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**How Does the Doctrine of Eternal Security Affect our
Pastoral Theology?**

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Introduction

The question “Are you sure that you will enter heaven” is a question many find difficult to answer. I have heard many preachers or leaders in worship make prayer phrases like “may you be part of those who will make heaven.” Or they say, “You will make heaven.” And you hear a resounding “Amen!” Three questions often came to my mind in such instances: 1) Does one enters heaven by just asking in prayer to be allowed in heaven or a leader simply promising them? Do we not realize that accepting the gospel message by acknowledging Christ as Lord and Savior is the guarantee for salvation and not just asking to be allowed into heaven? Are these

¹ See www.NBTSNG.org – He is editor of *Ogbomosho Journal of Theology* (OJOT) and several journal articles, chapter in books and books, the most recent being *Understanding God and Destiny*.

people saying “amen” or making the petition having any sense of assurance of their salvation? This petition or promise of heaven is often made not with the presentation of the gospel nor invitation to the people to believe in the Lord Jesus.

I often felt that some part of their religious worldview before they came to acknowledged Jesus must still be part of them not to raise questions as to the legitimacy of the prayer or promise. All world religions except Evangelical Christianity teach that only God knows who will be saved for certain. By this they mean that no human being can know whether he or she will be saved or not. No one can be sure. When this doubt is expressed by the evangelicals, it is probable that they hold to a view of eternal security that leaves them with no assurance of salvation as in any other world religion. This essay affirms that being certain of one’s salvation is not only possible but real for those who acknowledge Jesus as Lord; and, the view one holds affects his or her practical theology.

This article demonstrates the interrelatedness of doctrines and their impact on the total life of the Church with specific focus on the doctrine of eternal security. It is a doctrine much discussed and one that has attracted varied interpretations through all of church history. The intensity of the discussion grew from the time of the reformation on. It seems today though, not much of the doctrine is in discussion in direct form as its taxonomy expanded. A critical look at the various Christian communities however reveals an underlying stamp of one of the various expressions of this doctrine on their theory and practice. It seems that a good number are not conscious of their version of interpretation of this doctrine as you see that play out in their self-expression in liturgy, theology, missions and service. The unconsciousness is discerned through observable contradiction in the flow of their theology; for example, the petition or promise mentioned above in spite of the evidence of their confession of eternal security in their liturgy. There is no Church denomination that does not express one form within the taxonomy of this doctrine.

The doctrine of eternal security is cardinal to the Church. Its importance cannot be overemphasized as it affects our view of salvation which is central to the fact of the existence of the faith itself. It is not the intention in this article to give full taxonomy of this doctrine as could be observed. But, there is an attempt to look at the

most systematized perspectives with the goal to provide an understanding of the doctrine itself. This will form the basis, along with an understanding of pastoral theology, for presenting the impact of eternal security on our pastoral theology.

It is my observation that most of the writings on this doctrine focused more in interpretation of the doctrine rather than discussing its implication to the Church life. There is more interest in saying “this is what we believe;” rather than, “how does it impact the believers’ lives.” For the instances of discussing the question – “why do we believe in it;” the response is more – “because our founding fathers passed it on to us.” The implication of the doctrine which is the focus herein is therefore the drawing of inferences from the expression of this doctrine in its relationship to other doctrine. I will encourage a more concentrated effort in the area of drawing inferences from the various expressions of this doctrine. It will go a long way helping us come to terms with the impact of this doctrine through preaching and teaching on those who hear the preachers and teachers. This research tries to give the logical contexts of the various conclusions about the subject of eternal security. On the basis of the conclusion reached, a proposal will be developed.

A. Insight into the Doctrine of Eternal Security

The two earliest views of the doctrine of eternal security were the Augustinian and Palegian views later expanded by Calvin and Arminius as Calvinist and Arminian views respectively. These views grew as two opposing poles. Each of these also expanded into new typologies on the subject of eternal security. In a book edited by J. Matthew Pinson, four main views on the doctrine of eternal security were discussed namely, Classical Calvinism, Moderate Calvinism, Reformed Arminianism and Wesleyan Arminianism. The four views were discussed by Michael S. Horton, Norman L. Geisler, Stephen M. Ashby and J. Steven Harper respectively.

