

# "ETERNAL SECURITY"

## A Popular Delusion

"ETERNAL SECURITY" is the new title recently adopted for a false teaching variously known as "Perseverance of the Saints," the "Preservation of the Saved," "Once in Grace, Always in Grace." In substance these names all stand for one and the same thing. This unbiblical teaching is said to have originated with the Calvinistic system of theology, but the doctrine apparently received little notice until the early part of the nineteenth century, at which time a certain English churchman is credited with reviving and restating the doctrine. Since that time, like other theological dogmas that are the creation of some man's brain, this one has had the usual string of adherents and it has been incorporated in the creeds of a few denominations. But in recent years this teaching has been undergoing a sort of resurrection; and because of its wide advocacy among certain denominations, it is time that the truth or falsity of this teaching be determined.

### **The Doctrine Stated**

"Eternal Security" is the teaching that when a person is once saved he is forever saved: having been brought into the family of God he is thereafter a child of God for time and eternity. It is maintained that he may occasionally incur the displeasure of God through disobedience, and that he may even lapse into gross sin, but he is still a child of God. It is granted that at such times he forfeits the favour of God for a season, but the covenant relations remain unbroken, and in the eternal purpose of God he will in the end be restored and received into Heaven.

For this teaching its advocates offer what they persistently maintain is Scriptural authority. "Was not the prodigal son," they ask, "when in the far country, though wasting his substance in riotous living, nevertheless still a son?" One of their favourite texts is John 10:28, 29: "And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand." But we are in God's hand by choice; and by choice we can pluck ourselves out.

### **Its Growing Popularity**

Since "Eternal Security" is an offspring of Calvinism its adherents naturally lean to the doctrine of "Election," and oppose the Arminian, or Wesleyan, teaching of "Free Will." Likewise they are bitter opponents of the doctrine of Entire Sanctification as taught in the great holiness revival of the eighteenth century, a revival which accomplished more for Christianity than Calvinism has in its entire existence. And yet in the face of this great evangelical movement — a movement which shook continents and bore the seal of divine approval in the conversion of thousands — the adversaries of holiness are still on the warpath, stoutly declaring

that no Christian can live above sin; and this, too, in the face of the express declaration of God's Word: "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin" (I John 3:9).

Of course, a doctrine like "Eternal Security," which allows a loophole for sin without destroying the covenant relations with God, fits perfectly into the theological scheme of those who have lowered the standard of righteousness in order to accommodate it to the carnal minds of our modern religionists. For this reason "Eternal Security" is rapidly becoming a popular doctrine in the growing apostasy of these last days. And it is time to expose the falsity of this thing before it becomes a greater stumbling block to those who are honestly seeking the truth.

### **Tested by the Word**

We read in Ezekiel 18:24, "When the righteous turneth away from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, and doeth according to all the abominations that the wicked man doeth, shall he live?" A rather embarrassing question for an advocate of "Eternal Security," is it not? One would think from this pointed question that the prophet himself must have encountered certain advocates of this pet doctrine in his day. And for any reasonable mind it would seem that this question alone ought to settle the issue. But no, the defenders of "Eternal Security" hasten to the rescue with ready explanations of Ezekiel's meaning. One of their number dismisses the question with the passing remark that the prophet did not have in mind a regenerated person, that this man's righteousness was only outward or legalistic — it did not proceed from a regenerated heart.

### **The Righteous Man**

But the prophet's question is not so easily disposed of. So impressed was Ezekiel with the truth here enunciated that he reiterates it six times throughout his prophecy. And whom does he mean by the "righteous man"? The Hebrew adjective translated "righteous" in this chapter is *tsaddiq*. This is the word invariably employed throughout the Old Testament to contrast the righteous with the wicked, the godly with the ungodly, the saved with the unsaved. The root of this word, in one form or another, is used to describe nearly every man of God from Noah on down. This is the word used in Habakkuk's famous verse, "The just shall live by his faith" (Habakkuk 2:4). And that the "just" man here means a regenerated person is attested by the use of the reference in the New Testament. As conclusive proof that the "righteous man" of the Bible is a regenerated person we quote one more verse: "If ye know that he is righteous, ye know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of him" (I John 2:29). The contention that the oft-mentioned "righteous man" of Scripture possessed only outward righteousness is not an answer to Ezekiel's question — it is only an evasion. This man was none other than a thoroughly regenerated person.

Returning then to our text — what about the fate of this regenerated man who turns from his righteousness and commits iniquity? Shall he live? The advocate of "Eternal Security" is shut up to but one answer. In order to defend his thesis he must reply emphatically in the affirmative: "Yes, he shall live. The righteous man may do according to all the abominations that the wicked man doeth and still live. The covenant relations remain unbroken; he is still a child of God."

