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Volume 3 – 2011

How Does the Doctrine of Eternal Security Affect our Missiology

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Introduction

The Doctrine of Eternal Security is one of the doctrines that perplexes many Christians. This is not the only Biblical doctrine which is difficult for many Christians to understand. The other Biblical doctrines like the doctrine of predestination, of justification, of sanctification, of eschatology and of pneumatology, are also problematic to many Christians who try to understand them. Like other Biblical doctrines, the Doctrine of Eternal Security is understood in two different perspectives, that is, the perspective of those in favor of this doctrine (the Calvinists) and the perspective of those who are against it (the Arminians). The two questions that need to be attended assiduously are: from the two different perspectives on the Doctrine of Eternal Security, which one is right and which one is wrong? The last question is, “How does the Doctrine of Eternal Security affect our Missiology today?” In this paper, all these two burning questions will be attentively attended and a thorough elucidation of the Doctrine of Eternal Security will be done in this paper.

1. The Doctrine of Eternal Security

1.1 Definition

The Doctrine of Eternal Security can well be defined as the Biblical doctrine which teaches that whom God calls, He also delivers from the dominion and slavery of sin. Since God is faithful, He preserves those who believe to the end.³ God will not fail to bring into His presence for unending enjoyment of spiritual blessings those who have placed their faith in Christ; a corollary of election and efficacious grace, since what God purposes for those He chooses is

³ Enns, P. P. 1997, c1989. *The Moody handbook of theology*. Moody Press: Chicago, Ill.

certain to be accomplished (Jude 1; Ezek.18:24).⁴ This Biblical doctrine concisely teaches that the precise ones God has elected and drawn to Himself through the Holy Spirit will persevere in faith. None whom God has elected will be lost; they are eternally secure.⁵ From the above definition of the Doctrine of Eternal Security, it is quite clear that this doctrine is also called the “perseverance of the saints.”

1.2. Different views on the Doctrine of Eternal Security

Christians know that two experiences lie ahead of them. One of these experiences is physical death or the end of earthly life. The other is the life thereafter, the eternity beyond this life and world. The believer is assured that there will be survival of the former and blessed existence throughout the latter. The Christian, kept by the grace of God, will successfully endure all the trials and temptations of this life, and remain true to the Lord until death. This we term “perseverance of the saints”. A serious question which needs a thorough attention is: “Will the believer who has genuinely been regenerated, justified, adopted by God and united with Jesus Christ persists in that relationship?” In other words, “will a person who becomes a Christian always remain such?” Here we are going to see how the Doctrine of Eternal Security is viewed from two different perspectives, that is, Calvinistic and Arminian views. We will start by focusing on the Calvinistic view and end with the Arminian view. And lastly, an evaluation of the Calvinistic and Arminian views on the Doctrine of Eternal Security will be attended.

1.2.1. The Calvinistic view

The Calvinists position is both clear and forthright on this matter: “They, whom God hath accepted in His Beloved, effectually called and sanctified by His Spirit, can neither totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace; but shall certainly persevere therein to the end, and be eternally saved.”⁶ This point is consistent with the remainder of the Calvinist theological system. Since God has elected certain individuals out of the mass of fallen humanity to receive

⁴ P.S. Karleen, *The Handbook to Bible Study : With a Guide to the Scofield Study System* (Oxford University Press: New York, 1987).

⁵ P.P. Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology* (Moody Press: Chicago, 1997, c1989).

⁶ Westminster Confession of Faith 17:1.

eternal life, and those so chosen will necessarily come to receive eternal life, if follows that there must be a permanence to their salvation. If the elect could at some point lose their salvation, God's election of them to eternal life would not be truly effectual. Thus, the doctrine of election as understood by the Calvinist requires perseverance as well. As Loraine Boettner puts it:

This doctrine (perseverance) does not stand alone but is a necessary part of the Calvinistic system of theology. The doctrine of Election and Efficacious Grace logically imply the certain salvation of those who receive these blessings. If God has chosen men absolutely and unconditionally to eternal life, and if His Spirit effectively applies to them the benefits of redemption, the inescapable conclusion is that these persons shall be saved.⁷

It is not logical consistency alone which leads the Calvinist to hold to the doctrine of perseverance, however. There are numerous biblical teachings which serve independently to support the doctrine. Among them is a group of texts emphasizing the indestructible quality of the salvation which God provides.⁸ An example is 1 Peter 1:3-5: “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade—kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.” The three adjectives used to describe our inheritance are vivid and powerful. They speak of our salvation as incapable of being destroyed in the fashion in which armies ravage a nation during war. It cannot be corrupted or spoiled by the introduction of something impure. And it never fades, no matter what influences are brought to bear upon it. This salvation has a permanent quality about it; it endures!

Various texts emphasizing the persistence and power of divine love also support the doctrine of perseverance.⁹ One such testimony is found in Paul's statement in Romans 8:31-39, culminating in v38-39: “For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor

⁷ Loraine Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*, 8th ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958), 182.

⁸ John Murray, *Redemption – Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), 155.

⁹ Loraine Boettner; *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*, 8th ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958), 185.

demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” This text clearly points to a continued working of God in the life of the believer. Christ does not simply give us eternal life and then abandon us to our human self-efforts. Rather, the work begun in Him is continued until it is completed: “Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus” (Phil. 1:6). Moreover, Christ is said to make intercession for us constantly (Heb. 7:25). Since Jesus said that the father always hears His prayers (John 11:42), it follows that these prayers of intercession for us are effectual. And not only is Christ interceding at the right hand of the Father; but the Holy Spirit also intercedes for us (Rom. 8:26). Thus, even when we do not know how to pray or what to pray for, prayer is being offered for us.