The Classical Calvinists hold to the Sovereignty of God to affirm that it is God who secures the believer who cannot fall and cannot resist the grace offered by God. There is nothing on the part of man to do about his or her security. The Moderate Calvinist on the other hand moderates the Classical view to accommodate present assurance which they claim is absent from the Classical and Moderate Arminian views to accommodate future security which they claim also as

lacking in Arminianism. The above two views are similar in the positing that apostasy is not possible and emphasis on God as the securer of one's salvation. The Reformed Arminians hold that apostasy is possible and when it occurs it is irrevocable. It lays emphasis on the human role in experiencing salvation. This is interpreted for them as not having a place for assurance. The Wesleyan Arminianism holds to "conditional election, universal atonement, resistible grace and the possibility of apostasy." For them, apostasy could come by not confessing sins or unbelief, but could be remedied through repentance.² The last two views emphasize human responsibility and the possibility of apostasy.

Conclusions about eternal security could also be seen from additional categorizations such as: The Covenant view, 'Calminian' view, and others that may not have an identity label. There are other views that may be found among groups that call themselves Christian that are not considered mainline Christianity such as humanism, Christian Science, etc. Such views may be observable among those who even claim to be evangelical. The tapestry on this view is so split and comes with various terminologies that need to be the focus of another research. For the Evangelicals however the first four views are characteristic.

Some evangelicals are more settled on their denominational view than others. Among the evangelicals generally, the Baptists seem to have more variant perspectives than any other. The reason being they have always held to a view that accept both Calvinist and Arminian views in parts. The challenge then becomes that of the degree to which the view is Calvinist or Arminian. The reason for this is not farfetched: the Baptist sees the Bible as inerrant and the sole authority for faith and practice. Significant expressions of both Calvinist and Arminian views are scripturally supported.

Whichever of the views taken on eternal security is informed by some theological variables. The difficulty or impossibility of harmonizing these variables by the available evidence or evidences account for the differences of the conclusions reached through the various propositions. This research tries to look at the implications of

² J. Matthew Pinson, "Introduction." In *Four Vies on Eternal Security*. Edited by J. Matthew Pinson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002) 8-19.

the four main propositions in order to be able to make a proposal for a viable direction that is informed by the impact the views have on our practical theology.

The doctrine of eternal security is founded upon many theological variables. One's conclusion about eternal security relates, informs and is also informed by many theological realities. These theological realities include: doctrines of election,³ God's sovereignty,⁴ perseverance⁵ (faith, longsuffering, endurance, human response and responsibility), predestination,⁶ Justification,⁷ righteousness,⁸ apostasy,⁹ reprobation,¹⁰ sin, grace, temptation, human freewill, freedom and responsibility, purgatory, salvation, atonement, human being, sin, etc. The tenet to eternal security is

³ The question that is raised relating to eternal security here has to do with the question, 'why would only some be saved if God elects?' It leads some to hold unto universalism or pluralism which cannot be scripturally defended. We need to affirm that God elects and his election is not partial. For further reading on this subject see Robert A. Peterson, "The Bible's Story of Election." *Presbeterion*. 33:1, 2007, 31-43; and F. H. Klooster, "Elect, Elaction." *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*. Second Edition. Edited by Walter A. Elwell. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001) 270-272.

⁴ God's sovereignty does not contradict human responsibility. God chose to give humans free will of some degree and limit himself. God's foreknowledge does not predetermine human response either. This is another subject which is higher than human comprehension we might say, but it is an act of divine providence. We must acknowledge both in order to hold the right view of eternal security. See. F. H. Klooster, "Sovereignty of God." *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*. Second Edition. Edited by Walter A. Elwell. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001) 1131f; See also Moses Audi, *Understanding God and Destiny*. (Ibadan: Charisa, 2010) 31-37.

