

A “Mainstream” View about Salvation

Introduction

One of the doctrines that almost all mainstream Protestant denominations share is the doctrine of “eternal security”. According to that doctrine, all that a person needs to do, in order to be granted everlasting life, is as follows:

Make a **single** “statement of faith” in Jesus.

In other words, *as soon as* a person confesses that Jesus is our lord, and believes that God raised Jesus from the dead, then that person is *guaranteed* to be saved – no matter **what** he does after that time!

Think about that for a moment. If eternal security is true, then there is no need for a person to “maintain” his faith *at all*. For example, consider the following scenario:

- When Tim is 20 years old, he makes a sincere statement of faith in Jesus.
- When Tim is 22, he makes a deliberate, conscious decision to **reject** Jesus – and to become a worshiper of Satan.
- Tim continues to worship Satan for the next 60 years, and then he dies – and he *never* asks God for forgiveness, during the entire 60 year period.

According to the eternal security doctrine, Tim **will** be granted everlasting life – *solely* because of his one-time “statement of faith”.

The eternal security doctrine is sometimes known by the phrase “once saved, always saved” – since that is a rather succinct summary of the entire doctrine.

Recently, I attended a Sunday worship service at a “mainstream” Christian church. In that service, the pastor’s message went into great detail about his church’s belief in the eternal security doctrine. So, let’s take a look at some of the assertions that were brought up in that message (as listed in the headings below) – and then see if Scripture supports those assertions.

“When God looks at you, He sees Jesus”

One of the most fundamental tenets of the eternal security doctrine is the following: As soon as a person becomes a Christian, God immediately stops “paying attention” to that person’s actions (or “works”). Basically, the belief is that when God looks at a Christian, he sees *Jesus* instead of the person. (Apparently Jesus is “blocking God’s view” of us...)

From the above idea, the eternal security doctrine asserts that our actions do not have *anything to do* with salvation. In other words, that doctrine states that if a person has made a one-time statement of faith, then he can act *however he wants to* - and he will **still** be saved!

So, let’s see if that idea is supported by Scripture:

1 Corinthians 6:9 (ESV):

⁹Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, ¹⁰nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.

Revelation 21:8 (ESV):

⁸ But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.”

James 2:14-16 (ESV):

¹⁴What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? ¹⁵ If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, ¹⁶ and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled,” without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that?

James 2:20-22,24,26 (ESV):

²⁰Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless? ²¹ Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? ²²You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works. ²⁴You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. ²⁶For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.

From all of the above passages, I draw the following conclusions:

Good works – *without* faith – cannot save us.

Faith – *without* good works – *also* cannot save us.

In other words, true faith is *demonstrated* by a person’s good works. The good works, themselves, do not save us – rather, good works are a result of true faith; since true faith *motivates* a person to *do* good works.

“God cannot love you any more than He does now”

Another part of the overall eternal security doctrine is the following belief: “**All** Christians will receive the **same** reward”. In other words, all Christians will be treated *exactly* the same way when Jesus returns – no matter what *actions* they performed during their lives. (This idea is reinforced by the mainstream belief of “going to heaven when you die”.)

So, is this “equal rewards no matter what you did” belief supported by Scripture? Let’s find out:

Matthew 16:27 (ESV):

²⁷ For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done.

Revelation 22:12 (NASB):

¹² “Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward *is* with Me, to render to every man according to what he has done.

Some churches claim that Christians **will** receive different *rewards*, based on what they have done – but that Christians will **not** receive any *punishments* for their actions. So, let’s see if that view is supported by Scripture:

Romans 2:5-6 (NASB):

⁵ But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, ⁶ who WILL RENDER TO EACH PERSON ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS:

1 Thessalonians 4:6 (NIV):

...no one should wrong or take advantage of a brother or sister. The Lord will punish all those who commit such sins, as we told you and warned you before.

All of the above passages tell me that Christians will **not** be treated exactly the same way, when Jesus returns. Instead, the rewards – and the punishments – that Christians receive will be based upon our *actions* during our lifetimes.

“Do not try to be acceptable to God”

Finally, some proponents of the eternal security doctrine assert that Christians should **not even try** to do what is acceptable to God. Basically, these groups claim that people who try to be acceptable to God “do not understand the power of the cross”.

So, according to this rather “extreme” version of eternal security, not only do Christians not *need* to be acceptable to God, but Christians should **not even try** to be acceptable to Him.

The above assertion is extraordinarily serious. So, let’s see if Scripture tells us if Christians should try to be acceptable to God or not:

Matthew 7:21 (ESV):

²¹ “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.

Matthew 24:12-13 (ESV):

¹²And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. ¹³ But the one who endures to the end will be saved.

The above passages are pretty clear – it is *necessary* for people to **do God’s will**, in order to be saved. In other words, people **must** try to be acceptable to God, if they want to be saved!

However, most proponents of eternal security claim that the above passages do **not apply** to Christians. That's right – they claim that the above statements – which were made by **Christ** – do not have *any effect* on **Christians**.

The reason why they claim that is because Jesus made those statements *before* he was crucified – and most eternal security proponents believe that salvation completely **changed**, *after* Jesus was crucified.

So, let's take a look at some Scriptural passages that were written *after* Jesus was crucified:

Hebrews 10:36 (ESV):

³⁶For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised.

2 Peter 1:10-11 (ESV):

¹⁰Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to make your calling and election sure, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall. ¹¹For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

The above passages also state that people *must* to do the will of God, in order to be saved – and those passages are *specifically written* to **Christians**! So, it certainly appears to me that Christians **do** need to try to be acceptable to God, if they want to be granted everlasting life.

Conclusion

It is definitely true that faith in Jesus is *required*, in order for a person to be saved. This is primarily because all of us have sinned against God – and as a result, all of us deserve death. So, it is *absolutely necessary* for us to have faith in Jesus, in order for us to be granted everlasting life.

However, from what I can see, true faith is an ongoing *process* - rather than a one-time *statement*. In other words, in order for faith to save us, it is necessary for us to *maintain* our faith, until the end of our lives.

Consider the passages below. In particular, notice the conditionals (the clauses starting with the word “if”) in those verses:

1 Corinthians 15:1-2 (NIV):

¹ Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. ² By this gospel you are saved, **IF** you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.

Colossians 1:21-23 (ESV):

²¹ And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, ²²he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, ²³**IF** indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister.

Hebrews 10:26-27 (ESV):

²⁶For **IF** we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, ²⁷ but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries.

All of the above passages indicate to me that *maintaining* one's faith is necessary for salvation. So, a "statement of faith" is the *beginning* of a person's salvation process – **not** the *end* of it.

Note: a much more detailed discussion of the eternal security doctrine can be found at [this link](#).