Support for the Calvinist position is also afforded by the biblical assurances that, because of God’s provisions, we will be able to deal with and overcome whatever obstacles and temptations come our way. Our Master will enable us His servants to stand in the face of the judgement (Rom. 14:4). He provides a way for coping with temptations: “No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it” (1 Cor. 10:13).

The Calvinist finds the greatest source of encouragement concerning this matter, however, in the direct promises of the Lord’s keeping. One of the most straightforward is Jesus’ statement to His disciples: “My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand. What my Father has given me is greater than all else, and no one can snatch it out of the Father’s hand. The Father and I are one.”¹⁰ (John 10:27-30). Accordingly, Paul had complete confidence in the Lord’s keeping: “That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day” (2 Tim. 1:12).

¹⁰ *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version* (Thomas Nelson Publishers: Nashville, 1989).

In addition, many Calvinists also infer their view of perseverance from other doctrines.¹¹ Among them is the doctrine of union with Christ. If believers have been made one with Christ and His life flows through them (John 15:1-11), it is inconceivable that anything could nullify that connection. Louis Berkhof says, “It is impossible that they should again be removed from the body, thus frustrating the divine ideal” (1953:547-488). The doctrine of the new birth, the Holy Spirit’s impartation of a new nature to the believer, likewise lends support to the doctrine of perseverance. John states, “No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God’s seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God” (1 John 3:9). If salvation could be lost, there would have to be some reversal of regeneration. But can this be? Can spiritual death actually come to someone in whom the Holy Spirit dwells, that is, to someone who has already been given eternal life? This must surely be impossibility, for eternal life is by definition everlasting. Finally, perseverance is an implication of the biblical teaching that a believer can be assured of salvation. Relevant passages here include Hebrews 6:11; 10:22; and 2 Peter 1:10. Perhaps the clearest of all is found in the Book of 1 John. Having cited several evidences (the testimony of the Spirit, the water, and the blood) that God has given us eternal life in His Son, the apostle summarizes: “I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life” (1 John 3:13). How could one have this assurance if it were possible to lose assurance? That we can have such assurance means that our salvation must be secure.

1.2.2. The Arminian View

A quite different stance from that of the Calvinists is taken by the Arminians. Pelagians, Papists, and Arminians teach, in common, that the truly regenerate believer may totally and finally fall away, and be lost.¹² One of the early statements of the Arminians’ view on the issue of perseverance is that of the Remonstrants. While the position detailed in the *Sententia Remonstrantium* presented to the Synod of Dort is in many ways quite moderate, insisting only that falling away

¹¹ Augustus H. Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Westwood, N.J.: Revell, 1907), 882.

¹² Dabney, L. Robert, *Systematic Theology* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1985), 689.

is possible,¹³ later statement of the Arminian position are more emphatic. These are based upon both scriptural material and experiential phenomena.

The first class of Biblical materials cited by Arminians as bearing upon the issue of perseverance consists of warnings against apostasy. Jesus warned His disciples about the danger of being led astray (Matt. 24:3-14). He said specifically, “Beware that no one leads you astray” (v4). And after describing various events which will take place before His second coming, He added, “And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. And because of the increase of lawlessness, the love of many will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end will be saved” (v11-13).¹⁴ The question which seems to be strong to the Arminians is, “Would Jesus have issued such a warning to His disciples if it were not possible to them to fall away and thus lose their salvation?” This is not the only scripture which is preferable used in defending their stance; there are similar warnings in other portions of Scripture. Paul, whom Calvinists frequently cite in support of their position, suggested that there is a conditional character of salvation: “And you who were once estranged and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his fleshly body through death, so as to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before him, provided that you continue securely established and steadfast in the faith, without shifting from the hope promised by the gospel that you heard”¹⁵ (Col. 1:21-23a). Paul also warned the Corinthians, “So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall!” (1 Cor. 10:12). The writer to the Hebrews was especially a vehement, calling his readers’ attention on several occasions to the dangers of falling away and the importance of being on guard. One notable example is Hebrews 2:1 which says, “We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away.” A slightly different injunction is found in Hebrews 3:12-14 which says “See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called today, so that none

¹³ *Sententia Remonstrantium* 5.3.

¹⁴ *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*, Thomas Nelson Publishers: Nashville, 1989.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness. We have come to share in Christ if we hold firmly till the end the confidence we had at first." It is difficult, says the Arminian, to understand why such warnings were given if the believer cannot fall away.¹⁶

The Arminian also cites texts which urge believers to continue in their faith. An example of these exhortations to faithfulness, which frequently appear in conjunction with warnings such as I have just noted is Hebrews 6:11-12: "We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure. We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised". Paul testified regarding his own diligence and efforts to remain faithful: "No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize" (1 Cor. 9:27). For the Arminians, the urgency of Paul's efforts to keep from being disqualified suggests that even his salvation could be lost.

The Arminians also base their view upon passages which apparently teach that people do apostasize.¹⁷ Hebrews 6:4-6 is perhaps the most commonly cited and straightforward instance: "It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age, if they fall away, to be brought back to repentance, because to their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace". Another instance is Hebrews 10:26-27 "If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God". For the Arminians, the Bible does not simply remain on this abstract level, however. They believe that it also records concrete cases of specific persons who apostasized or fell away.¹⁸ One of the most vivid is the case of King Saul in the Old Testament. He had been chosen and anointed king of Israel, but

¹⁶ Dale Moody, *The Word of Truth: A Summary of Christian Doctrine Based on Biblical Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 350-354.

