

Once Saved, Always Saved

Ironically, while one group of Protestants is touting "once saved always saved" another group is stating that you can never really be sure who has *REAL* faith until the end because it might turn out that one is "overcome" by the world at the last minute. Maybe the salvation really never "took" in the first place. I'm just curious, which of these groups is "rightly dividing the word of God" and which is wrongly dividing it? They can't both be right yet both claim scripture as their sole rule of faith. So much for the doctrine of *sola scriptura*. But I digress.

Isn't it ironic that when Catholics speak of mortal sin, many "once-saved-always-saved" Protestants will begin screaming about how "wrong" Catholics are to hold that someone could be justified according to the Word of God and still lose out on salvation in the end because they are not in a state of grace due to mortal sin at the time of their death. Yet, another Protestant declares that if one is "overcome" by the world and does not persevere (in what? good works?) to the end, that is evidence that one does not have saving faith.

Such a one is in a difficult situation for even *he* cannot know for sure *right now* if he *REALLY* has that saving faith or not, and he won't know this side of heaven. He realizes that he, too, could be overcome at some point in the future...perhaps his time of testing has not yet come.

This is what drives the "good works" of many Protestantism - the evangelizing, the tithing, the missionary work, etc. They are seeking to do these things as evidence that they have saving faith that perseveres to the end.

This is the treadmill they are on - and then they condemn Catholics because they mistakenly believe we think we can earn our way into heaven! They attribute this false idea to Catholics because many of them are actually doing that very thing themselves!

Eternal Security (another way of saying "once-saved-always-saved") is usually based on verses like 1 John 5:13, "I have written these things that you may KNOW you have eternal life." But the Protestant does not know until he actually gets there -- to heaven that is. The cheap backdoor "out", the escape hatch their flawed theology is this: if in the end they fall into serious sin and deny Christ, they simply say that the salvation never really took in the beginning. There was a defective faith or lack of true belief. But how do they know that until the end when they have proved their "true saving faith" until the end by their works, perseverance and faithfulness?

They don't. I am glad to be a Catholic.

Steve Ray's Additional Comments

For more on this, read my [letter to Baptist Preacher Charles Stanley](#) (author of Eternal Security).

Here also is a footnote from my book [Crossing the Tiber](#) concerning 1 John 5:13 about "knowing you have eternal life."

"I want to question the way 1 John 5:13 is often promoted as a proof text for "eternal security". It is often used by people to prove you "know" for sure they have eternal life. It is often asked of Catholics, "Do you know you are going to heaven, are you positive of eternal life?" The Catholic usually stumbles around and looks foolish as the great proof text is read to them. I would make two points. First, the thirteenth verse (1 John 5:13) begins the conclusion to John's epistle, and the intent of John's letter was primarily to defend the true faith against the heresies of the Gnostics, who said one needed special knowledge (implying a knowledge the Christians did not have) to obtain eternal life.

John is refuting the Gnostics and comforting the Christians with the fact that they *did* have the true knowledge, which John had seen, heard, and handled (1 Jn 1:1-3), and that true knowledge through Jesus Christ was the true and only way to eternal life. *It was not meant as a proof text between those who hold eternal security and those who deny it. John's words had a higher purpose that had little to do with the question of eternal security or absolute knowledge and confidence of eternal life.* His argument was between the Christian and the Gnostic, between the physical incarnation of God and the illusory phantom god of the Gnostics. John would cringe if he heard how Fundamentalists use his words today.

This is borne out in my second point, that the verse which begins the conclusion of John's epistle, summarizes the preceding four chapters. It should be noted that the conditional word "if" is used twenty times in the epistle and seems to be saying, "*If you understand and abide by the conditions of this letter, if you love one another, if you avoid sin, if you believe in the Son, etc., you may know that you have eternal life.*" Eternal life, then, is meant to be a moral certainty, not a definite certainty. Another words one has a moral certainty, if one measures up to the conditions given by the preceding pages.

Evangelical John Stott comments, "They [the recipients of John's letter] had been unsettled by the false teachers and become unsure of their spiritual state. Throughout the epistle John has been giving them criteria (doctrinal, moral, social) by which to test themselves and others. His purpose was to establish their assurance" (*The Epistles of John* in the *Tyndale New Testament Commentary* series [Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans, 1964], 184-185). But, could these believers securely "rest in their absolute assurance of salvation" if their lives were not living

up to the “criteria” John gave them?

One should be cautious in reading too much into a text without understanding its literary and historical context, and the rest of Christian teaching. One should also beware of Protestant teaching that strays from the clear teaching of historical Christianity. What you discover is that you CAN trust the Catholic Church!