⁵ Perseverance has two edges for pastoral ministry and central to the doctrine of eternal security. On the one hand is the assurance of salvation and on the other is endurance. The first is a source of encouragement of the believer and the later is a challenge. The two though seemingly contradictory, are essential. See D. K. White, "Perseverance." *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*. Second Edition. Edited by Walter A. Elwell. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001) 907ff.

⁶ Various extents of this include double predestination. Its interpretation has often questioned human role in the experience of salvation. The issue of the choice of some from before the creation of the world leads some to say that he has also destined some to perdition from the creation of the earth. We can hold to the doctrine of predestination without condemning God with injustice. This doctrine as well has direct bearing to eternal security. See S. R. Spencer, "Predestination." *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*. Second Edition. Edited by Walter A. Elwell. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001) 950.

⁷ See J. I. Packer, "Justification." *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*. Second Edition. Edited by Walter A. Elwell. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001) 643-646; Robert A. Kelly, "Successful or Justified? The North American Doctrine of Salvation by Works." *Concordia Theological Quarterly*. 65:3, 2001 (224-245). See also Gottfried. Martens, "Agreement and Disagreement on Justification by Faith Alone." *Concordia Theological Quarterly*. 65:3, 2001 (195-223)

⁸ See Timothy. Saleska, "The Two Kinds of Righteousness! What's a Preacher to Do?" *Concordia Journal*. 33:2, 2007 (136-145); and, Charles P. Arand and Joel Biermann, "Why the Two Kinds of Righteousness?" *Concordia Journal*. 33:2, 2007 (116-135).

⁹ See L. G. Whitlock, Jr. "Apostacy." *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*. Second Edition. Edited by Walter A. Elwell. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001) 85.

¹⁰ See W. S. Reid, "Reprobation." *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*. Second Edition. Edited by Walter A. Elwell. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001) 1012f.

informed and characterized by the doctrines listed above. There is no room to fully discuss these doctrines, but the short statements in the endnotes provide the dimensions for evidence of the relationship with this given doctrine.

B. Demarest Defines Assurance of salvation as “the confidence of the believers in Christ that notwithstanding their mortal sinful condition they are irrevocably children of God and heirs of heaven.”¹¹ God, through the Holy Spirit provides the believer with the assurance or ‘certainty’ of their legal standing in God’s family. This is widely taught in the Bible – especially in the teaching of Pauline Epistles, John and Hebrews. We note both objective and subjective basis for this assurance in the Bible. The objective dimension has to do with the affirmation of the Word of God – the Bible, that God assures believers that he has chosen them in the atonement of Christ. This has nothing to do with emotion. The second aspect has to do with the personal conviction by the Holy Spirit in the believer. There are those who may be believers yet do not have the assurance in the subjective sense of the experience. This may happen in the case that such individual still has sinful habits and not reading the word of God, etc.¹² Demarest adds, “The normal experience of assurance achieved by faith and obedience results in security in an age of insecurity, selfless service to God and neighbor, and confidence in the face of death.”¹³ The Roman Catholics rejects this doctrine due to their teaching on merit and purgatory. All the reformers however taught this doctrine.¹⁴

Arthur W. Pink’s discussion of the subject goes as follows. Eternal security is founded on the fact that God is the one who preserves those who believe (saints). It is the faith they already have. Several Scriptural passages are used to illustrate this: 1 Samuel 2:9; Psalm 37:28; 87:10; Romans 8:27 and 2 Thessalonians 1:10. An essential dimension of the life of the saint is to desire and pursue righteousness – see Titus 2:11, 12. They acknowledge that they have received grace and the grace is sufficient which is also evident in the

¹¹ B. Demarest, “Assurance.” *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*. Second Edition. Edited by Walter A. Elwell. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001) 108.

¹² Demarest, 108-109.

¹³ Demarest, 109.

¹⁴ Demarest.

