

Expository Essay: Security Of The Believer (NIV based)

INTRODUCTION:

After a person places his/her faith in Jesus Christ as his/her Savior, formulating a sound comprehension of one's security as a believer becomes critical to establishing fertile soil upon which one's faith can grow and produce spiritual fruit. A close examination of the doctrine of security/assurance and of its definition, related key passages, and implications to the believer, will significantly contribute to the believer's spiritual wisdom, understanding, steadfastness, and patience in his/her spiritual life and walk (Colossians 1:9,11).

DEFINITION:

The 'security of the believer' is theologically known as the 'doctrine of assurance'. "Assurance" can be defined as "ground for certainty (a pledge, token, or proof); or the state of certainty" (Packer p.100). Assurance of one's faith or salvation can be described as "the confidence or certainty of the believer in Christ that notwithstanding his/her mortal sinful condition he/she is irrevocably a child of God and an heir of heaven" (Demarest p.91). This involves a "deep personal conviction in the heart that sins have been forgiven, that one has been adopted into the family of God, and that one belongs to Him forever" (Demarest p.92). Assurance goes beyond "human optimism or presumption", to a solid persuasion (Packer p.100).

BASIS:

The assurance of salvation has both an objective and a subjective basis (Demarest p.92). The objective aspect rests on the character of God, that His written Word is completely truthful and trustworthy, and that His incarnate Word, Jesus Christ, accomplished complete salvation in His work on the cross for believers (Letham p.51; Demarest p.92). Romans 4:21 verifies that assurance is "being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised". Thus, the objective aspect of assurance is essentially based on the truthfulness of God's testimony of Himself (Packer p.100).

The subjective aspect of assurance centers around the experiential ministry of the Holy Spirit. Romans 8:16 declares "The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children", that the believer can be certain of his new membership in the family of God (Demarest p.92). Also, the Holy Spirit provides assurance to the believer in the evidence of the work that He does to transform the believer's life (1 Thessalonians 2:13). 1 John 3:17-19 proclaims that truthful love in one's actions is evidence of the presence of the Holy Spirit in one's life. Also, the abundance and overflowing of the fruit of the Spirit as listed in Galatians 5:22 and the gifts of the Spirit in Romans chapter 12, 1 Corinthians chapter 12, and Ephesians chapter 4 would also be some evidences of the Holy Spirit's activities in the life of the believer.

KEY PASSAGES:

There are several key Scripture passages that directly address the issue of assurance or security. One such passage is John 10:27-30 in which Jesus emphatically states that no one can take away from Him or from God the Father those people (sheep) who belong to Him. Theologian and author Millard J. Erickson, in his theology book

Christian Theology, correctly asserts that "this passage is as definite a rejection of the idea that a true believer can fall away as could be given" (p.992).

Another passage supporting the security of the believer is John 6:37 in which Jesus says that He will never "drive away" (NIV) or "cast out" (NAS) those who come to Him. Hebrews 13:5b contains God's promise "'Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.'" Paul pronounces in Romans 8:38-39 that nothing in all of creation "will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord". In affirmation that the Lord's calling to faith is eternal and not temporary, 1 Peter 5:10 states that "the God of all grace" has called believers "to His eternal glory in Christ". Romans 5:9 maintains that believers are justified or have a right-standing before God, who will save them from His wrath. John 3:16 declares that "...whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." 1 Peter 1:3-5 expounds that God has caused believers to be born again to obtain "an inheritance... kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power...".

Also pertaining to security/assurance, the Scriptures indicate that at the moment a person places his/her faith in Christ, at least two crucial events occur to the believer that point to his/her security. Firstly, as Jesus states in John 5:24, a person crosses over from death to eternal life and will not be condemned. Secondly, as announced in Ephesians 1:13-14 and 2 Corinthians 1:22 and 5:5, God's seal of ownership in the person of the Holy Spirit is placed into the believer's life as God's pledge or guarantee of future inheritance of eternal life. Upon consideration of all of these passages, it becomes obvious that God desires for believers to have assurance of salvation.

IMPORTANCE FOR DAILY CHRISTIAN LIVING:

Possessing an incorrect understanding of one's eternal security will hinder the development of the proper foundation for spiritual growth and service to God. If a believer is preoccupied with constant striving to please God in order to retain his/her salvation, then very little attention and study will be exerted in other areas of his/her spiritual life or on serving God in his/her areas of spiritual gifted-ness. Inadequate devotional habits may develop. A works-for-salvation thinking which enslaves one to ritual or external activities while promoting improper internal heart attitudes could also materialize. Furthermore, a believer may become focused on his/her own spiritual needs rather than on the needs of others and he/she would be unable to confidently share his/her faith with anyone else.

Another spiritually unhealthy consequence of insecurity is that the believer could attempt to erect a platform of lofty moral standards as minimum requirements to retain his/her salvation. When failure to uphold these righteous standards occurs, the believer may experience feelings of overwhelming disillusionment, dejection, and defeat which may then lead to an unhealthy attitude towards God and to a total cessation in regard to maintaining any type of faith. If the believer "feels he is constantly on trial, having to prove himself, being analyzed or feeling afraid that he will be cut off the moment he does not come up to standard, he will not really have respect for God" (Kendall p.74). Thus, the believer's spiritual life would become stale, growth would become stagnant, and fruit-bearing would become restricted or nonexistent.

Conversely, proper understanding of one's eternal security can foster good Bible study methods, vibrant personal devotions, active service for God, and enthusiastic

personal witness and evangelism. With full confidence, the believer can rejoice and worship in praise, adoration, awe, wonder, and thankfulness because of the surety of his future life in heaven (Erickson p.996; Kendall p.68).

SUMMARY CLOSURE:

Through the study of the security of the believer, important knowledge and understanding have been gained. Examination of the definition of assurance/security has revealed both an objective aspect based upon God's written testimony of Himself and a subjective aspect based upon the experiential ministry of the Holy Spirit in one's life. Reviewing key passages such as John 10:27-30 has affirmed God's promises of guaranteed eternal life. Considering the implications of proper understanding of one's security has illuminated potential stumbling blocks to healthy spiritual growth and service to God. Thus, with this information in mind, the believer can confidently trust God as he "lives a life worthy of the Lord... pleasing him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God" (Colossians 1:10).

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