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**How Does the Doctrine of Eternal Security Affect
Our Method of Doing Pastoral Care**

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Abstract

The public domain depicts security as one of the basic needs of humanity. Security affects many aspects of humanity. Socio-economics, politics, culture and all forms of development do not thrive where security is compromised. This study contends that eternal security is security and as such greatly affects the manner in

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which all theology and specifically pastoral theology is practiced. This will be done by introducing the subject matter and the notions thereof. The doctrine of eternal security will be investigated in scripture in general terms. Then we shall determine the effects on the manner in which pastoral theology is done.

I. Introduction

Security is a human need. Wherever women and men are found security needs must be adequate otherwise life becomes unbearable. Amongst the very poor nations, one ironically finds military wings taking a good share of national budgets in comparison with other cost points of service delivery. Dictators of the world survive by the appeasement of military wings and forces among other means. Whenever they are pushed even by democratic voices dictators order the military to remove security systems of the people so that when security is compromised and people die, then the general public would oppose whatever voices threaten incumbent powers. No genocide has taken place without security wings being compromised and at times getting involved. It is for this reason that our global village is seeing a new trend that prosecutes dictators and military chiefs after change of governments. No head of a fallen state faces the international court of justice in the Hague alone. Always, someone who had served in some key position within the fallen government joins the former head of government in facing prosecution on crimes against humanity.

One may observe that in all manner of life, security is cardinal. It is a weapon more powerful than the latest technological innovation and where security is compromised, people lose patience and they can do anything. For this reason we may observe further that even the United Nations whose background was to prevent any more world wars and foster global development, has among its organs the Security Council. Wherever the security of the general populace is threatened anywhere in the world, the Security Council advises the United Nations on the appropriate course of action.

Indeed the security need affects humanity in terms of socio-economics, politics, culture and development to mention but a few.

The daunting question is: if humankind is holistic in being, does the security need which affects socio-economics, politics, psychology and culture have anything to do with religion and spirituality? Let us

attempt to respond to this question by surveying the doctrine of eternal security in Scripture.

II. Doctrine of Eternal Security

It seems just and fair to acknowledge that religion and spirituality have everything to do with security. To respond to the question above, what affects the physicality of humanity equally affects the emotional, religious and social spheres too because life is holistic. As globalization continues to take effect by making the world one global village which is well-connected, humanity has become more and more aware of the importance of security. A security threat at one part of the world easily spreads the effects to the rest.

Writing about globalization, Friedman (2005:8f) writes:

Professionally, the recognition that the world was flat was unnerving because I realized that this flattening had been taking place while I was sleeping, and I had missed it. I wasn't really sleeping, but I was otherwise engaged. Before 9/11, I was focused on tracking globalization and exploring the tension between the "Lexus" forces of economic integration and the "Olive Tree" forces of identity and nationalism-hence my 1999 book, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*. But after 9/11, the olive tree wars became all-consuming for me. I spent all my time travelling in the Arab and Muslim worlds. During those years I lost the trail of globalization. ... The second great era, Globalization 2-0, lasted roughly from 1800 to 2000, interrupted by the Great Depression and World Wars I and II. This era shrank the world from a size medium to a size small.

In the above quotation, there seems to be two major events that had some definitive effect on the world and actually reshaped and re-sized the world. One is the 9/11 event in which terrorists bombed the twin towers of the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon in the United States of America using passenger planes as missiles killing thousands of innocent people. The other one is World War I and II which gravely destroyed human life and property. Perhaps, it is important to put forward some daunting questions like: What was at stake in these events? Who was affected by these events? Were there any persons or institution that watched by without themselves being affected?

For the purposes of our subject matter, we observe that at the core of these events was security. No single person and no single institution was unaffected. It was only a question of time between the occurrences of the events and the time of experiencing the effects. The security of the world was threatened and humanity became

holistically vulnerable. The world became interconnected in a search for security. At this juncture, it would not be pre-mature to state that the security, safety, refuge, safekeeping or protection concerns are real concerns that affect particularly human life in its totality.

