's why Hebrews 4:16 tells us to come boldly before God to obtain mercy. The Greek word translated "stand" (hist[ma]emi) means to "stand firm" or "abide." We are abiding in a state of grace.

1. The definition of grace

Grace is God's unmerited favor by which He saves us and makes us righteous. It is based solely on His sovereign love, which is manifested in the perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ for our sin. It is not the result of any worthiness on our part. Once we are saved we stand in grace.

2. The definitiveness of grace

Many people believe that once someone is saved by grace he has to keep himself saved by keeping the law. But Romans 5:2 says that once we are truly saved, we stand in grace--firmly fixed in an environment of grace.

a) Jude 24--"Unto Him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy." When you are saved you stand in grace. It is a continual reality because of the high-priestly work of Christ. You stand in an aura of grace--grace that is continually forgiving and able to keep you from falling.

b) John 15:7--Jesus said, "Abide in me." We abide in an environment of grace. We're secure in that environment. We didn't do anything to get in; we can't do anything to get out.

c) Romans 5:20--"The law entered, that the offense might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound." There is no way out. Grace functions where there is failure, so every time you sin, grace covers your failure. That's why you're so secure. If salvation depended on our ability to obey rules, we would all lose our salvation.

We have peace with God and we stand in grace. If someone asserts that peace with God can't secure our salvation, he would have to deny two things: (1) that the sacrifice of Christ is adequate to cover all sin and keep the peace, (2) that maintaining that peace is beyond the ability of Christ, who "ever liveth to make intercession for [us]" (Heb. 7:25). So he would be denying who Christ is and His past and present work.

Maintaining the Peace

The high-priestly work of Christ is going on right now. He maintains our peace with God and applies His grace to us. Romans 5:10 says, "If, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be being saved by his life." Since a dying Savior succeeded in bringing us to God, a living Savior can certainly keep us there.

It is Christ's high-priestly work to go continually before the Father on our behalf. In Luke 22:31-32 Jesus says, "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you.... but I have prayed for thee." That example gives us insight into how He maintains our relationship to God. Christ intercedes on our behalf to maintain our peace with God and our environment of grace.

Will the Judge Change His Verdict on You?

Arthur Pink, who wrote a book on this topic (Eternal Security [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1974]) said that it is utterly and absolutely impossible that the sentence of the divine Judge should ever be revoked or reversed. He wrote, "Sooner shall the lightnings of omnipotence shiver the Rock of Ages than those sheltering in Him again be brought under condemnation." The Judge issued a verdict that will stand forever.

1. 2 Timothy 1:12--The apostle Paul, confident of God's ability to preserve his salvation, said, "[I] am

persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day."

2. Hebrews 10:10-14--"We are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering often the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins; but this man [Christ], after he had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down on the right hand of God, from henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool. For by one offering he hath perfected forever them that are sanctified."

3. Romans 8:31-34--"If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" (vv. 31-32). Since God gave the supreme gift of His Son to redeem us, you can be sure He will give us whatever is necessary to preserve our redemption.

Verses 33-34 say, "Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? Shall God that justified? Who is he that condemneth? Shall Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us?" Do you think the Attorney for our defense is going to accuse us? Do you think the Judge who delivered us from judgment and set us free is going to reverse His verdict? No!

CONCLUSION

Our peace with God and standing in grace are not precarious--we are on firm ground. God holds us, and that's His work. But it is our responsibility to obey Him. Why? Because one of the ways God keeps us is by empowering us with His Spirit to walk in obedience. When you see someone who once claimed to be a Christian but abandons the faith, remember 1 John 2:19: "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us." True Christians continue to persevere.

If anyone attacks the security of the believer, first of all he is attacking God and claiming He changed His verdict. Second, he is attacking Christ and claiming His work on the cross was inadequate and that His high-priestly work can't maintain us. Finally, he is attacking the Holy Spirit and claiming He is inadequate to help the believer persevere. A discrediting of the Trinity is wrapped up in a denial of the security of salvation.

The nineteenth century Scottish Presbyterian poet and preacher Horatius Bonar wrote these majestic words in a hymn entitled, "The Sin-Bearer" (Hymns of Faith and Hope by Horatius Bonar [London: James Nisbett & Co., 1872], pp. 100-02):

Thy works, not mine, O Christ,
Speak gladness to this heart;
They tell me all is done;
They bid my fear depart.

To whom, save Thee,
Who can alone
For sin atone,
Lord, shall I flee?

Thy pains, not mine, O Christ,
Upon the shameful tree
Have paid the law's full price,
And purchased peace for me.

Thy tears, not mine, O Christ,
Have wept my guilt away;

And turned this night of mine
Into a blessed day.

Thy bonds, not mine, O Christ,
Unbind me of my chain,
And break my prison-doors,
Ne'er to be barred again.

Thy wounds, not mine, O Christ,
Can heal my bruised soul;
Thy stripes, not mine, contain
The balm that makes me whole.

Thy blood, not mine, O Christ,
Thy blood so freely spilt,
Can blanch my blackest stains,
And purge away my guilt.

Thy cross, not mine, O Christ,
Has borne the awful load
Of sins, that none in heaven
Or earth could bear, but God.

Thy death, not mine, O Christ,
Has paid the ransom due;
Ten thousand deaths like mine,
Would have been all too few.

Thy righteousness, O Christ,
Alone can cover me;
No righteousness avails
Save that which is of Thee.

Thy righteousness alone
Can clothe and beautify;
I wrap it round my soul;
In this I'll live and die.

Focusing on the Facts

1. According to those who claim you can lose your salvation, what maintains salvation?
2. Why did Paul write Romans?
3. Why did the Jewish people have trouble understanding salvation by faith?
4. When do we have peace with God?
5. What kind of peace do we have?
6. Explain the nature of unregenerate man's war with God.
7. How do believers obtain peace with God?
8. What happened to our sins?
9. How does Christ maintain our reconciliation to God?
10. How long does Christ maintain that reconciliation?

11. How are we able to stand in grace?
12. Why is "access" a key word in Romans 5:2?
13. What did the Jewish people in Old Testament times believe about approaching God? Why?
14. What enables man to have access to God?
15. Define grace.
16. What did Paul mean when he said the believer stands in grace (Rom. 5:2)?
17. According to Romans 5:20, what must exist for grace to function?
18. What is the significance of Romans 5:10 concerning our peace with God?
19. How does a believer's obedience relate to his peace with God and standing in grace?

Pondering the Principles

1. Have you ever thought you could lose your salvation? Why? Read Romans 3:21--4:25 and 1 John 5:9-13. List as many reasons as you can find that show your salvation is real. How do they relate to the reasons you gave for losing your salvation? How does your peace with God relate to those truths? Thank God that you do not have to earn your salvation. Ask Him to make those truths even more real in your life.
2. Read 2 Corinthians 5:17-21. According to Paul, all Christians have been given the ministry of reconciliation. What are some ways you personally can be involved as an ambassador for Christ? Based on the fact that you have peace with God, what has to be an integral part of your ministry? Make a list of people you know whom you'd like to see at peace with God. Begin praying that God would use you in bringing about their reconciliation with Him.
3. Since you now have access into God's presence and stand in grace, with what attitude should you approach God? Look up the following verses: Hebrews 4:14-16; 10:12-22; 1 John 3:18-21; 4:17; 5:14. Why is it possible for us to have that attitude? List some reasons that explain why sometimes we don't approach God in that way. Read 1 John 1:9. Remember it is confession of sin that enables us to keep our consciences clean (Heb. 10:22) and be obedient to God. Although we can approach Him confidently, we must also approach Him (James 4:10).

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