Bible – Romans 5:17; Ephesians 4:7; James 4:6; John 1:14, 16; Hebrews 4:16; 1 Corinthians 12:19.¹⁵

What the doctrine of eternal security entails include 1) the saints are enabled by the Word of God, his grace; 2) those who are saved will continue to live by faith to the very end; 3) they will meditate on the word of God and put it to practice through the grace that continues to prepare the believer for ‘every good work;’ 4) challenges and dangers are eminent but the believer will remain by the grace of God through the narrow path; 5) resistance in the life of the believer is powered by God; 6) it entails constant struggle to overcome sin; and, 7) it is the reality of God’s grace and will to save.¹⁶ In the experience of salvation, the believer is active and conscious; committed to the faith, daily walk with God and desire for greater godliness. The doctrine affirms that he or she who believes and enters into fellowship with God in Christ will not opt out of the fellowship but will desire more and more of it.¹⁷ It does not mean that one who can do what he or she likes after accepting Jesus. While it is contrary to the Arminian view that holds an uncertain view of salvation, it is also far from the use of the slogan “once saved always saved” (as obtained in the Moderate Calvinist view) to be unconcerned about the future and the need to live a transformed life.¹⁸

The doctrine does not accept the interpretation that one who believes and later rejects the faith and walked away contrary to it will be saved whether he likes or not (which is also a dimension of the Moderate Calvinist view).¹⁹ Pink further identified seven concepts that this doctrine does not mean. 1) It does not mean that everyone who professes Jesus Christ will be saved even if they live contrary to profession. 2) It does not mean that one will not lose his “seeming grace” because there are those who do not belong that cannot be identified now. 3) ‘Initial or preparatory grace’ does not equal saints who persevere. 4) It does not mean that God’s grace is left in our hands and it will abide. 5) It does not mean that grace cannot be “hindered” and suffer “relapse” ever. 6) Sin could bring discomfort in

¹⁵ Arthur W. Pink. *Eternal Security*. (Grand Rapids: Guardian Press, 1974) 22ff.

¹⁶ Pink, 26-69.

¹⁷ Pink, 22.

¹⁸ Pink, 21f.

¹⁹ Pink, 22.

the relationship, but the legal standing is not lost. (I.e. though sin brings discomfort, it does not nullify the adoption of the believer by God). 7) The experience of grace does not nullify the necessity for the saint to persevere.²⁰

Eternal security is sometimes referred to as perseverance, or assurance or even preservation. It is the work of God guaranteeing the believers with the certainty of salvation as a gift of grace which cannot be lost. It has the aspect of the assurance of salvation for now as well as the eternal certainty. This is so because of the love, power and purpose of God the father; because of the death, and prayer of the Lord Jesus and because of the regenerating, indwelling, baptizing and sealing work of the Holy Spirit for those who believe.²¹

In a summary, eternal security is the assurance that salvation is guaranteed for the believer in Christ as an act of God's grace and gift. Such a believer will for the joy set for him or her seek to know and do the will of God. This will of God includes letting others know about this grace God has offered for all in Christ Jesus. This leads to perseverance which is also possible through God's grace. For those who do not experience salvation, it is not as if they were deprived of the grace. They have been given the same opportunity with the expectation to respond in faith. When they fail to respond, they will be held responsible for their unbelief. Millard J. Erickson also explains this by affirming that salvation is seen as "single continuous process" rather than linear or series of events.²² Some may accuse Erickson of being silent about the life of the believer here on earth. This assurance is not only for the consummation but even from the

²⁰ Pink, 23-25. A criticism may arise here about the tenet to assurance that it might be the result of indoctrination or 'dogma' as the critics of religion always do with the accusation that religion is subjective and opposed to reason. This criticism cannot stand because of the inerrancy of the Bible. The Bible teaches this doctrine as an act of God by his love which is evident in the incarnation and the atonement in Christ. God intruded into human history which cannot be wiped out no matter what the human being want to say. The experience has dumfounded the world and convicted it with its frailty. Though it does not subject itself to scientific proofs and reasoning, it is affirmed by the human conscience.