¹⁷ I Howard Marshall, *Kept by the Power of God* (London: Epworth, 1969), 141.

¹⁸ Samuel Wakefield, *A Complete System of Christian Theology* (Cincinnati: Hitchcock and Walden, 1869), 463-465.

eventually proved so disobedient that God did not answer him when he prayed (1 Samuel 28:6). Rejected by God, Saul lost his position as king and came to a tragic death. A striking New Testament instance of apostasy is Judas Iscariot, who was chosen by Jesus as one of the twelve disciples. It seems inconceivable to the Arminian that either that Jesus would have internationally chosen an unbeliever to be one of His most intimate associates and confidants, or that He made a mistake of judgment in His selection. For the Arminians, the conclusion is clear: when chosen, Judas was a believer. Yet Judas betrayed Jesus and ended his own life apparently without any return to faith in Christ. Surely this must be a case of apostasy. Others who are mentioned include Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11); Hymenaeus and Alexander; who “by rejecting conscience ... have made shipwreck of their faith” (2 Tim. 1:19-20); Hymenaeus and Philetus (2 Tim. 2:16-18); Demas (2 Tim. 4:10); the false teachers and those who follow them reasoning can explain away the obvious impression that these individuals were actual believers who departed from the faith. These are the statements for the Arminians about people who, having had the experience of salvation, departed from it.

1.3. An Evaluation of the Calvinistic and the Arminian Views on the Doctrine of Eternal Security

In our discussion above, we have discoursed two opposed views on the Doctrine of Eternal Security. The advocates of both views have cogent arguments which they can appeal to in support of their positions. Is there truth within both, or must we choose one or the other? According to Erickson (1987:992), one way in which we may deal with this dilemma is to examine two key Biblical passages which serve, respectively, as the major textual support for each of the two theories. These passages are John 10:27-30 and Hebrews 6:4-6. Jesus’ words in John 10:27-30 constitute a powerful declaration of security. Verse 28 is especially emphatic: “I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand”. In the clause “and they shall never perish” John the writer of this Gospel, uses the double negative *ouj mh*; with the aorist subjunctive, which is a very emphatic way of declaring that something will not happen in the future. Jesus is categorically excluding the slightest chance of an apostasy by His sheep. A literal translation would be, “They shall not, repeat, shall not ever perish in the slightest”. This

assertion is followed by statements that no one can snatch believers out of Jesus' hand or out of the Father's hand (v28-29). All in all, this passage is a definite rejection of the idea that a true believer can fall away as could be given. The Calvinists' view is based on the passages like this one.

The Arminians on the other hand argue that Hebrews 6 presents an equally emphatic case for their position. The passage seems clear enough to them, "It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age, if they fall away, to be brought back to repentance, because to their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace." (v4-6). The description is apparently of genuinely saved persons who abandon the faith and thus lose their salvation. There is a logical possibility of apostasy, but it will not come to pass in the case of believers. Although they could abandon their faith and consequently come to the fate described in Hebrews 6, the grace of God prevents them from apostasizing. God does this, not by making it impossible for believers to fall away, but by making it certain that they will not. Our emphasis on "can" and "will not" is not inconsequential. It preserves the freedom for the individual. Believers are capable of repudiating their faith, but will freely choose not to.

One might ask again this question, "If salvation is sure and permanent, what is the point of the warnings and commands given to the believers?" The answer is that they are the means by which God renders it certain that the saved individual will not fall away.¹⁹ But what of the claims that Scripture records cases of actual apostasy? When closely examined, these instances appear much less impressive than at first glance. Some cases, such as that of Peter, should be termed backsliding rather than apostasy. Peter's denial of His Lord was something done in a moment of weakness; it was not a deliberate and willful act of rebellion. There was nothing of permanence in his action. As for Judas Iscariot, there were early indications that he was not regenerate. If we consider particularly the reference to his thievery (John 12:6), it is clear that he was surely not regenerate. In

¹⁹ G.C. Berkhouwer, *Faith and Perseverance* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958), 83-124.

the case of Hymenaeus and Philetus, who had “wandered away from the truth. They say that the resurrection has already taken place, and they destroy the faith of some” (2 Tim. 2:17-18), there is no indication that they had ever been convinced advocates of the truth, or that it had become an intrinsic part of their lives. As a matter of fact, it is significant that the following verse focuses, by contrast, on sure believers: “Nevertheless, God’s solid foundation stands firm, sealed with this inscription: “The Lord knows those who are his,” and, “Everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness” (2 Tim. 2:19).

Even less reliable are the instances cited of contemporary persons who supposedly were at one time true believers but fell away. The difficulty here is pointed up by the fact that we can also cite instances of persons who by their own testimony were never really Christians, but were thought to be so. Further, we must be careful to distinguish cases of temporary backsliding, such as that of Peter, from real abandonment of the faith. Beyond that, we must note that the Bible does not justify identifying every person who makes an outward profession of faith as genuinely regenerate. Jesus warned of false prophets who came in sheep’s clothing, but who are ravenous wolves (Matt. 7:15). They are to be evaluated by their fruits rather than by their verbal claims (v16-20). In the judgment day such people will call Him, “Lord, Lord”, and claim to have prophesied, cast out demons, and done many mighty works in His name (v22). All of these claims will presumably be true. It will not, however, be these individuals who enter the Kingdom of Heaven, but rather those who do the Father’s will (v21). Jesus’ final word regarding the sham believers will be, “I never knew you; depart from me, you evildoers” (v23). From the foregoing considerations it is clear that, in Jesus’ view, not all who appear to be believers are truly that. We conclude that those who appear to have fallen away were never regenerate in the first place.

