

What Must I Do to be Saved?

Introduction

In my view, one of the most important theological questions, in all of Christianity, is as follows:

What, exactly, do we need to *do*, in order to be saved?

In other words, what *actions* must we take, in order for Jesus to grant us *everlasting life*, in the *kingdom of God*, when he returns?

The various Christian denominations have many different answers to that question. So, I would like to discuss that question in more detail, in this document.

The Mainstream Doctrine – “Eternal Security”

The most common doctrine about salvation, in mainstream Protestant churches, is the doctrine of “eternal security”. According to this doctrine, all that is required for a person to be saved is as follows:

Make a single “statement of faith” in Jesus.

Basically, according to this doctrine, all that a person needs to do to be saved is to accept Jesus as his Lord, and believe that God raised him from the dead. This statement of faith is often referred to as the “sinner’s prayer”.

This doctrine also states that once a person makes a statement of faith, he immediately – and irrevocably – becomes a child of God. As a result, this doctrine claims that once a person has made a statement of faith, he is guaranteed to be saved – no matter what he does after that time.

The eternal security doctrine is frequently referred to as “once saved, always saved”.

There are two main points to consider about eternal security:

First, according to that doctrine, all that is required to be saved is faith in Jesus – our actions (i.e., our “works”) do not matter at all. As a result, that doctrine claims that *everyone* who has made a statement of faith will be saved – *regardless* of how anyone behaves afterwards.

For example, consider the following case: John Smith was a notorious adulterer for many years. Then, at one moment in his life, he made a sincere statement of faith in Jesus. After that, he began to commit adultery even more frequently than he did before – and he kept up that sinful behavior for the rest of his life.

According to this doctrine, John Smith will be saved – simply because he made a single statement of faith. Basically, this doctrine claims that our *actions* have absolutely nothing to do with salvation.

The eternal security doctrine also claims that a statement of faith permanently guarantees salvation.

In other words, that doctrine states that once a person has made a single statement of faith, he will *automatically* be saved – *even if* that person explicitly rejects Jesus, after his statement of faith.

For example, consider the following case: Paul Jones was raised as an atheist. Then, at one point in his life, he made a sincere statement of faith in Jesus. One week after that, Paul explicitly rejected Jesus – that is, he made a *deliberate, conscious* decision that he did not believe in God or Jesus any longer. Paul then spent the rest of his life, in that state of unbelief.

According to the eternal security doctrine, Paul Jones will be saved – simply because he made a single statement of faith in Jesus. Basically, according to that doctrine, it is not necessary for a person to “maintain” his faith at all, in order to be saved.

Is There Any Scriptural Support for Eternal Security?

In my view, any Christian doctrine needs to be validated by Scripture. In other words, if any doctrine violates what is listed in the Bible, then that doctrine should be rejected.

So, the question becomes, is there *any* Scriptural support for the eternal security doctrine?

There are some verses that are used to attempt to prove that doctrine. Almost all of the verses in question are from the apostle Paul. Some of the most popular of those verses are listed on the next few sections.

“Confess with your mouth, and believe in your heart”

One of the most famous verses that is used to support eternal security is Romans 10:9 – the so-called “formula of salvation”:

Romans 10:9 (ESV):

⁹If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

This passage certainly *seems* to indicate that a one-time statement of faith is *all* that is required, in order to *guarantee* our salvation – i.e., that we do not need to “maintain” our faith at all.

In addition, this passage *seems* to state that our *actions* do not matter at all – i.e., that we do not need to obey Jesus, to be saved.

This specific verse appears to be the primary inspiration for the concept of the “sinner’s prayer”.

“Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved”

Acts chapter 16 contains the account of the Philippian jailer. This man was ordered to guard the apostles Paul and Silas in his jail; but God caused a huge earthquake to free them. Here is the jailer’s reaction:

Acts 16:29-31 (ESV):

²⁹And the jailer called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas.
³⁰Then he brought them out and said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” ³¹And they said, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.”

This passage certainly *seems* to indicate that all that is required for salvation is *belief in Jesus* – i.e., it seems to state that our *actions* don’t matter at all.

“Nothing can separate us from the love of God”

Another common passage to support the doctrine of eternal security is Romans 8:38-39:

Romans 8:38-39 (ESV):

³⁸For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

This passage states that all of the listed items – death, angels, powers, etc – can not separate us from the love of God.

Many mainstream churches interpret that passage as meaning that God will still save us, *even if* we, ourselves, explicitly turn away from Him. (Of course, the passage does not state that anywhere.)

“You have been saved by faith, not by works”

Finally, the passage that is usually used as the “ultimate proof” to support eternal security is Ephesians chapter 2, verses 8 and 9:

Ephesians 2:8-9 (ESV):

⁸For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

This passage certainly states that our actions – *alone* – can not save us. However, many mainstream churches come to a more “extreme” conclusion from the above passage – they state that the above passage means that our actions do not have anything to do with salvation!

In my view, the above passage does not warrant such a conclusion – especially in light of many other passages in Scripture.

Does the Entire Bible Support Eternal Security?

The passages on the last few sections certainly seem to support the doctrine of eternal security.

However, it is very easy to “pick and choose” specific verses from Scripture, and then make *sweeping* generalizations from them. (It is possible to justify almost *any* concept with that “pick and choose” method. In fact, some “fringe” groups use this method to support *polygamy* for *Christians*...)