²¹ Charles Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 328-332.

²² Millard J. Erickson, *Introducing Christian Doctrine*. 2nd edition (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001) 290. He discusses the time in relation to salvation. Part ten of this book discusses the theology of salvation covering most of these concepts addressed here; Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology* (Canada: Victor Books, 1988). His sections on Sin and of Salvation are a reference point here. He has wonderful summaries at the end of each chapter that provides easy to grasp explanation of the doctrine as well. You can also see Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* 2nd edition. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985).

day one enters into a covenant relationship with God in Christ. The goodness in encountering Jesus is so wonderful that whoever gets into it will not desire to get out of it for any reason. When temptation comes that raises doubts, the witness of Holy Spirit's within, The Word of God, the loss of inner peace that passes all understanding, the witness of the faith community, the benefit of the relationship with God in prayer, etc; counters any consideration of abandonment of the faith. Hence, no one can boast about their salvation because it is made possible only by God. Evidently, the Church must accept Calvinist emphasis of the Sovereign act of God, human depravity and perseverance of saints and the Arminian emphasis on human responsibility and accountability. It is in balancing between the two poles that an effective doctrine of eternal security enhances the course of the Church. A tenet on one of the views in isolation will lead to errant effect on the practical theology of the Church.

B. Challenges Surrounding the Doctrine of Eternal Security

The challenge of multiple conclusions raises the tendencies for controversy. Bell discusses how controversy over this doctrine, called “the Marrow Controversy” in the 1717 following, affected mainland Europe in his book, *Calvin and the Scottish Theology*.²³ It will be helpful to be constantly reminded that the work of theologians is to help us interpret the Bible for every given generation. This should make us be weary of classification of concepts as strict modes like we find in this doctrine. The struggle should not be whether we are Calvinist or Arminian, but biblical.

The temptation to uphold theological heroes against the witness of the Bible is another challenge facing the church here. Those theologians who have made landmark contribution to Christianity like the Early Church fathers, the reformers, and the like are often represented in strong terms as if they are the inerrant interpretation of the Bible without the consciousness that they interpreted the Bible for their generation and we need to interpret it for ours. This is not to imply that we learn nothing from the earlier classical interpretation; but acknowledge that we all go to the Bible and with the help of the Holy Spirit come with an understanding that is contextual yet true to

²³ M. Charles Bell, *Calvin and the Scottish Theology: The Doctrine of Assurance*. (Edinburgh: The Handsel Press, 1985), 151ff.

the Biblical text. This should not be difficult for the evangelicals with their tenet to “*sola Scriptura*.”

Another challenge is the tendency to go in search for unnecessary details. For instance when the Bible asserts that God has chosen those who will be saved before the foundation of the earth, we often go further to say therefore he has chosen some for damnation without strong scriptural justification. The limit of the affirmation of the Bible is that “whoever does not believe stands condemned already” (John 3:18) not because God chose them for it without opportunities and yet hold them culpable for their sin while he forgives others. The verse above continues “because he did not believe in the name of God’s one and only Son.” When we go beyond the provision of Biblical text, it brings more harm than good by widening the dividing lines. Take another example, all theologians are agreed (at least the evangelicals) that human depravity and salvation in Christ as the remedy; we often find details such as inherited sin or imputed sin and inherited guilt of the first Adam on all as Augustine and Calvin.²⁴ These kinds of details can be misleading and can take our focus away from the emphasis of the Bible. The fact of the Bible here is that we are all sinners before God- “not one is righteous!”(Romans 3:10, 23). The details we often seek lead us to shifting culpability.

C. Understanding Pastoral Theology

Loughridge defined pastoral theology as “a practical application of the scripture to the relationship between a minister of the gospel and the people for whose spiritual well-being he is responsible. It is theology because it deals with the things of God and his word. It is pastoral, because it relates to a pastor and his people.”²⁵ This is sometimes called practical theology. From the foregoing, pastoral theology would include ministry in the areas of missions,²⁶ pastoral care, spiritual nurture, teaching and preaching. It has to do with expressions in a Christian community that pertains to living out the

²⁴ Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 634f.

