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Lesson 1 — *Eternal Security: Preservation by God*

INTRODUCTION

The Golden Gate Bridge officially opened on May 27, 1937 and became (at that time) the longest suspension bridge in the world. That day, nearly 200,000 people walked, ran, tap-danced, and roller-skated across the bridge, and it opened to automobile traffic the next day.

One unique fact about the Golden Gate Bridge is the high level of safety its crew experienced during construction. While these kinds of projects in the 1930s typically experienced a fatality rate of 1 person for every \$1 million in cost, the \$35 million project lost only 11 men, and 10 of them perished at one time in a freak accident.

The architect behind the safety of the construction workers was Joseph Strauss. This chief engineer made the construction site the first in America to require workers to wear hard hats, and he spent \$130,000 on an innovative safety net that was suspended under the bridge deck. The net saved the lives of 19 workers and is credited for an increase in work output.

Whether installed underneath laborers on a bridge, below a tight-rope walker across a cavern, or beneath a trapeze artist at a circus, the security of a safety net comforts, emboldens, and inspires its users.

Do Christians have any such safety net? Do we have any underlying security that gives us confidence and conviction, assuring our hearts and motivating our wills? Is there any such surety for believers, prone to wander and vulnerable to falling?

God's Word answers those halting questions with a resounding, "Yes!" "Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only

God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever" (Jude 24).

It is the doctrine of eternal security that serves as a kind of safety net for true believers. One preacher put it this way, "We have security in God. When we are sure in His arms, we dare to attempt big things for God. We dare to be holy. We dare to be obedient. We dare, because we know the eternal arms of God will hold us if we fall" (Juan Carlos Ortiz, <http://bit.ly/1Ow9saU>).

DEFINITION OF "ETERNAL SECURITY: PRESERVATION"

Various Statements

- *Theological definition* — "God secures and guarantees the final salvation of all true believers" (Rolland McCune).
- *Poetic explanation* — "The saints in heaven are happier but no more secure than true believers here in this world" (Loraine Boettner).
- *Practical affirmation* — Once saved, always saved. You cannot lose your salvation. God is not an "Indian giver."

Important Qualifications

- *Regarding professing believers* — This does not apply to mere professing believers, but to possessing believers. In other words, this does not mean that if a person has confessed faith at any time in his life, then that person is saved even if he later falls into unrepentant sin or repudiates Christ (i.e., profession of faith ≠ possession of salvation and eternal security). The whole field may look like wheat, but we know that some are actually tares (not wheat that went bad). The wheat will be saved, while the tares burned, and God absolutely knows the different natures and ensures the different outcomes (Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43; 2 Timothy 4:10; 1 John 2:19).
- *Regarding Christians who sin* — This does not mean that a true believer will not sin or backslide or doubt (e.g., Jeremiah, John the Baptist, Peter, Lot). Nor does this mean that a believer may live however he wants, because he is eternally secure (cf. Romans 6:1; 1 Corinthians 6:11; 2 Corinthians 5:17).

- *Regarding my personal responsibility* — This does not mean that I don't need to endure until the end, but it does guarantee that God can enable my perseverance. The biblical teaching on eternal security is both that God will preserve me and that I must persevere — in other words, preservation by God and the perseverance of the saints are two sides of the same coin of eternal security.
 - Now, we'll deal with the perseverance of the saints in our third lesson, but while we're talking about the whole of eternal security (both preservation and perseverance), it may be helpful to make a brief comment on how these two concepts interrelate.
 - To do so, consider a text like Matthew 24:13 (cf. Matthew 10:22; 2 Timothy 2:12; 1 Corinthians 15:1; Colossians 1:22; James 1:12; Revelation 2:10)—“the one who endures to the end will be saved.” For some, this conditionality seems to threaten eternal security and the surety of God's preservation.
 - However, John Piper helps us understand (<http://bit.ly/1YzAr7H>) that what this and other verses are teaching is that, while election is unconditional, glorification is conditional—we will be saved (ultimately glorified) *if we persevere unto the end*. Notice the conditionality of this statement. And yet, we are wrong to equate this conditionality with uncertainty—conditionality does not mean uncertainty, nor does it undermine a divine guarantee.
 - There is admittedly a part of mystery involved here, and yet we can suggest two points that help to resolve part of the seeming tension between the conditionality and certainty in our eternal security.
 - First, God's preservation guarantees the fulfillment of the condition (cf. 1 Peter 1:5). The true believer doesn't need to worry or wonder about his fulfilling of the condition to persevere, for the doctrine itself assures us that true believers will persevere. Their nature has been

changed, and God is dwelling within them—and resurrection life can never die! Far from suggesting that conditionality undermines certainty Romans 8:30 presents a certain, unbreakable chain from election to glorification—“And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.” Yes, God will enable our perseverance, for He is able to keep us from falling (Jude 24)!