If security can be a concern in ordinary life, eternal, never-ending or everlasting security is much more a concern. Many things that people engage in, particularly from the African perspective have a reason for the future. There is no doubt that humanity everywhere tends to invest in the future. As afore-mentioned, many African people whose perspectives have influence on this article as it is written the African context, cherish the future. A lot of sacrifice is made in this life for the sake of the future. For instance, in village life, the grain in the granary store is never finished completely even during seasons of famine except in the critical times where literally there is nothing as the case is in Somalia currently. Otherwise, there is always something at the corner no matter how small in quantity. The rationale is that in future, in case something terribly goes wrong, the family must be somewhat safe. No life is worthy living, no project is worthy undertaking and no religion is worthy practicing if there is no offer of security for the future or better still eternal security. This is the context in which this article is born. Eternal security in most instances goes beyond individual victories over either Satan or death. The extent of eternal security is broader. In classical Christian doctrine, eternal security is covered by the doctrine of the *perseverance of the saints*. According to Rushdoony (1983:329):

The root meaning of *perseverance*, from the Latin through the French, means to persist in a purpose, to continue striving (*per*, through; *severus*, strict). The word *perseverance* appears in Ephesians 6:18, but not in a doctrinal sense. The word there used is *proskarteresis*, meaning to continue steadfastly in a thing or give unremitting care to it, as in Romans 13:6, where it is translated “attending.” The doctrine thus is not readily expressed in any single word but is set forth throughout Scripture in a number of sentences and assumptions. Thus in Jeremiah 32:36-44, it means that God will use His saints to accomplish His purpose of restoration and reconstruction, although Jeremiah’s reference is to the limited restoration after Babylonian Captivity and before Christ’s first coming. In Isaiah 54:10-17, it clearly has reference to the triumph of all believers and their establishment on earth under God.

Concerning matters of eternal security one can observe in this testimony that there are several voices in Scripture that concern

themselves with the same. Firstly, the diversity in all Biblical texts that directly or otherwise, relate to eternal security, render a single meaning difficult. Secondly, the teaching goes beyond the individual benefit. It falls within God's grand salvific plan for His creation.

Humanity finds itself in the hands of the almighty triune God as instruments for divine restoration and reconstruction as aforementioned. What appeared to Jeremiah as applicable and limited to the Babylonian Captivity has in Christ Jesus become a promise that will endure until the *parousia*, the second and final coming of our Lord Christ Jesus.

Eternal security occupies religious minds as a matter of great importance. Perhaps, this would be the right space to indicate that this teaching does not cover every Churchgoer, but only those members who are united with Christ Jesus in faith. Some people find themselves in the faith community for different reasons. On the one hand, there may be breakers of the covenant and nominal members, while on the other hand, there are bona fide members of the body of Christ and these are the ones in our focus. The question to face concerns the real meaning of this teaching. What is perseverance or eternal security of the saints?

Hoekema (1989:234f) rightfully argues that:

What the doctrine of perseverance of the true believers does mean is this: those who have true faith can lose faith neither totally nor finally. The real question at issue, therefore, is this: Can a person who has true faith ever lose that faith? To this question the person of Reformed persuasion says: No. It should immediately be added, however, that the Calvinist gives this answer not on the basis of the superior spiritual strength of the believer, but on the ground of God's faithfulness to his promise. The Calvinist believes that God will never permit those whom he has given true faith to fall away from that faith. The true believers persevere not because of their strength but because of God's unchangeable mercy.

Though Hoekema writes from a Calvinistic Reformed tradition, his wrestling with the question of eternal security is helpful across denominational boundaries. The believers presented as those who cannot lose faith and their eternal security, are those who are born again or regenerated and are in union with Christ. As they are in union with Christ, the Holy Spirit nourishes and sanctifies them.

This implies that eternal security does not rest on believers themselves, but on a source outside of themselves. That source is the

triune God who in His sovereign will decides to work with and through regenerated humanity. We agree with Hoekema (: 239) who argues that:

The security of believers is thus not dependent on their hold of Christ, but on Christ's hold of them. ... Our hold on Christ may sometimes be very weak, but Christ's hold on us is strong and unbreakable.

The understanding that Christ's hold on the believer is strong and unbreakable serves a pastoral motif. No greater good news than this can one expect. Of course this is to the contrary of the natural human way of doing things. Humanity shares a tendency to go for what is difficult in search of security.