²⁵ Adam Loughridge “Pastoral Theology.” *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church*. Edited by J. D. Douglas. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974) 751.

²⁶ Norbert H. Mueller and George Kraus, eds. *Pastoral Theology*. (St. Louis: Concordia, 1990). Mueller and Kraus addressed the missiological dimension of pastoral theology.

content of the gospel ministry for oneself and for the community of faith.

Pastoral theology will include personal and corporate prayer life, personal and corporate ethical self-expression, individual and collective responsibility to the precepts of the Lord as expressed in service and missions. It relates not only to the content of pastoral theology by to the practice and the mindset that determine the motivation as well as the value we attach to the liturgical expressions.

D. The Effect of Eternal Security on Pastoral Theology

The tenet of eternal security affects everything the pastor teaches or does. Here a few aspects of pastoral ministry which have been taken for illustration to show how the tenet affects pastoral theology. What the pastor defines as his role towards members and what constitutes the ground for encouragement and teaching is informed by what he thinks about the assurance of salvation. At best, the pastor will teach hope and assurance to members when he does not have nor believe in eternal security only as a vocation from which he receives his livelihood. For his ministry to be done as a calling and for the strength to demonstrate true hope and true encouragement, it has to be founded in being assured of his salvation and living it out in the ministry. Below here four main areas of pastoral theology are considered for the inference on the impact of eternal security.

1. Eternal Security Impacts the Caring Ministry of the Church

Our view on eternal security informs our perception of the privileges as God's children. An example of the privileges is prayer. We can cry Abba, Father and he hears us. Without the assurance of salvation the courage to pray will be far from us. When we hold to the hyper view that rejects human responsibility on the other hand, we find such pleasure in depravity and weakness that the transformation that ought to take place remains only a wish. The later view will not promote a sense of gratitude either for it is God who chose to do with us what he wishes. Evidence of this is reflected in the time when there was no contradiction between slave trade or ownership and being a Christian. This kind of state does not give room for confession.

Our view on eternal security also informs the theory and practice of pastoral care. Our view affects our care attitude towards the believers. Being sure of our salvation, we will encourage the believers

of the love and care of God through every life situation. When we fail to accept the assurance of our security, our moment of challenges will be despair. The thought whether we are being punished for our sin, the fear of rejection will lead to dislocated relationship with God. Instead of run to God in prayer for instance, we will be full of complains and grudges. The care givers in such situation will be apportioning blame one way or the other.

2. Eternal Security Impacts the Mission of the Church

There is direct relationship between the view one holds on eternal security and theology of missions (they can also be called theologies of salvation). Much discussion also exists about these theologies. Just as the taxonomy of the views on eternal security is growing, taxonomy of the views on the theology of mission is also growing. The dominant theologies of missions that we find are: exclusivism, inclusivism, pluralism, universalism and agnosticism. The evangelical position is the exclusivist view. But the way the exclusivist perspective is expressed is determined by the view held of eternal security stated above. It is possible for Calvinist to hold all five views. Most Calvinists will hold to exclusivism when they hold to limited atonement, double predestination and irresistible grace without a sense of responsible mission towards the unreached. They will hold to inclusivism or pluralism or even universalism when confronted with the justice of God without feeling obliged to participate in mission. For them God will save whoever he pleased. He or she will hold to inclusivism when he or she sees salvation as Christocentric; and pluralism when Christocentrism is not a consideration. He or she will hold to universalism when confronted with the goodness of God. When you observe those who hold to the Calvinist view of eternal security involved in mission and social service, their view is added to by humanism or they hold to a universalist view of salvation. For the former, they do missions because of the need to help those in need here and now. The later they see no need for mission, but social service.