- Second, it is this very conditionality that God uses to preserve believers (cf. John 16:1). As the ancient confessions put it, God's Word issues exhortations, threats, and promises in order to spur us on to endure. We'll consider this further in our third lesson, but listen to how John Piper describes this usefulness.

Eternal security, then, is not like a vaccination that we receive when we were six and don't have anything to do with now. No, it is like an ongoing therapy regimen and our doctor, Jesus, promises never, never, never to leave us, but always to help us and to keep us and, thus, our therapy, our ongoing daily therapy is the means by which we are preserved and kept and his words are an essential part of that (<http://bit.ly/23iMzdL>).

- The doctrine of eternal security must be our “north star” as we consider people who seemingly “fall from grace” (e.g., Jeremiah in Jeremiah 20, Judas, Peter, Lot, those who “went out from us,” those who “fall away” in Hebrews, etc.). While God alone knows the final answer on a person, the double-sided doctrine of eternal security assures us that if someone is eternally lost, then they never were truly saved in the first place.

- Incidentally, that provokes another question: how can I be sure that I am saved? That will be the focus of our study the next time we consider this series together (7/31), and then we'll conclude with a third lesson on the flip side of this coin of eternal security—the perseverance of the saints (8/7).

Eternal Security (objective)	
<i>Preservation by God</i> - Lesson 1 - EDUCATION	<i>Perseverance of the Saints</i> - Lesson 3 - EXHORTATION
Assurance of Salvation (subjective)	
- Lesson 2 - ENCOURAGEMENT	

For now, setting both that question aside and the previous important qualifications, let us return to this important and precious “safety net” for all true believers—that they are, in Christ, eternally secure.

Summary Thesis — God’s Word is clear that what God starts, He finishes; that when He saves a person, He secures that person entirely.

DEFENSE OF “ETERNAL SECURITY: PRESERVATION”

We are going to look at this clear teaching of Scripture via four categories of support.

THE NATURE OF SALVATION

Several aspects of our salvation necessitate an eternal dimension to its security:

- 1. Our election by God (Matthew 24:22; John 6:37, 39-40; Romans 8:28-30; Luke 10:20; Philippians 4:3; Revelation 3:5 [13:8; 17:8]; 21:27 [20:15])** — If God has unconditionally elected believers, then they must, by nature of that selection, be eternally safe.¹
- 2. The substitutionary atonement of Christ (John 5:24; Romans 8:1-2, 34)** — Jesus atoned for all our sin in His life and death and fully bore its penalty and guilt; therefore, there is no condemnation left for believers.

- 3. The resurrection of Christ (John 14:19; 1 Peter 1:3)** — Our union with Christ assures us that as He was raised to life and ascended to acceptance before the Father, so, too, have we.
- 4. Our justification & union with Christ (Romans 5:19; 6:2-10; 8:1-4; Hebrews 10:14)** — In our union with Christ, we have been positionally “perfected for all time” and have experienced a once-for-all-time break with the mastery of sin in our lives.
- 5. Our redemption & ownership by Christ (1 Corinthians 6:19-20; Hebrews 13:5-6)** — God purchased our freedom, dwells within us, and will not sell us back or abandon us.
- 6. Our propitiation & reconciliation by Christ (Romans 5:1; 8:1)** — The assurances of peace with God and the removal of condemnation would offer little comfort if they could be forfeited.
- 7. The sealing by the Spirit (Ephesians 1:12-14; 4:30)** — The “guarantee” of God’s Spirit within us serves to seal us as His own and to be a down payment of our inheritance.²
- 8. Our forgiveness by God (Psalm 32:1-2; Psalm 103:3, 9-14)** — The great blessing of the New Covenant is that sin will be, not just covered, but forgiven (Jeremiah 31:34). Our sin was judged fully in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:21) and we were given His privileged standing—this is the joy of imputation, the precious scandal of the great exchange.

THE DECLARATIONS OF SAFE-“KEEPING”

- 1. John 10:28-29** — “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand. I and the Father are one.”
- 2. John 17:11-12** — “And I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one. While I was with them, I kept them in your name, which

you have given me. I have guarded them, and not one of them has been lost except the son of destruction, that the Scripture might be fulfilled.”

3. **2 Thessalonians 3:3** — “But the Lord is faithful. He will establish you and guard you against the evil one.”
4. **2 Timothy 1:12** — “Which is why I suffer as I do. But I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard until that Day what has been entrusted to me.”
5. **2 Timothy 4:18** — “The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen.”
6. **1 Peter 1:3-5** — “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.”
7. **1 John 5:18** — “We know that everyone who has been born of God does not keep on sinning, but he who was born of God protects him, and the evil one does not touch him.”
8. **Jude 1** — “Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James, to those who are called, beloved in God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ.”
9. **Jude 24** — “Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy.”