The Doctrine of Eternal Security does not imply that a man may be living in habitual and purposed sin, and yet be in a justified state, because he who is once justified cannot come into condemnation. We heartily join in everything which can be said against so odious a doctrine. It is impossible, because the living in such a state of sin proves that the man never was, and is not now, in a justified state,

whatever may be his names and boasts.²⁰ Our doctrine does not teach that many will not be finally lost, who are connected with the visible Church outwardly, and whom the Scriptures may call believers in a certain sense, because they have a temporary or historical faith, like that of Simon Magus. But those who have once had in them the true principle of spiritual, life never lose it. Nor do we teach that all Christians have equal spiritual vitality at all times; but they may fall into partial errors of doctrine, coldness and sin, which may for a time wholly interrupt their comfort in religion, and overcloud their evidence of a gracious state. Yet is the root of the matter there. It is simply this; that “They whom God hath accepted in His beloved, and effectually called and sanctified by His Spirit, can neither totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace; but shall certainly persevere therein to the end, and be eternally saved” (Dabney 1985:689).

The practical implication of our understanding of the Doctrine of Eternal Security is that believers can rest secure in the assurance that their salvation is permanent; nothing can separate them from the love of God. Thus they can rejoice in the prospect of eternal life. There need be no anxiety that something or someone will keep them from attaining the final blessedness which they have been promised and have come to expect. On the other hand, however, our understanding of the doctrine of perseverance allows no room for indolence or laxity. It is questionable whether anyone who reasons, “Now that I am a Christian, I can live as I please,” has really been converted and regenerated. Genuine faith issues, instead, in the fruit of the Spirit. Assurance of salvation, the subjective conviction that one is a Christian, results from the Holy Spirit’s giving evidence that he is at work in the life of the individual. And whenever the Spirit’s work results in conviction that one’s commitment to Christ is genuine, there is also the certainty on biblical grounds that God will enable the Christian to persist in that relationship, that nothing can separate the true believer from God’s love.

2. Missiology

Missiology is the study of the salvation activities of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit throughout the world geared forward bringing

²⁰ L. Robert Dabney, *Systematic Theology* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1985), 688-689.

the Kingdom of God into existence.²¹ Seeing in this perspective missiology is the study of the worldwide church's divine mandate to be ready to serve this God who is aiming His saving acts toward this world. In dependence on the Holy Spirit and by Word and deed the church is to communicate the total gospel and the total divine law to all mankind. Furthermore, missiology is a study which the church should regard it as a cause for her being or her existence in the world. The Church as a vital tool in the hand of the Triune God, her obligation is to propagate His Word to the world, especially to the unreached people so that they accept the Word of God and be saved. If missiology does not include the salvation activity of the Triune God and the church's mandate of reaching the world with the Gospel, then it is not missiology at all.

3. How the Doctrine of Eternal Security Affects our Missiology Today

As we have already discussed the doctrine of Eternal Security above in detail, it was quite clear that God who calls people to repentance, He preserve them for eternity. The undeniable fact is that the Doctrine of Eternal Security affects our Missiology today. There are many vital things that one can mention that should be taken into consideration in order to show how this Doctrine of Eternal Security affects our missiology today. Here I will mention only four of them which are: *Firstly*, it inspires the church to understand God's Mission (*Missio Dei*); *Secondly*, it stimulates the church's involvement in God's Mission; *Thirdly*, it motivates the church to convey God's message seriously; and *Fourthly*, it gives the church audacity to publicize God's faithfulness to all His promises.

3.1. It Inspires the Church to Understand God's Mission (*Missio Dei*)

3.1.1 God's Plan of Saving the Sinners.

One can define the plan of God as His eternal decision rendering certain all things which shall come to pass.²² Our God has a plan of

²¹ Johannes Verkuyl, *Contemporary Missiology. An Introduction* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987), 5; Dale Moody, *The Word of Truth: A Summary of Christian Doctrine Based on Biblical Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 350-354.

²² Erickson (1987), 346.

everything on earth and in heaven, which was planned before the creation of everything in heaven and on earth. It was according to His great plan when He sent our Lord Jesus Christ on earth to die for our sins, so that “...whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”²³ According to Rodger S. Greenway, Christians should find out God’s plan in their daily lives, and fit themselves into that plan. Nothing is more fruitful or satisfying than knowing God’s plan and coming to terms with it.²⁴ In God’s plan, salvation of the sinners plays a vital role. In His plan, they have to be saved from the dominion of Satan and be brought to the everlasting light.

3.1.2. God assures Eternal Security to those who repent from their sins

Set right with God by faith, given a new lease on life, living now by the law of love-is it possible to move along in the assurance that God’s grace will not let us down? Yes! There is no turning back. The Gospel certainly imparts a resilient faith to the Christian community (1 Corinthians 15:58). But such steadfastness is rooted only in the continuity of God’s grace. Our security lies therefore in knowing that “the reality of salvation transcends by far any subjective, incidental experiencing of it” (Berkhouwer, *Faith and Perseverance*, p79). Again and again God’s irresistible grace overcomes our resistance. As the prophet Jeremiah testifies, “You overpowered me and prevailed” (Jeremiah 20:7). As we embrace by faith God’s preserving grace we may rest assured that “the transition from death to life is irreversible” (Berkhouwer, *Faith and Perseverance*, p238). According to Berkhouwer, such assurance of a deep seated durability is of utmost importance, for Christians cannot and they may not be faced continually with an either-or, with a possible back-and-forth movement, from life unto death and then perhaps again from death to life.... There is but one road they must travel without turning back.²⁵ The Biblical doctrine of perseverance assures us “that God by His power keeps His people from falling away from Him, that Christ will never permit anyone to snatch them out of His hand, and that the Holy Spirit seals them for the day of

²³ John 3:16.