In one compound of Lusaka, a member² of some Church was sick. A story is told about a Church elder responsible for the section which organized prayers. Feeling unwell for some time other members prayed for her and left her house. Not being satisfied she went for a spiritual healer belonging to a Church organization different from her denomination. The spiritualist locally known as a *profita*³ welcomed her and did not only pray for her but additionally demanded for a fee which would be a form of a seed. Then she was told to drink water obtained from a hole in a tree near a river.

The woman travelled a distance of over 45 kilometers to reach Kafue river which is the nearest river to Lusaka. She indeed found some water in a hole in a tree which was along the banks of the river. She climbed to collect needed water that she believed would heal her in addition to prayers. Unfortunately just when she was about to achieve her mission, a huge snake came out of the same hole where she wanted to get some water. Out of fear she fell from the tree and sustained some injuries on the shoulder. Then she ran for her life and never returned to her project.

She risked much to obtain security though unfortunately she got more injuries. This story demonstrates how many people render themselves vulnerable as they seek security. Again we affirm that security is a need of humanity and sometimes people risk all they can as they pursue security.

² For the purposes of security and

³ Most likely the word is a localization of the noun prophet though such prophet do not come any close to the Biblical prophet in either character or function.

If security is a need of humanity, how does eternal security fare in the New Testament? We pursue this question by treating as a test case some selected statements and teachings of Jesus and Paul. The two are chosen as major contributors to the New Testament.

III. Jesus on Eternal Security of Believers

The teachings of Jesus on eternal security come through different texts.

Luke 22:31-32

The first of these contexts we would like to discuss is that of Luke 22:31-32 where Jesus said:

“Simon, Simon, Satan has asked^o to sift you⁸⁴ as wheat. ^p But I have prayed for you, ^q Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.”^f (cf Heb 7:25)

In this passage Jesus explains to Peter that Satan asked to sift the disciples⁴ but Jesus prayed for Peter to prevent Peter’s faith from failing. The statement implies that faith is not permanent and may fail. The only ground on which faith defeats failure is the intercession of Jesus Christ. This understanding agrees with the author of Hebrews who states that:

Therefore he is able to save^f completely³¹ those who come to God^g through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.

Jesus is indeed able to save completely those who come to God through intercession thereby making the cords that bind Him to the faithful blessed and unbroken.

John 5:24 cf 4:14

The second text that we would like to explore is John 5:24 where Jesus is quoted as having stated that:

I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me^q has eternal life^r and will not be condemned;^s he has crossed over from death to life.

Jesus tells the truth that people with faith in Him have eternal life and will not face condemnation. Their condition is such that already they have crossed over from death to life. Once more, the faithful have not crossed over from death to life on their own merit, but on the basis of

⁴ You plural

Jesus' word and Him who sent Jesus. Jesus is the fountain of water that replenishes human life (*cf.* Jn 4:14).

John 6:51

The third text to be discussed is John 6:51 where according to John Jesus declared before His audience that

I am the living bread ^d that came down from heaven. ^e If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.”

In the Johannine context, bread was a source of livelihood. It was a staple food and people ate bread in order to live. By declaring that He is the living bread that came down from heaven and that anyone who ate of that bread from heaven would live forever, Jesus reveals that He is the life-support of the faithful. While they have no capacity to cling to Him, He has all the capacity to take a firm hold of them. In union with Jesus Christ the faithful defeat even death. This victory is not attributed to any human achievement but on Jesus who is the resurrection and the life. The resurrection and the life of such a quality that whosoever believes in Him will actually live even though she or he dies (*cf.* 11:25). In this way, the faithful have such security in Christ that people with enduring faith, those who live and believe in Jesus will never die (*cf.* 11:26). What would this message mean to people of Sub-Saharan Africa where the effects of HIV/Aids are devastating?

The eternal security that assures life and proclaims victory should certainly have a positive effect of pastoral practice in a very demanding context of several crises ranging from natural disasters to tragedies caused by human failure.

John 6:39-40

The fourth text that we shall examine is interesting. John (6:39-40) quotes Jesus as having declared that:

And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, ^p but raise them up at the last day. For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son ^r and believes in him shall have eternal life, ^s and I will raise him up at the last day.”