THE IMPLICATIONS OF OTHER PASSAGES

1. **John 3:16; 5:24** — “not perish”; eternal life”; “does not come into condemnation”; “passed from death to life”

2. **John 4:13-14; 6:51** — “never be thirsty again”; “living bread...live forever”
3. **Romans 8:30** — “And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.”
4. **Philippians 1:6** — “And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.”
5. **Hebrews 12:2** — “founder and perfecter of our faith”

THE INTERDEPENDENCY OF OTHER DOCTRINES

1. **The intercession of Christ (John 17:24; Romans 5:10; Hebrews 7:25; Romans 8:34; 1 John 2:2; cf. Luke 22:31-32)³** — Christ's ongoing intercessory work provides an additional dimension of security to His atonement, and since He is always heard by the Father (John 11:41-42), we can have confidence that His prayers for us, like for Peter, will be effective.
2. **The faithfulness of God (1 Corinthians 1:8-9; 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24; 2 Timothy 2:13; Numbers 23:19)** — God is bound by His own reputation and will always fulfill His word. Thus, in the midst of his own failing, the believer has welcome assurance from God's untainted faithfulness.
3. **The power of God (1 Peter 1:5; 1 Thessalonians 5:24)** — God's power is infinite and cannot be frustrated by finite sin. Regarding our final salvation, the omnipotence of God will surely “bring it to pass.”
4. **The providence/sovereignty of God (Romans 8:28-30)** — God undeniably sovereignly brings every facet of the universe to its preordained purpose, including “all things” that pertain to the salvation of His people.

CONCLUSION

God's Word is clear that what God starts, He finishes. When God saves a person, He secures that person entirely.

If we ever doubt God's ability to preserve us (or question someone's true profession/perseverance), it may be helpful to remember the biblical example of Lot (Genesis 19; 2 Peter 2:7-8; also cf. Jeremiah in Jeremiah 1:17; 20:1-18). Lot's testimony reminds us that we're not God on this matter of eternal security. Lot certainly struggled to live his faith, and yet he was kept by God unto the end (cf. 2 Peter 2:9).

H. A. Ironside likened salvation to Noah's invitation to the lost to trust God's Word and come into the ark. He suggested that some view salvation like Noah offering to put a peg on the outside of the ark—"If you just hang on through the storm, you'll be saved." But that, of course, is not the whole truth, and by itself is even damning. Our salvation is not dependent on our holding on to God, but on our being securely held by and in Christ.⁴

We "cling to Christ," but aren't we glad that even when our grip loosens, He's clinging to us!

ENDNOTES

¹ <http://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/can-i-be-blotted-from-the-book-of-life>

² Additionally, consider the illumination of the Spirit (1 John 2:27).

³ John MacArthur wrote:

The above explanation by Murray of the doctrine of perseverance is an elaboration of what Peter meant by his words "protected by the power of God" when he wrote his first epistle (1 Peter 1:5). If any biblical character was ever prone to failure, it was Simon Peter. Judging from the biblical record, none of the Lord's disciples—excluding Judas the betrayer—stumbled more often or more miserably than he. Peter was the disciple with the foot-shaped mouth. He seemed to have a knack for saying the worst possible thing at the most inappropriate time. He was impetuous, erratic, vacillating—sometimes cowardly, sometimes weak, sometimes hotheaded. On several occasions he merited strong rebukes from the Lord, none more severe than that recorded in Matthew 16:23: "Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's." That occurred almost immediately after the high point in Peter's experience with Christ, when Peter confessed, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16).

Peter's life is proof that a true believer's spiritual experience is often filled with ups and downs, but Peter illustrates another biblical truth, a more significant one: the keeping power of God. On the night Jesus was betrayed, He gave Peter an insight into the behind-the-scenes spiritual battle over Peter's soul: "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat; but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail" (Luke 22:31–32, emphasis added).

Peter was confident of his willingness to stand with Jesus, whatever the cost. He told the Lord, "Lord, with You I am ready to go both to prison and to death" (Luke 22:33). Yet Jesus knew the truth and sadly told Peter, "The cock will not crow today until you have denied three times that you know Me" (Luke 22:34).

Did Peter fail? Yes, miserably. Was his faith overthrown? Never. Jesus Himself was interceding on Peter's behalf, and His prayers did not go unanswered.

The Lord intercedes for all genuine believers that way. John 17:11 gives a glimpse of how He prays for them: "I am no more in the world; and yet they themselves are in the world, and I come to Thee. Holy Father, keep them in Thy name, the name which Thou has given Me, that they may be one, even as We are."

(<http://www.gty.org/resources/Articles/A218/Perseverance-of-the-Saints>)

⁴ http://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/e/eternal_security.htm