²⁴ Greenway (1991), 23.

²⁵ Berkhouwer, *Faith and Perseverance*, 119.

redemption”.²⁶ The plan of salvation is directed toward creating a renewed humanity perfectly at home on a renewed earth. That end lies secure in God’s promise of a twofold preservation: He safeguards both the heirs of salvation and their inheritance (Matthew 25:34; John 14:1-4; 1 Peter 1:4). Thus God’s people are assured of a permanent place in the sun. This outlook lends a steady course to our Christian pilgrimage. This is very clear that for perseverance is not

an experience of consolation that flickers and dies and then flickers again in the shadows of life’s uncertainties,... that tomorrow could be partially, and later even totally, threatened and destroyed; but it is a continuity amidst all the transitoriness of our lives, as we proceed by devious paths through numberless circumstances and dangers toward the consummation, toward the day of Jesus Christ (Berkhouwer, *Faith and Perseverance*, p10).

There are many scriptural evidences in addition to the above scriptural evidences that motivate that God assures Eternal Security to those who repent from their sins. Jesus says, “My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand” (John 10:27-29). It is true that nothing “will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:39). “And I am sure,” says Paul, “being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus” (Philippians 1:6). In the *Heidelberg Catechism*, Lord’s Day 21, question 54 says, “What do you believe concerning the holy catholic Christian church? The *Heidelberg Catechism* prompts its heirs to confess that, “I believe that the Son of God, out of the whole human race, from the beginning of the world to its end, gathers, defends, and preserves for Himself, by His Spirit and Word, in the unity of the true faith, a church chosen to everlasting life. And I believe that I am and forever shall remain a living member of it”²⁷

²⁶ Hoekema, *Saved by Grace*, 255

²⁷ *Heidelberg Catechism* (1983), 51.

3.1.3. The Doctrine of the Perseverance of the Saints is a Reality that Should be Taught

Scripture never minimizes the power of personal and communal temptations. The way of the church through world history, like that of Israel, is beset by demonic principalities and power. The Biblical witness is clear: perseverance is real, sinless perfection is a myth. Some Christian traditions nevertheless draw straight line conclusions from the one to the other. We are indeed called to “be perfect as our heavenly father is perfect”.²⁸ In context, however, Christ is not summoning us here to a God-like sinlessness but to spiritual wholeness, to personal integrity as opposed to hypocrisy and duplicity. Still, holiness movements argue from the imperatives of the central law of love to our ability to live up to the high standard of perfectibility. God would not ask the impossible. Within the full sweep of Scripture, however, as Louis Berkhof rightly concludes, “the measure of our ability cannot be inferred from the Scriptural commandment”.²⁹ Neither perfection nor perseverance may be viewed as a theological deduction. Nor may be claims of God’s Word be tailored to the projected potentials of human’s response. Yet appeals are made to 1 John 3:9 in support of perfectionist doctrine: “No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God’s seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God”. Careful analysis of this passage, however, yields the following reading: Those born of God are not stranded in sinful practices as a settled way of life. This pastoral letter sheds an even fuller light on this question of sinlessness/sinfulness: The blood of Jesus Christ “cleanses us from all sin”; such cleansing is as necessary as daily conversion, for “we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us” (1 John 1:5-10). “Therefore, the biblical call to “be perfect” is not an evangelical counsel for some special class of believers. All are “perfect” who appropriate “the content of the Christian faith in the right way” (Riddebos, *Paul*, p271). But there is no crown without cross-bearing. Christians suffer from within and from without, not in spite of the renewing power of Christ’s triumph, but precisely because of it. “The newness of the new life”, therefore,

²⁸ Matthew 5:48.

²⁹ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 538.

“is not static, but dynamic, needing continual renewal, growth, and transformation” (Hoekema, *Saved by Grace*, p212-213).

The Reformed theologian, John Calvin already challenged perfectionist tendencies in his day. Though we are “freed through regeneration (sanctification) from bondage to sin”, he says, we are not yet in “full possession of freedom so as to feel no more annoyance from the flesh”. For while “sin ceases to reign” in believers, “It does not also cease to dwell in them” (*Institutes*, III,3,10-11). God’s grace enlists us in lifelong “military service”. For as Christians, we are ever in “a threatened position”. So we may never act as though we had “left sin behind as ground already conquered” (Ridderbos, *Paul*, p267,269). The “new man” in Christ has not yet vanquished the “old man” in Adam. We still live “by faith”, not yet “by sight”. Instead of striving for sinless perfection as a “second blessing”, we must learn by faith to draw our strength continuously from the original, abiding blessing of the justifying and sanctifying grace of God. To seek total and final separation from sin in this life is to seek separation from life itself. To insist on “evangelical perfection” here and now is futile, says Calvin, for then “all would be excluded from the church” (*Institutes*, III,6,5).