In this Johannine text, the will of God is that Jesus should not lose anyone of all people who have been given to Him in faith. Even those that die Jesus pledges to raise them at the last day. Though death

appears to be a huge loss socially and economically, those who are in union with Jesus Christ die to gain eternal life through the Son of the living God. Jesus Christ has authority over all people (cf 17:2-3). Union involving Jesus Christ and the faithful is unbreakable and eternally secure because it rests in God who is the greater than all. They are so secure that there is no one who can snatch the faithful out of God's hand (cf. Jn 10:27-29)

To sum up, the faithful have eternal security that they do not have to fear that they may fall out of grace. According to the afore-alluded to thought attributed to Jesus Christ, the bases for this security is not in the faithful themselves, but the unbreakable union with Jesus Christ. Eternal security rests on the almighty God.

Having discussed texts that are concerned with eternal security attributed to Jesus Christ, perhaps this can be the juncture to discuss other texts but this time attributed to Paul who is the second major contributor to the New Testament. Actually Paul dominates the New Testament. Out of 657 pages of the Greek test in the (Nestle-Aland 26th ed.) 156 is linked to Paul (Keck 1988:5), which is quarter of the New Testament. More than half of the Book of Acts is devoted to Paul. Therefore, it is necessary to find out whether or not such an important figure viewed eternal security as an issue in his pastoral and evangelistic ministry.

For the purposes of this article, though we are aware of several contributions of Paul to the New Testament (cf Keck 1988: 24), we view it unnecessary to go into the details. Though tradition classifies Pauline writings into various categories such as authentic writings (1 Thessalonians, Galatians, Philippians, Philemon, 1 & 2 Corinthians, Romans) and deutero-Pauline writings (Colossians, Ephesians, 2 Thessalonians, 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus) we will treat them on the same level.

We are in full agreement with Dunn (1998:4) when he argues that;

It is important, therefore, for each generation of Christian theology to reflect afresh on Paul's theology. And over generations there has been no dearth to such attempts. But in the past fifty years, since Bultmann's epochal exposition of NT theology, there has been only a handful of full-scale attempts to restate or wrestle with Paul's theology at a sustained depth. There have been several briefer treatments as part of a New Testament theology, or at a more popular level.

As pointed out, Dunn's insights are very important to consider in order to understand and appreciate Paul and his theology. At this stage, these insights can only serve as some pre-understanding of the texts that we shall discuss. Of course, it is cardinal to always take into consideration hermeneutic wisdom that reveals that every text is created within some context (Tate 1997:29).

With the above consideration, was eternal security an issue for Paul? To address this question, let us discuss some selected text from Pauline writings.

IV. Paul on Eternal Security of Believers

Romans 8:29-30; 34

²⁸ And we know that in all things God works for the good^j of those who love him,³⁸ who³⁹ have been called^k according to his purpose.¹ ²⁹ For those God foreknew^m he also predestinedⁿ to be conformed to the likeness of his Son,^o that he might be the firstborn^p among many brothers. ³⁰ And those he predestined,^q he also called;^r those he called, he also justified;^s those he justified, he also glorified.^t ³¹ What, then, shall we say in response to this?^u If God is for us,^v who can be against us?^w ³² He who did not spare his own Son,^x but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? ³³ Who will bring any charge^y against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. ³⁴ Who is he that condemns?^z Christ Jesus, who died^a —more than that, who was raised to life^b —is at the right hand of God^c and is also interceding for us.

In this rich text Paul raises a number of issues. He begins with a statement that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose. A good statement to recite when one is in the midst of prosperity. How about when one's security is threatened? Can someone still recite the statement and if yes, with the same vigor? Going a little beyond these questions, Paul goes on to state that if God is for His people, those who love Him and are called according to His purpose, if God is with them, who can be against them? Without directly responding to the question that in all forms is rhetorical, the missionary pastor goes for another rhetorical question asking whether there is anyone who can lay a charge against God's people. Then he proceeds to point out real issues that threaten human life. He asks whether or not trouble, hardship, persecution, famine, nakedness, danger and sword can break the union of Jesus Christ with the faithful (8:35)? To appreciate these

statements from Paul, a panoramic view into the context is necessary to which we briefly turn.

