

S T U D Y G U I D E



Eternal Security

by R.C. Sproul



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Stones of Remembrance

MESSAGE INTRODUCTION

The doctrine of the perseverance of the saints has been a source of much controversy in the history of the church. Some have argued that it is possible for a true convert to Christ to fall away permanently. Others have argued that all those who are truly regenerate will persevere in faith. In this lesson, Dr. Sproul introduces the doctrine of perseverance, or eternal security.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. To be able to explain the fundamental nature of the controversy underlying the doctrine of perseverance
2. To be able to explain why the doctrine of perseverance is important for Christian growth

QUOTATIONS

God's decree is the very pillar and basis on which the saints' perseverance depends. That decree ties the knot of adoption so fast, that neither sin, death, nor hell, can break it asunder.

—Thomas Watson

When God calls a man, He does not repent of it. God does not, as many friends do, love one day, and hate another; or as princes, who make their subjects favourites, and afterwards throw them into prison. This is the blessedness of a saint; his condition admits of no alteration. God's call is founded upon His decree, and His decree is immutable. Acts of grace cannot be reversed. God blots out His people's sins, but not their names.

—Thomas Watson

LECTURE OUTLINE

A. Introduction to the Doctrine of Eternal Security

1. The doctrine of eternal security is usually referred to as “perseverance of the saints” in Reformed theology.
2. The doctrine deals with whether a true convert to Christ can lose his or her salvation.

B. Theological Controversies Concerning Eternal Security

1. The first controversy arose in the sixteenth century between the Reformers and the Roman Catholic church because the Reformers taught that people are justified by faith alone and that upon their justification they can have assurance of their present state of salvation.
2. The second controversy was between the Reformed and the Lutherans because many Lutherans taught that the faith that justifies can be lost.
3. The third major controversy occurred in Holland between the Dutch Reformed and the “Remonstrants,” who denied perseverance of the saints.
4. These controversies arise because many passages in Scripture strongly suggest that Christians can lose their salvation, yet many passages seem to indicate that God promises to preserve His people to the end.

C. The *Militia Christianae*

1. In the ancient church, the Latin phrase that was often connected to the doctrine of security was *militia Christianae*.
2. This term refers to the ongoing struggle of the Christian life, the struggle of the Christian who is called to come to faith and to endure and to stand in that faith.
3. Jesus repeatedly made the statement, “He who endures to the end will be saved.”
4. Those who embrace the faith are warned by Jesus to not look back.

D. Stones of Remembrance

1. In the fourth chapter of Joshua, we read of the arrival of the people of Israel at the banks of the Jordan River—the boundary of the promised land.
2. Two major things take place at this point in Israel’s history.
 - a. When the people arrive at the Jordan River, it is in a flood stage.
 - b. When the people are miraculously enabled to cross on a dry riverbed, representatives of each tribe take a stone from the river to erect a monument at Gilgal.
3. The monuments were meant to confirm decisive moments in history for all future generations, so that when the people of Israel were afraid and seeking consolation, they could look at the monument and remember that God had brought them this far and had promised to take them the rest of the way.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. The doctrine of eternal security is usually referred to as _____ in Reformed theology.
 - a. Limited atonement
 - b. Perseverance of the saints
 - c. Irresistible grace
 - d. Unconditional election
2. According to the Roman Catholic church, who may possibly have assurance of salvation?
 - a. All Christians
 - b. Bishops, priests, and monks
 - c. An elite group of saints
 - d. No one
3. In Holland, a group of men known as _____ fiercely protested against the doctrine of perseverance.
 - a. Jesuits
 - b. Remonstrants
 - c. Lutherans
 - d. Dispensationalists
4. What ancient Latin term has been commonly used to describe the ongoing struggle of the Christian life?
 - a. *Militia Christianae*
 - b. *Iustitia habitualis*
 - c. *Praeparatio ad conversionem*
 - d. *Spes meliorum temporum*
5. What Reformation-era catechism declares that Christ is our “only comfort in life and in death”?
 - a. The Westminster Shorter Catechism
 - b. The Genevan Catechism
 - c. Luther’s Small Catechism
 - d. The Heidelberg Catechism
6. After crossing the Jordan River, the people of Israel built a monument of stones at God’s command. The people did this at other times in their history as well. What was the purpose of these monuments?
 - a. To remind the people of their ingenuity and cunning.
 - b. To provide a place for the idolatrous worship of pagan gods.
 - c. To remind the people of God’s past faithfulness and His promises for the future.
 - d. To demonstrate ownership of the land.

BIBLE STUDY

Read Joshua 3–4, and answer the following questions.

1. What does 3:1–6 say about Israel's preparation before entering the land?
2. In light of Moses' recent death, how significant is Joshua 3:7–9? What does God promise Joshua in these verses?
3. How is the declaration in 3:10–13 meant to give the people of Israel assurance?
4. In Joshua 3:14–17, there is an unusual parenthetical in the telling of the story in verse 15. Why does the author insert this bit of information about the state of the Jordan River at that time of year?
5. In Joshua 4:1–10 and 21–24, what is assumed to be one of the greatest enemies of faithfulness? How is this problem to be addressed by the people of Israel?
6. What does 4:18 indicate about God's role in the crossing of the Jordan River?
7. Compare Joshua 4:19 to Exodus 12:2–3. How are these two events (preparation for the Exodus in the Passover and the crossing of the Jordan into the promised land) tied together in these verses?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What basic controversy is dealt with in the doctrine of eternal security? Why has a controversy arisen?
2. Why is the doctrine of perseverance important for Christian growth?
3. How do the principles illustrated in Joshua 3–4 contribute to our understanding of eternal security?

APPLICATION

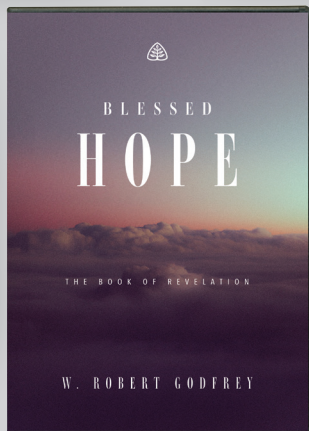
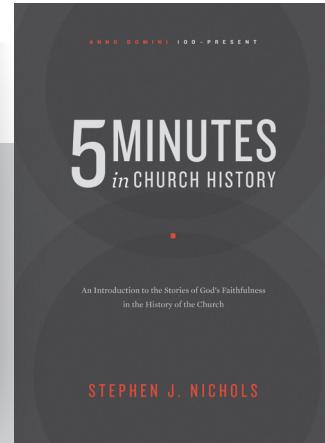
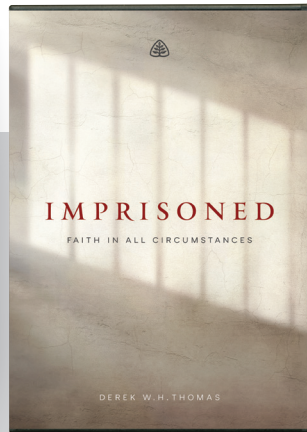
1. Do you find that forgetfulness of God's past grace in your Christian life results in a lack of assurance? What are some of the ways (or "monuments") that God has provided in the new covenant to encourage you to remember His grace? Do you use these "monuments"?
2. Read and meditate on Joshua 3–4 this week. Think about the relationship in the history of Israel between remembering and perseverance on the one hand and forgetfulness and apostasy on the other. The next time you witness a baptism, remember God's grace given to you. The next time you partake of the Lord's Supper, remember what He accomplished on the cross.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Berkouwer, G.C. *Faith and Perseverance*

NOTES

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