Those who hold to the Arminian view of eternal security in isolation on the other hand uphold human effort for salvation beyond proportion. Their expression of exclusivism will comprise those who “work out their salvation with fear and trembling.” It will present salvation as something to earn. They will see works as if salvation is a

merit. Such will do missions but erroneously laying emphasis on human effort to receive approval. This can degenerate to holding inclusivism or pluralism on the grounds of ‘good works’ by those outside the Church. They are not likely to hold to universalism.

When a middle ground position is taken, one can hold to exclusivism and also involve in missions as a call to responsibility, worship and gratitude. Below are the impacts of eternal security on some brief but specific aspects of practical theology. This I advocate for.

The tenet of eternal security informs our theory and practice of missions. With a hyper view of “It is God who saves those he destined for salvation” there is no need for missions and no urgency. God will save those he foreknew and destined. This was illustrated during the time of William Carey when he was told God will save elect without his help.²⁷ In our time it is no news to hear that the time of mission is gone. One who is proselytizing is despising the religion of others. At a mission summit in Europe I participated in 2007, witnessed one who served as missionary in time past stand up and say “we cannot do missions like our father had done. We only need to let the people discover the Christ in their religion.” This is evidence of either universalism which does not provide security with evidence from the Bible, or takes Christian particularity as necessary; it rather promotes a sense of insecurity of salvation as found in all other religions of the world. Our sense of eternal security will guide our definition of, and interest in mission.

3. Eternal Security Impacts the Teaching and Preaching of the Church

Our possession or lack of it affects our view on the means of salvation. A view that rejects human responsibility and instrumentality will not only wait on God to save those he wishes to save, but will not value the place of faith as well because God saves not because of anything in us. On the other hand a view the holds human role more highly will rely on own strength to live the Christian

²⁷ L. H. Dalton, *Young Man - - Sit Down (William Carey of India)*. Second Edition. (New York: Friendship Press, 1944). In 24 pages the story of the state of the Church was relayed reflecting the sense of exoneration from the task of reconciliation which is clearly in the Bible on the basis of dominant interpretation of the security of believers.

life and may be involved in preaching the gospel in order to get reward or buy his salvation – like paying a penance in Roman Catholicism.

To understand the impact of eternal security here, the first question has to do with ‘how does one experience salvation?’ Is salvation by grace alone? Are there proveniences of grace? In other words, does salvation come by preaching the Word or say baptism, Lord ’s Supper, belonging to a Christian household, and such other proveniences of grace? There is even the question, ‘do we even need to preach the gospel at all?’ The response to these questions is partly informed by our tenet on eternal security.

Our view informs our liturgy. Fellowship with God is the essence of worship. But a fatalistic view may arise for one who hold a hyper-Calvinist position. This could lead to passivity in worship or even see worship as unnecessary. On the other hand, an Arminian view could lead to arrogance of coming to show God how well we have lived without a sense of repentance of our failures. This will reflect the attitude of the Pharisee who went to the temple to pray.²⁸

What we hold affects our view of sin and the nature of grace in relation to human responsibility. The view that overemphasizes the human ability and qualification will take the grace of God for granted while the one who holds to total human passivity will take sin for granted.

4. Eternal Security Impacts the Sense of Responsibility of Believers

What one believes determines our personal assurance of salvation. A right sense of security will provide for us courage in times of suffering and persecution. A denial of human role will make us complacent or may lead us to pray that we will make heaven without consciousness about divine expectation on us. A denial of the divine role on the other hand will lead to finding assurance in good works. Such will struggle to despair as in the end one’s failures stare him or her in the face.

Believing in eternal security informs our response to God in relation to salvation and service. Our service in the body life of the

²⁸ Luke 18:10-14.

Church will be to buy our salvation if we hold to the Arminian view. This will build on the despair and dilemma to ask why when bad things happen to good people. The motivation to serve is not as an act of worship but in order to get a payback for it. For the Calvinist, no service is needed and my response to God is not required.