Accordingly, the Gospel punctuates its Good News regularly with urgent warnings against “falling away” (1 John 2:19; Hebrews 6:4-8). But its positive intent is equally clear: “Hold fast” to the faith. Christ further said, “He who stands firm to the end will be saved” (Matthew 10:22). This is not a contest, however, whose outcome remains undecided (John 10:8). In the midst of its earnest admonitions to persevere “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling” scripture affirms the Father’s unfailing grace “for God is at work in you” (Philippians 2:12-13). When Jesus trained His disciples He forthrightly declared that they should expect suffering in the course of serving Him. In Matthew 10, which describes the missionary “internship” of the twelve disciples, Jesus spoke clearly about the kinds of suffering and opposition that the disciples were to expect. But others would reject them, hate them because they came from Jesus, and persecute them severely.³⁰ In all these sufferings, the disciples were taught to persevere to eternity. In the confessions of the

³⁰ Greenway (1991), 30.

church (The Canons of Dort: The Fifth main point of doctrine), and in theological reflection on it, this doctrine is called “the perseverance of the saints”.³¹ Not all who go to the church can persevere, but only saints can persevere. This article of faith includes all believers. Persevering in faith is possible, moreover, by drawing steadily on the boundless resources of God’s preserving grace. Apart from His unchanging faithfulness, perseverance degenerates into the pursuit of an ever receding mirage.

The church must strongly persuade people that perseverance is not a status symbol but a dynamic reality, anchored securely in the sovereign grace of God, experienced by faith alone. It is worlds removed from self-righteousness and spiritual complacency. There is nothing presumptuous or rationally predictable about it. It offers no automatic guarantees of unbroken continuity in our lives. Nor does it grasp prematurely a glory reserved for the future. It is rather “in the thick of the actual struggles of life that Scripture speaks of perseverance in grace”.³² Persevering believers can only rely wholly on the miracle of divine continuity, the mystery of God’s steadfastness. Relentlessly “the Hound of heaven” (Francis Thompson) shadows us down our labyrinthine ways, through all the ups and downs of the often zigzag course of our pilgrimage. For “the believer would fall away if he were left to himself”.³³ Because persevering faith is not

a human contribution to salvation, but the state of being oriented to God’s grace, because it is not a grasping, but rather a being grasped; because it is not a conquest, but rather a being conquered – therefore, in light of God’s grace, there is a foundation for permanency.³⁴

3.2. It Stimulates the Church’s Involvement in God’s Mission

In His Great Commission recorded in Matthew 28:19-20, Jesus commissioned His disciples to make disciples of all nations. Even today He expects the Church to be zealously engaging herself in this vital commission of making disciples of all nations. Jesus spelled out how to make disciples, i.e. by going to the people, baptizing them in

³¹ *Canons of Dort* (1983), 92.

³² Berkhofer, *Faith and Perseverance*, 99.

³³ Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 546.

³⁴ Berkhofer, *Faith and Perseverance*, 112-113.

the Name of God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and also by teaching them to observe all that He commanded His disciples. He promised them that He will be with them to eternity. This simply means that He will be with them in His Spirit for the whole of their lives. This is a great comfort and encouragement to the Church today to witness Christ without any fear of those who oppose the Biblical doctrines, for example, the Arminians who strongly oppose the Biblical Doctrine of Eternal Security and also the adherents of non-Christian religions who do not believe in God. This doctrine should encourage the church to take into consideration the three vital things when propagating the Word of God to the people. *Firstly*, the church must vigorously engage herself in mission outreach. *Secondly*, the church should faithfully propagate the Word of God, and *Thirdly*, the church has to proclaim the truth of God’s Word without any compromise. I will discuss each of these three vital things that should be taken into account by the church when propagating the Word of God to the people.

3.2.1. The Church Must Vigorously Engage Herself in Mission Outreach

Jesus in His Great Commission commanded His disciples “to go and make disciples of all nations” (Matt 28:19). In other words, Jesus expects us to be going out and proclaim His Word to all people. The scope of the work assigned to us by Christ is not limited to any language, tribe, boundary, place, but it is unlimited. We have to go to all the people (nations). The mandate assigned to us by our Lord Jesus Christ does not teach us to sit down and wait for the nations to come to us, but we have to go to them. We can’t make disciples out of sinners. I still remember one of my conversations with my third year students in my Missiology class at Heidelberg Theological Seminary (South Africa). It took place early in 2011. The topic of that week was “*The responsibility of the local Church in Church Planting*”. I was emphasizing the fact that the Church should engage in mission outreach in order to reach the unreached people with the Gospel. If the Church fails to take her obligation of reaching the sinners with the Gospel, she must know that the non-Christians religions will do the opposite, they will spread their religion. The discussion was on the fact that the non-Christian religions are more aggressive in spreading their religions to the people than before. We shared what we are

experiencing in our country South Africa where African Traditional Religion is rising in a great force. The media is also contributing a lot to the promoting of African Traditional Religion. For example, the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) has some programs made especially for the witchdoctors who are given a platform to persuade and encourages people to follow their religion. The comments that people always give in Phalaphala FM during the broadcasting of these programs, reveals that these programs are listened and followed by many people. By so doing, they have a great influence to the lives of many. This is a wake-up call for the church to involve herself in mission campaigns with the aim of leading sinners to have faith in Christ, but if the church can sit down and relax, then the sinners will not repent from their sins. I concur with the words of God which says, “How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!” (Romans 10:14-15). The Church is sent out by our Lord Jesus Christ. The Church is not doing her work if she is not winning souls to Christ. According to Tony Evans, our calling is not complete until the church is making disciples who can also go and make more disciples.³⁵ Jesus saw the unlimited scope of the mission assigned to the Church as He went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the Good News of the Kingdom of God and healing every disease and sickness. When He saw the crowds, He had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then He said to His disciples, “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field” (Matt 9:35-38). Jesus saw the great necessity of the Church of engaging herself in mission outreach. Even today the necessity is still great for the church to do outreach seriously as many people are dying in sins. Outside the church there are many people who should come to Christ, and be incorporated inside His sheep pen.

