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

Dr. Ernest Aime Lockngenu
Instructor of Bible and Theology
Tyndale Learning Center, Yaounde, Cameroon[1]

Introduction

Commonly called by earlier theologians the perseverance of the saints, the doctrine of eternal security affirms that once an individual is saved by the grace of God, he will never fall totally and finally from that security but, he shall be "kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation." H. A. Ironside wrote,

> Once a poor sinner has been regenerated by the Word and the Spirit of God, once he has received a new life and a new nature, has been made partaker of the divine nature, once he has been justified from every charge before the throne of God, it is absolutely impossible that that man should ever again be a lost soul.[2]

Though this doctrine was developed and exposed by reckoned reformers such as John Calvin, it should be noted that it is clearly set forth in the New Testament in very absolute terms – terms that

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[1] See http://tyndale.edu/about/locations/yaounde-cameroon, main campus in Hurst, Texas.

[2] H. A. Ironside, *The Eternal Security of the Believer* (NY: Loizeaux Brothers, 1934), 6.

convey an idea of absolute certainty. It is therein presented as a "work" undertaken by God when a lost soul is saved.

The doctrine of eternal security is related to some basic biblical truths that are capital: depravity (the state of fallen man in whom there is nothing pleasing onto God), efficacious grace (the salvation of fallen man is wrought entirely by God – even the grace he exercises in his salvation comes from God), sovereign grace and eternal election (God chose before the foundation of the earth all those who will be saved from their state of depravity by His divine efficacious grace).[3] Among these basic truths, the doctrine of eternal security is closely tied to the doctrine of sovereign election and sovereign grace.

Before getting into the heart of our topic, the influence of the doctrine of eternal security on our pastoral theology, we are going to briefly explore the doctrine of eternal security in relation to the two above mentioned ones.

Eternal security and sovereign election

In Ephesians 1: 4 apostle Paul writes that God "hath chosen us in him (Christ) before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love." In eternal ages past, God in sovereign election determined to elect some who shall be "before him" in glory and, according to Romans 8:30, these chosen ones are predestined to that glory. From eternity past, God has absolutely and unconditionally chosen some men to eternal life and these men will assuredly be saved. He has set all before the foundation of the earth; no man on earth can be saved on the basis of his own merit. No man on earth can be saved unless he was chosen and is brought into a state of grace, unless he repents and believes. If it be true that God has set all these, He will assuredly give to all whom He has chosen for life faith and holiness and, He will not fail to keep them into that state till the end. Dr. Ralph Wardlaw wrote,

> Election is election to salvation; not to privilege merely, or the enjoyment of the means of salvation, but, through these means, to salvation itself. If this be the Bible doctrine, then it follows inevitably, that all who are elected to salvation shall obtain salvation. … Perseverance is a consequence of election, and

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[3] L. S. Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 & 4, (Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1947-48), 267-68.

involved in it. There can properly be no personal election to salvation without it.[4]

Ryrie adds,

> God purposed to glorify the same group He predestined, called, and justified (Rom. 8:30). This daring statement could not be made if any one of that group could lose his salvation.[5]

To deny the doctrine of eternal security is to deny the doctrine of sovereign election that is clearly taught in Scripture. Every proof election is a proof of the eternal security of the believer.

Eternal Security and Sovereign or Efficacious Grace

God in eternity past did not only determine to elect some men to salvation, but He also did remove all the barriers to that purpose which sin and human will impose. Thus security is assured and, to deny it is to stand for the fact that sovereign election and sovereign grace are powerless. God who determines to save also has the power to preserve those He has chosen. Chafer says,

> Similarly, it is to be seen that the ground upon which sovereign grace advances provides a holy God with the requisite freedom, not merely to save those who are unworthy, but to preserve them after they are saved –even when, as all are, they are unworthy."[6]

Even though sovereign grace takes place in time, it was planned in eternity. According to Romans 8: 30, the very ones God called were the very ones He justified. In John 10: 28 Jesus says that those to whom He gives eternal life "shall never perish", would this be true if anyone receives salvation and then perishes through sin or apostasy? God does not only make sure that the recipients of His efficacious grace are effectively saved but also, He keeps them till the end.

How Does the Doctrine of Eternal Security Affect Our Pastoral Theology?

A strong pastoral theology is built on a strong and sound biblical theology, and far from being speculative, the doctrine of eternal security stands on indisputable biblical facts. We now know that the

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[4] Ralph Wardlaw, *System of Theology*, II, 550.

[5] Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, (Victor Books, 1982), 330.

[6] L. S. Chafer, op. cit., 267.

doctrine of eternal security is inseparable from that of the sovereign election and the sovereign grace of God. It is capital for every preacher of the Word of God to strongly hold to the doctrine of eternal security for it is the basis for a personal assurance of salvation. Once a preacher has the firm assurance that he is saved once and for all, it makes it easier for him to preach with assurance as well. It is not always easy for someone to offer what he does not have. Thus, the doctrine of eternal security affects our pastoral theology in the sense that it helps us build our personal assurance of salvation which in turn serves as a strong basis in the teachings concerning salvation.

Moreover, the doctrine of eternal security sustains the preacher in the right doctrine of salvation by grace alone. Rejecting the doctrine of eternal security may lead one to the position that man has to produce some efforts in order to preserve his salvation. Such a position is not different from the preaching of salvation by works. Born a sinner, God decided before the foundation of the world to save me by His grace and He is the one preserving me from falling away from His grace. Grace saved me and grace will lead me home! Some people contend that, by teaching the doctrine of eternal security, some Christian may be encouraged to live in sin knowing that they are saved and nothing can separate them from the love of God. This may be true. Nonetheless, the Bible commands to teach the "whole counsel of God". If we affirm the doctrine of sovereign election and the doctrine of sovereign grace, we cannot do but affirm the doctrine of eternal security. God chose to elect some men to salvation, He saved them by His grace and He will unfailingly lead them Home.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be noted that the doctrine of eternal security is closely linked to the doctrine of sovereign election and sovereign grace. It affects our pastoral theology in the sense that it helps the preacher build a strong personal assurance of salvation. Standing on this foundation, he can in turn preach it with much assurance to others. The doctrine of eternal security helps the preacher to remain firm in the biblical doctrine concerning salvation.