In the Greco-Roman world during the time these issues in reference led to various tensions. To get some insight into that context, Theissen (1982:28-29) renders some help when he indicates that:

The bearers of what later came to be understood as “Christianity” were, rather, itinerant missionaries, apostles and prophets who could depend on small groups of sympathizers. What they represented was not only inner Jewish renewal movement marked by a pronounced socially divergent posture. At that time those who wished to renounce their social existence in order to adopt a different style of life were confronted with several possibilities. They could become beggars, thieves, guerrillas, Essenes – or, just as well, apostles, prophets, or missionaries. Sometimes they might try a variety of these in succession, as did Simon the Zealot (Lk.6:15). There were robbers and beggars everywhere, of course, but what is extraordinary is that movements merely to such things could actually become bearers of the religious and social renewal of an entire society. This unusual significance of socially divergent behavior in Palestine society of the time is in no doubt linked with the same deep-seated social crisis which found explosive expression in the Jewish War.

The issues in reference in the Pauline rhetorical questions connect with what Theissen refers to as the “deep-seated social crisis” that exploded into war. Without rendering theoretical and philosophical service, Paul draws from his fundamental theological convictions to declare in Romans 8:38-39:

³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, ⁴¹ neither the present nor the future, ^j nor any powers, ^k ³⁹ neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God ^l that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

In this fundamental statement Paul shares the same wavelength with Jesus in depicting God as the greatest and who cannot be challenged by any other powers. The love of God transcends all security concerns.

1 Corinthians 1:8-9 – Source of Sustaining Power

The second text from the Pauline corpus 1 Corinthians 1:8-9 where Paul is quoted as having encouraged the Corinthians that:

⁸ He will keep you strong to the end, so that you will be blameless ^o on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. ^p

⁹ God, who has called you ^q into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, ^r is faithful.^s

Amidst several concerns of Corinthians, they hear the good news that God who has sanctified in Christ Jesus and called them to be holy ... (1:2) will keep them strong not halfway but to the end, so that they will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. According to this text, the faithful have eternal security. However, this security is not acquired by human technology, education or indeed by any means. It is security imputed on them by God through Christ Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Believer should refrain from grieving the Holy Spirit of God with whom they were sealed for the day of redemption (Eph 4:30). All security is as a result of the sealing with the Holy Spirit and in no way would this be a human endeavour.

2 Corinthians 1:22

The third text to discuss is 2 Corinthians 1:22 which reads:

²¹ Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm ^p in Christ. He anointed^q us,²² set his seal ^r of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.

Just in case the Corinthians allowed themselves to be seized by arrogance over the several charismatic gifts that were being exercised in the Church, Paul pastorally ministers to them by unequivocally indicating that *it is God* who makes the faithful stand firm. Not only has God regenerated and anointed the faithful, but He has also set His seal of ownership by putting a deposit in the hearts of the faithful as a guarantee towards what is to come. In 2 Timothy 4:16 the apostle complains that everyone deserted him at the first defense and he had no support. He pastorally avoids cursing the disappointing deserter by wishing and praying that the offense may not be held against them. There is no doubt that Paul was seized by loneliness and perhaps he avoids cursing those who deserted him because in his conviction, evil must be overcome with good (Rom 12:21). But is this the only reason? It seems the courage to overcome hopelessness when those who should have assisted deserted instead, when they were needed most, is rooted in the statement of 2 Timothy 4:18. In this verse, the apostle unreservedly allows his conviction and the truth that the Lord would certainly rescue him from every evil attack and would bring him safely to His heavenly kingdom.

The teaching locating the security of the faithful in the realm of the triune God appears in several scriptures. Two other New Testament texts where this teaching clearly comes up is in Hebrews (7:25) in which the author proclaims that Jesus is able to save completely those who come to God through Him. The basis is explained in the same verse that complete salvation is possible on the basis of Jesus' intercession for the faithful. It is not on account of any human achievement but on the basis of the triune God.

On the same wavelength the author of 1 Peter 1:3-5 declares:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! ^m In his great mercy ⁿ he has given us new birth ^o into a living hope ^p through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ^q ⁴ and into an inheritance ^r that can never perish, spoil or fade ^s —kept in heaven for you, ^t ⁵ who through faith are shielded by God's power ^u until the coming of the salvation ^v that is ready to be revealed ^w in the last time.