The given view determines our ethics and values. Our sense of justice is dependent on our view on eternal security. With a view that the human being does not have a shared responsibility, there will be a low sense of justice or injustice. Such will resign to fatalism. With a view that takes God offer of grace and enablement for granted, one's sense of justice or injustice will be at the level of human effort. Such will experience the frustration of inability to be or do right. It can lead to seeing the failure of others and not ours. Such will not be open to the divine enablement which is readily there for those who open their arms to receive. Both extremes do lead to the possession of the "we and they" complexes. No wonder many do not see it a duty to reach out to people different from them because one of the two extremes rule in most Churches.

How we see eternal security determines our self-perception and how we see others. Bell tells of the lack of a sense of assurance of the salvation in the Scottish Highlands and the Americas hinder the believers from feeling they can partake in the Lord's Supper.²⁹ This is true of Africa as well. The Lord's table has become more of a meal of the righteous than it is a moment of recommitment and praise to God for the offer of salvation in the atoning death of Christ. It is no longer a remembrance of the suffering of the Lord that assures us of salvation. Bell again reflects that Calvin taught that God's love is only for the elect.³⁰ This contradicts the affirmation of God's love for the whole world in the Bible (John 3:16) and will further make the believer who hold such view not to care about those God chose not to love.

Conclusion

It is obvious that our view on eternal security is crucial for pastoral theology. And the Bible which all the proponents claim as

²⁹ Bell, *Calvin and the Scottish Theology*, 7.

³⁰ Bell, 13ff.

their source of evidence acknowledges more complexity than any of the factions are willing to admit. Paul, who is the reference point of the Calvinists especially held to a balance between the two extremes in Calvinism and Arminianism. In Ephesians 1:3-10 Paul says,

3 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. 4 For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love 5 he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will— 6 to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. 7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace 8 that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding. 9 And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, 10 to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment — to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ. (NIV).

On the other hand he also says,

12 Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed — not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence — continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, 13 for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose (Phil 2:12-13 NIV).

7 But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. 8 What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ 9 and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ — the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. 10 I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, 11 and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead. 12 Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. 13 Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. 15 All of us who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you. 16 Only let us live up to what we have already attained (Phil 3:7-16 NIV).

The above passages blend the two poles of Paul acknowledging the grace of offer of salvation by God and the commitment on his own part with the assured hope both now and in time to come.

We can also see the two sides in the ministry of Jesus

44 "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day. 45 It is written in the Prophets: 'They will all be taught by God.' Everyone who listens to the Father and learns from him comes to me. 46 No one has seen the Father except the one who is from God; only he has seen the Father. 47 I tell you the truth, he who believes has everlasting life (John 6:44-47 NIV).

If we can only go back to the foundation – the authority of the Bible, we will hold to a balanced view. As stated above, the dependence on ‘heroes of faith’ and the theologians of renown in their narrow interpretations of the Bible will mislead us to partial views that plunged the Church in the dark ages into debates. We find people today who will do all in their power to preserve the theological legacies of renowned theologians without the consciousness of their blind spots and / or the angles that do not constitute an issue for their generation. Again, the essential call here is to return to the Bible which affirms God’s justice, promise to keep the saints, called the saints to responsible living and mission through perseverance. It is time to ask and respond to question within the limits of the evidence the Bible provides without feeling guilty that we are not intelligible enough. Intelligibility is not necessarily a mark of truth especially truth about God who is wholly other! To assume to know all mystery will be self deception; but to seek the fulfillment of the promise of the Holy Spirit who will teach us all things at the level of the ‘light available to us’ as we ‘wait to understand by and by’ is virtue. That is why Paul said in 1 Cor. 13:12 “Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known” (NIV).

When we have a balanced view that acknowledges that God has secured our salvation and has put everything in place to help us in our part of the responsibility, then we will live meaningful Christian life that does not glory in acts of goodness but in God’s providence. Such a life will be full a gratitude to God for the salvation and will be contrite in hear and will respond to God with thanksgiving and good works powered by God himself.

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