Thus, following out this abortive doctrine to its logical conclusion, God is required to maintain covenant relations with a backslidden man whose conduct and iniquitous practices are such as bring upon the sinner the most terrible judgments: woe and anguish in this life, and in the life to come eternal damnation. "Eternal Security" for the one, and eternal damnation for the other! But what says the prophet? Here is his answer: "All his righteousness that he hath done shall not be mentioned: in his trespass that he hath trespassed, and in his sin that he hath sinned, in them shall he die." Ezekiel in the same chapter declares, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die" (Ezekiel 18:4), and that applies to everyone — saint or sinner, saved or unsaved. And which of these two answers, may we ask, is most in keeping with the character of a holy and just God?

Some may object to the above statement as an exaggeration of the doctrine of "Eternal Security"; and say that a correct statement of this doctrine gives no such license to sin. Then in evidence that we have not in the least overstated the case, let us note a concrete instance in which the proponents of "Eternal Security" confess unblushingly that the above is a true statement of their position.

### **David's Transgression**

The incident referred to is that of King David's transgression and his subsequent restoration to God's favour, a story familiar to all. Since David unquestionably died a saved man, the advocates of "Eternal Security," in order to defend their doctrine, are under the necessity of maintaining that David was only out of fellowship with God, but still His child during his backslidden state. And this they do with out apology. One of their number, in commenting upon David's prayer for forgiveness in Psalm 51, observes that David did not pray for a restoration of salvation, but only for the joy of salvation. So here we have the doctrine of "Eternal Security" revealed in its true colours.

With all due respect to David's memory, here was a righteous man who turned from his righteousness and did "according to all the abominations that the wicked man doeth," even to the extent of committing, without provocation, the most heinous crime of stealing another man's wife, of breaking up his home, and then of deliberately plotting and carrying out the murder of the innocent victim of his crime; yet they say he did not forfeit his covenant relations with God — he only incurred His temporary displeasure! They say he did not lose his salvation — he only lost, for the time being, the joy of his salvation! This is "Eternal Security" in its final analysis. Is it any wonder that with the advocacy of such a doctrine the Bible

standard of clean, holy living is being lowered to the zero point among certain sects and that every manner of sin in these latter days is being tolerated under the cloak of religion?

### **Restoration of the Backslider**

Nothing that has thus far been said in this tract is intended to convey the idea that one who has fallen from grace cannot be restored. The point we have been maintaining is that in his fall he loses his salvation and forfeits all his rights of sonship, but this does not debar him from the privilege of seeking God's forgiveness as a sinner and of being restored. We rejoice in the boundless mercy of God which can reach a man who has miserably failed God and has even fallen into the vilest sin, as David fell. But when that man comes back, let it be remembered, he will not return merely as a disobedient child, as the proponents of "Eternal Security" would have us believe. He will return as David, an abject sinner undeserving of the least of God's mercies; and with anguish of heart and bitter tears he will pray the prayer that David prayed, before the smile of God's approval will ever again rest upon his life. And he may even thereafter suffer long and grievously, as David did, the consequences of his sin. God is merciful, but His mercy is not to be trifled with.

### **Warnings Against Apostasy**

The Bible teaches not only the spiritual death to all backsliders, but it teaches further that the backslider through repeated transgressions may reach a state far worse than his first. Listen to this: "If after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them" (II Peter 2:20, 21).

The man who has been brought into the light and has then turned back and refused to walk in it, far from being a child of God, is in a much worse state than the sinner who never had the light. He is like the man out of whom the unclean spirit had gone. Seven other spirits, more wicked than the first, took up their abode in his empty house, and the last state of that man was worse than the first. Jesus in commenting on this man's condition, applied it to the Jews. The well-known apostasy of the Jews, God's chosen people at one time, and the deplorable state into which they fell after their rejection of the Messiah, are monumental examples of what it means for a nation or an individual to forsake the "Fountain of Living Waters."

Thus, as terrible as it may seem to contemplate, it is possible even for a man who has once known God, and walked and talked with Him, to reach a state, through repeated transgressions, where he, like Esau, finds no place of repentance. Someone has said, "There are two stages of apostasy: the first stage is where

man rejects God; the second is where God rejects man." The Epistle to the Hebrews echoes with stern warnings against falling into this awful state.

Certain advocates of the doctrine of "Eternal Security," in their painful attempts to adapt God's Word to their teaching, would have us believe that these repeated warnings throughout Scripture against backsliding are only one of the means which God employs to bring about in the elect His eternal purpose—not that there is any danger of the saved being finally lost, but that God through these warnings incites them to an overcoming life, and thus they fulfill His eternal purpose concerning them.

Let us not be deceived. God was not shamming when He sounded this solemn warning: "For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame. . . that which beareth thorns and briers is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing; whose end is to be burned" (Hebrews 6:4-6, 8). There is hope for restoration for the one who falls from grace, but none for those who continue to deny the faith.

It is true that in the Bible there is found a teaching of eternal security, but this blessing is for those only who continue in all God's commandments to do them. "He that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved" (Matthew 24:13). For God "will render to every man according to his deeds: to them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life: but unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath" (Romans 2:6-8). God will keep the man who keeps His commandments. To no other man is there any promise of eternal security. "Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure" (II Peter 1:10).