It is important to note that God has given not only new birth, but also an inheritance that never perishes, spoils or fades. Through faith believers are shielded by God's power until the fulfillment of salvation.

A good reading of these portions of Scripture reveals that eternal security of the faithful is certain. It is not what might fail for whatever reasons because God is himself the basis.

To confess that God is good all the time and all the time God is good has become a revival slogan among many religious groups. The genuineness of this confession faces real tests in times of crisis.

In times when people die in large numbers due to various causes, many people question the providential care of God. In many African Countries the dead command a lot of respect. When a mourning party approaches, it used to be common for people to stop until the funeral procession passes. This was a way of life until the early 1980s. From the 1990s to date, things have changed. For instance, in Lusaka, Zambia, if someone tried to re-live that time and planned to stop upon the approaching funeral procession, such a person would not reach his or her destination. The reason being simply that in a day, one does not meet one funeral procession but several of them. People are dying massively mainly due to HIV/AIDS. The writer has observed that around major cities, one of the lucrative business ventures is not only dealing in cascades and coffins but also converting farms into private

high cost and well-decorated cemeteries or memorial parks as the billboards read.

In such moments where is God and is there really anything like eternal security that one can talk about? The Biblical answer is the presence of God is not questionable at all. Even in moment of hardship and suffering God providentially cares. Migliore (1991:100) reveals that God has providential care over His entire creation:

Christians confess the lordship and providential care of God over the world. God the creator does not abandon the creation, leaving it to run on its own, as deism teaches. The true God is no absentee landlord but remains ever faithful, upholding, blessing and guiding the creation to its appointed goal. God's continuing care for all creatures is attested in many passages of scripture (e.g Ps.104:27-30), perhaps the most familiar being the teaching of Jesus that God sends rain on both the just and the unjust (Matt. 5:45), feeds the birds of the air, clothes the lilies of the fields (Matt. 6:26-30), and knows every hair on our head (Matt.10:30).

Migliore (:101) further states that to wish the world was immune from *every* form of struggle and *every* form of suffering would be to wish not to have been created at all. This is a very fundamental observation. Life is worthy living amidst its ups and downs because therein, we define ourselves.

Unless there has been darkness, the value of light remains unnoticed.

Discussing happiness, Philip Yancey (2001:53) quotes a Chinese Philosophy and states that:

To be dry and thirsty in a hot and dusty land – and feel great drops of rain on my bare skin – ah, is this not happiness! To have an itch on my private part my body – and finally to escape from my friends and to a hiding place where I can scratch – ah, is not happiness! ... Everywhere a greater joy is preceded by a greater suffering.

In this quotation, it is necessary to note that pain and pleasure are presented as companions. Much as our society presents us with a life that is prosperous, reality compels us to testify that pain and suffering crouch at our doors. Nevertheless, all this does not take away the providential care of God upon the faithful and does not mean that humanity should be passive and except all suffering as ordained by God. This view is also upheld by Louis Berkoff (1996:165) who writes that:

While the term “providence” is not found in Scripture, the doctrine of providence is eminently Scriptural. The word is derived from the Latin *providentia* which corresponds to the Greek *pronoia*. These words mean primarily prescience or foresight, but gradually acquired other meanings. Foresight is associated, on the one hand, with plans for the future, and on the other hand, with the actual realization of these plans. Thus the word “providence” has come to signify the provision which God makes for the ends of His government, and reservation and government of all His creatures.

God has not abandoned His creation. He is not an absent landlord. He cares and part of His care includes the eternal security of the faithful who live in union with Christ Jesus. As the faithful live or die in Christ Jesus, they have eternal security and persevere. Louis Berkof (:545) discusses the eternal security or perseverance in a very interesting way. He argues that:

The doctrine of the perseverance of the saints is to the effect that they whom God has regenerated and effectually called to a state of grace, can neither totally nor finally fall away from that state, but shall certainly persevere therein to the end and be eternally saved ...

Moreover, we should guard against the possible misunderstanding that this perseverance is regarded as an inherent property of the believer or as a continuous activity of man, by means of which he perseveres in the way of salvation ...