³⁵ Evans (2003), 55.

3.2.2. The Church Should Faithfully Propagate the Word of God

The Bible makes clear God's purpose in sending the church on its mission. In God's plan of missions, believers are the Spirit's instruments, His co-witnesses, in the application of Christ's work and the transformation of sinners into saints.³⁶ God gave the church the responsibility of propagating His Word. The initial demonstration of fulfillment came of the task came at Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost when people from almost every known language heard Peter who was faithfully propagating the Word of God, and were convinced in their hearts by the Holy Spirit and believed. Upon returning to their own towns and peoples these believers became the first witnesses wherever they went,³⁷ they preached the Word of God without any fear. The second wave of witnesses was the movement of the disciples who left Jerusalem because of persecution while the apostles remained in the city (Acts 8:1). Along with these two dynamic movements, Scripture presents individuals who became dynamic witnesses such as Stephen, the first martyr (Acts 7), and Philip, the evangelist (Acts 8). The outstanding mark of the church would be faith in Christ. By faith members of the church would be reconciled to God, and would live in a relation of love and reconciliation to one another. The reconciliation would be the sign that God's plan for the world was in operation.³⁸

Christians like their Master, are sent to seek and save the lost.³⁹ Among other desires of God-in-Christ, He beyond question wills that lost be found-that is, be reconciled to Himself. Most cordially admitting that God has other purposes, we should remember that we serve a God who finds persons. He has an overriding that men and women should be redeemed. However we understand the word, Biblical witness is clear that people are "lost".⁴⁰ The finding God wants them found-that is, brought into a redemptive relationship to Jesus Christ where, baptized in His name, they become part of His household. He is not pleased when many findable sheep remain

³⁶ Greenway (1991), 31-32.

³⁷ Pentecost (1982), 175.

³⁸ Greenway (1991), 23.

³⁹ McGavran and Wagner (1990), 6.

⁴⁰ McGavran and Wagner (1990), 21.

straggling on the mountain, shivering in the bitter wind. The more found, the better pleased is God. Our Lord Jesus Christ says, “I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd.” These words of Jesus, encourages us to see our responsibility of proclaiming His Word to the unreached people as our vital role we should seriously engage in. As He was sent and bore witness to the truth about God, so should we. As the Holy Spirit testifies to the truth about Jesus, so should we. In the power of the Holy Spirit we become co-participants in God’s great plan, the evangelization of the world and the building of the family of God.⁴¹ Every Christian, by virtue of the fact that he or she believes in Jesus Christ, is called to witness through proclamation of His Word to the world, every day, wherever he or she may find himself or herself.⁴²

3.2.3. The Church Has to Proclaim the Truth of God’s Word Without Any Compromise

Truth is simply a fixed standard by which reality is measured, a non-negotiable reality. It is that which corresponds to the facts. Once you lose truth, you lose even the possibility of measuring or evaluating anything with any degree of actuality. Once you lose truth, you lose freedom.⁴³ Jesus says, “Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (John 8:32). The Church simply needs to convey God’s truth in all of its clarity and power. We must also defend the truth from distortion and misrepresentation, but the best defense of truth is a good offense in which we are taking God’s Word to the ends of the earth. Our Lord Jesus Christ in John 14:6 says “I am the way and **the truth** and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me”. Jesus did not say, “I know the truth” or “I have an access to the truth”. He is the personification and embodiment of all that is true, so when we proclaim Him to the world we are giving people a sure standard against which to measure and judge all reality. Therefore, anything that does not line up to Jesus is false.

⁴¹ Greenway (1991), 24.

⁴² J.J. Kritzing, P.G.J. Meiring, and W.A. Saayman, *On being Witnesses* (Halfway House: Orion Book Publishers, 1994), 62.

⁴³ Evans (2003), 72.

The Church is distinctive in its message because we are obligated to proclaim the truth even when no one else agrees or stands with us. Just like what we have discussed above, where the Arminians are strongly against the Biblical Doctrine of Eternal Security. The church should continue to propagate the truth of this doctrine as it is not man's doctrine, but the biblical doctrine which should be published to everyone. The Doctrine of Eternal Security, like any other Biblical doctrines is a doctrine that should not be compromised, and the church must defend this doctrine to those who oppose it. There are many instances in the Bible where we find Christians defended for the Gospel even in difficult situations. A man like Stephen in Acts 7, defended the Gospel among his strong opposition without fear of death. After his speech, we hear that, "When they heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him. But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God." "Look," Stephen said, "I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God." At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices; they all rushed at him, dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul. While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Then he fell on his knees and cried out, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." When he had said this, he fell asleep. What the Church should know is that our society only wants convenient, comfortable truth that fits with people's preconceived ideas and biases. If things continue going the way they are, the church may well be the only place left on earth where the next generation can get the real story on the way things are. That means the Church had better be doing a good job of upholding and imparting the truth. One way we do that is by learning and knowing the Word of God just like what Stephen did. One cannot uphold or teach what he does not know. Paul exhorted his spiritual son Timothy, "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth" (2 Tim 2:15).

3.3. It Motivates the Church to Convey God's Message Earnestly

The message that the Church should propagate to the people should not come from the church itself, but it should be the message

from the Almighty God. The Christians are messengers who are sent by the owner of the Church to deliver His Word to the sinners so that they should repent. In Acts 1:8 Christ charged His witnesses (His disciples). In current parlance a “*martyr*” is one who seals his witness with his blood. In the New Testament we find a more original usage. According to Spykman J. Gordon, these witnesses are people appointed to stand up before men and nations to certify the historical reality and truthfulness of what happened in Jesus Christ. The Lord commissioned them to bear this testimony concerning His life, death, and resurrection (1995:377). It is this that qualifies them to pass on to succeeding generations a reliable account of these events. Paul says to the Ephesians, “Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should” (Eph 6:19-20). The content of the message is none other than preaching Christ the crucified, who was resurrected from the dead on the third day, who is the Savior of the world. The message of the Church should indicate that the purpose of the coming of Jesus here on earth is to save the sinners as it was already indicated by the angel Gabriel who was sent by God to introduce the birth of Jesus to Mary and Joseph. But the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end.” (Luke 1:30-33). According to Matthew Henry, Jesus Christ came to save us by *healing* us, as the children of Israel that were stung with fiery serpents were cured and *lived* by looking up to the brazen serpent; we have the story of it (Num 21:6-9).⁴⁴

3.4. It Gives the Church Audacity to Publicize God’s Faithfulness to All His Promises

There are many Scriptural evidences where God fulfilled His promises to His people, but here I will only give three examples. The *first* example is the words uttered by King Solomon when offering his

⁴⁴ Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Bible*, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997).

prayer of dedication to God in His altar. Then Solomon stood before the altar of the LORD in front of the whole assembly of Israel, spread out his hands toward heaven and prayed the following prayer, “O LORD, God of Israel, there is no God like you in heaven above or on earth below—you who keep your covenant of love with your servants who continue wholeheartedly in your way. You have kept your promise to your servant David my father; with your mouth you have promised and with your hand you have fulfilled it—as it is today” (1 Kings 8:22-24). After King Solomon had finished all these prayers and supplications to the LORD, he rose from before the altar of the LORD, where he had been kneeling with his hands spread out toward heaven. He stood and blessed the whole assembly of Israel in a loud voice, saying: “Praise be to the LORD, who has given rest to his people Israel just as he promised. Not one word has failed of all the good promises he gave through his servant Moses” (1 Kings 8:54-56). The *second* example is of God’s promise to Zechariah together with his wife Elizabeth were both old without a child. God sent His angel Gabriel to tell him that he will have a son. “Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to give him the name John. He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He is never to take wine or other fermented drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even from birth. Many of the people of Israel will he bring back to the Lord their God. And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous—to make ready a people prepared for the Lord” (Luke 1:13-17). When it was time for Elizabeth to have her baby, she gave birth to a son as God has promised Zechariah (v57). The *third* example is God’s promise to a childless family of Abraham and Sarah who were old. God said to Abraham, “Yes, but your wife Sarah will bear you a son, and you will call him Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him. And as for Ishmael, I have heard you: I will surely bless him; I will make him fruitful and will greatly increase his numbers. He will be the father of twelve rulers, and I will make him into a great nation. But my covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah will bear to you by this time next

year” (Gen 17:19-21). Truly, God fulfilled His promise to Abraham’s family, “Now the LORD was gracious to Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did for Sarah what he had promised. Sarah became pregnant and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the very time God had promised him” (Gen 21:1-2). From all three examples given above, it is quite clear that our God is faithful to all His promises. The tempered impatience of a persevering remnant looking for “the consolation of Israel” (Luke 2:25) is eloquent testimony to the steadfastness of God in keeping His Messianic promise. “For God’s gifts and his call are irrevocable” (Romans 11:29). From all the above evidences of God’s faithfulness to His promises, I am 100% sure that God will secure His elect to eternity as He is promising in His Word; no one of them will be lost.

Conclusion

In my conclusion, I want to emphasize the fact that the Doctrine of Eternal Security is one of the Biblical doctrines that are confounding many Christians today. In this paper we have discussed two different views on this doctrine, which are, the Calvinistic and the Arminian views. It was clear in our discussions that the Calvinistic view is in favor of the Doctrine of Eternal Security while the Arminian view is totally against it. The two questions raised in our introduction were clearly answered in our deliberations. The *first* question says, “From the two different perspectives on the Doctrine of Eternal Security, which one is right and which one is wrong?” This question was answered in our evaluation of both the Calvinistic and the Arminian views on the Doctrine of Eternal Security. The Calvinistic view is right as it is based on the true understanding of the Word of God. Jesus in His powerful Word is categorically excluding the slightest chance of an apostasy by His sheep, and it is factually true that no one can snatch believers out of Jesus’ hand or out of the Father’s hand (John 10:28-29). All in all, this passage is a definite rejection of the Arminian idea that a true believer can fall away. I can say without any hesitation that the Arminian view is wrong as it denies the Biblical truth of this doctrine. According to the *Canons of Dort*, this doctrine of Eternal Security is difficult for the unbelievers to understand (1983:97).

The *second* question which says, “How does the Doctrine of Eternal Security affects our Missiology today?” was also attended in

this paper. Four significant things that the Church should know on how the Doctrine of Eternal Security affects our Missiology today were expounded properly. It is clear that this doctrine inspires the Church to understand God's Mission (*Missio Dei*) and it also stimulate her involvement in God's Mission. *Lastly*, this doctrine motivates the Church to convey God's message seriously and gives the Church audacity to publicize God's faithfulness to all His promises. It was quiet clear that our faithful God who fulfilled all His promises to His people in the past, will also fulfill all promises He is promising us today. The Church should propagate the faithfulness of God to all His promises and also His divine promise of securing His elects to eternity. It was clear that the Church should vigorously engage herself in mission outreach and preach the Word of God to the people.



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