It is, strictly speaking, not man but God who perseveres. Perseverance may be defined as that continuous operation of the Holy Spirit in the believer, by which the work of divine grace that is begun in the heart, is continued and brought to completion (546).

There are a number of insights we can pencil in from above. Firstly, the doctrine of eternal security is grounded in Scripture. God through Christ perseveres such that the faithful should never live in fear that they may fall away. Christ Jesus intercedes for them and holds them so firmly that no one can snatch them out of the hands of Christ Jesus. They have been sealed by Holy Spirit towards the *parousia*. When Christ Jesus will not only return to judge the living and the dead as Paul states in 2 Corinthians 5:10, but much more than judgment to take with the faithful with Him and dwell in the Fathers’ house forever (John14:3). However, it is a responsibility of all authentic believers in Christ Jesus to guard against all forms of misunderstanding.

Conclusion

After the above investigation and reflection, what can we say is the effects of belief in the doctrine of eternal security on the practice of theology?

As we conclude our discussion, a number of propositions can be made and among them are the following that we consider critical:

- Security in all aspects of human life is a key need for humanity. Humanity perishes or flourishes where security is either compromised or sustained.
- As afore-mentioned, no life is worthy living, no project is worthy undertaking and no religion is worthy practicing without the offer of a future or better still eternal security.
- Eternal security is a form of security and is key to faith living. Any faith that ignores security is hollow and therefore, must be despised and rejected apriori
- Eternal security is not a mere subject of belief. It is a real Biblically rooted teaching that attracted the attention of several Biblical figures including Jesus and Paul to mention but a few.
- In this teaching, continuous operation of the Holy Spirit in the believer, by which the work of divine grace that is begun in the heart, is continued and brought to completion. This means that eternal security is the provision of God who Himself perseveres with the faithful.
- No matter what pain and suffering from any source, the faithful are secure on the basis of the triune God who enables the faithful to stand. In this case, the regenerated should overcome all forms fear and embarrassment (McNeill 2010:71). Instead, live in joy and confidence knowing that our God is the biggest and greatest one who surpasses everything.
- Understanding and seeking religious life that is informed by the above would positively affect the practice of theology in such a way that God and His kingdom would occupy the central place in believing humanity. The shocking instruction of Jesus ... *But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness...*(Matthew 6:33), would really provide a

standard for life. Even in modern times where life is driven opposite way. Even the most religious or spiritually minded live in personal Trinitarian ways of *I, me and myself*. I must live; I must generate a lot of money and other wealth; I must be best clothed, I must be fed, I must have the best of car, cash and cell phone. The greatest concern of our lives is not the kingdom of God, but ourselves and how we must survive. Jesus placed this in reversal: Get rightly related to God first, maintain that as the great care of life and never put the concern of care on other things (Chambers 2006:148).

- The other effect of belief and understanding of eternal security would be economic. Many people particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa make expensive travels in search of healing. Some get loans or spend retirement benefit to meet airfare and hotel accommodation in some foreign country to participate in some Bishop's or Prophet's much televised healing session. On the one hand, some return and tell testimonies stating that they are healed. On the other hand, however, others return dead, leaving their surviving families in debt. Sound understanding of pain, suffering and the eternal security that the faithful enjoy regardless of their geographic location, would reverse some of the extremes. Which God is in my neighbouring country who is not present in my own country? Sound understanding of eternal security would transform faith communities to be really centres of worship. Every member would take worship as central and so exercise restraint on issues of conflict. And where conflicts arise, it would offer all concerned to glorify God.
- Belief and sound understanding of eternal security would bring a stop to the clericalization of the Church. Christ Jesus' intercession and God's perseverance are not imputed on one on the basis of position and title that she or he holds. It is not even on the basis of gender or age, it is based on faith in Christ Jesus.
- The proper positioning of this teaching should liberate every member to demand treatment with dignity at the hands of Church systems and personalities and resist all forms of dehumanization and abuse.

- Belief in eternal security would lead to a practice of theology that is Christocentric and ascribes all glory to God. It would lead to a practice of theology powered by the Reformation motto: *Soli Deo Gloriac-* to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen (Jude 25).

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