So, in my view, it is necessary to see what the entire Bible has to say about salvation for Christians – before assuming that the eternal security doctrine is correct.

What Did Jesus Say?

First off, let’s take a look at some of the statements that Jesus made about salvation.

Since Jesus – himself – is going to judge everyone when he returns, it stands to reason that Jesus *knows* what we need to *do*, in order to be saved.

In other words, Jesus knows what actions we need to perform during *this* age, in order for us to be granted everlasting life in the *next* age.

“Not everyone who says to me ‘Lord, Lord’”

One of the most famous statements of Jesus occurs in Matthew 7:21:

Matthew 7:21 (ESV):

“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.”

Similarly, Jesus states the following, in Luke 6:46

Luke 6:46 (ESV):

“Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do what I tell you?”

My understanding of the above verses is as follows:

It is *not enough* to just say that Jesus is one’s Lord; it is necessary to actually follow Jesus – i.e., to do what he commands – in order to be saved.

The Sheep and the Goats

Matthew 25:31-46 contains the famous “sheep and goats” judgment. In this passage, Jesus divides up people into two different groups – with one group (the “sheep”) being saved, and the other group (the “goats”) being condemned:

Matthew 25:34-36,41-43,46 (ESV):

³⁴Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. ³⁵For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, ³⁶ I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.'

⁴¹"Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. ⁴²For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, ⁴³I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.' ⁴⁶And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

This passage explicitly states that our actions do have an effect on our salvation – in fact, it states that our actions *indicate* whether we will be saved or not!

“He who endures until the end will be saved”

In Matthew chapter 24, Jesus describes the persecutions that Christians will face, during the “last days” of this current age:

Matthew 24:9-13 (ESV):

⁹"Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name's sake. ¹⁰And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another. ¹¹And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. ¹²And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. ¹³But the one who endures to the end will be saved.

In the above passage, Jesus explicitly states that Christians will *only* be saved if they “endure until the end”.

That indicates to me that it is absolutely necessary for us to *maintain* our faith, in order to be saved – i.e., true faith is not just a “one time event”.

The “Dispensationalism” Doctrine

The passages from Jesus on the last few sections are very explicit – they state that our actions do have an effect on our salvation; and that it is necessary for us to maintain our faith in order to be saved. As a result, Jesus’ statements contradict the eternal security doctrine.

Most churches that believe in that doctrine try to “explain away” Jesus’ statements, by using another doctrine called “dispensationalism”.

Basically, dispensationalism divides up human history into many different “periods of time”, or “dispensations”. In addition, that doctrine claims that Jesus lived on the earth during a different dispensation than the one that we are currently living in. Finally, that doctrine claims that *entire* process of salvation completely changed, when the current dispensation began. In other words, that doctrine asserts that salvation is completely different now, than it was when Jesus walked the earth.

As a result, the dispensationalism doctrine makes the following, *astounding* claim:

The statements that **Christ** made about salvation do *not apply* to **Christians!**

In other words, that doctrine basically makes the following statement to Christians:

“Don’t pay any attention to what Jesus **said**, because Jesus was talking to people who lived in a different dispensation.”

I *strongly* disagree with the above claim – because it is contradicted by Scripture. For example, Jesus tells us that heaven and earth will pass away, but his words will never pass away. Also, the apostle Paul explicitly tells us that if anyone does *not* obey the words of Christ, then that person is conceited and does not understand anything!

What Did the Other Apostles Say About Salvation?

As noted on the last section, I do not believe in the dispensationalism doctrine at all, because the entire focus of the New Testament is about following Jesus – and how can we follow him if we do not listen to his **words**?

Nevertheless, just for the “sake of the argument”, let’s assume that dispensationalism is correct. If so, that means that salvation for Christians is defined in the epistles – i.e., the letters that the apostles wrote in the New Testament.

So, let’s take a look at what some of the *other* apostles (besides Paul) wrote, in their letters – to see if the other apostles agree with the doctrine of eternal security.

After all, if eternal security is correct, then certainly all of the apostles should be in agreement about it – because we know that the Bible does not contradict itself.

“Faith without works is dead”

The apostle James made some very explicit statements about salvation. In particular, he emphasized the relationship between true faith, and good works. Here is one such passage:

James 2:14-17 (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? ¹⁷So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

In my view, the above passage states that faith which does not *motivate* a person to do good works, is *not* true faith at all. Of course, if a person does not have true faith, he will not be saved.

“A person is justified by works, and not by faith alone”

Another very explicit passage about salvation from James is as follows:

James 2:18,20-24 (ESV):

¹⁸But someone will say, "You have faith and I have works." Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. 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; ²³and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness"—and he was called a friend of God. ²⁴You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.

The above passage contains several very important points. First, it repeats the statement that faith which does *not* result in good works is not faith at all.

Then, it tells us that good works “complete” faith – i.e., works are the *result* of true faith.

Finally, it explicitly states that we are **not** justified by faith alone – instead, we are justified by faith which *includes* good works.

“The last state has become worse for them than the first”

The apostle Peter also made some important statements about salvation. In the following passage, Peter describes people who turn away from Jesus:

2 Peter 2:20-21 (ESV):

²⁰For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. ²¹For it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than after knowing it to turn back from the holy commandment delivered to them.

The above passage talks about people who are true followers of Jesus at one point – as evidenced by the fact that they had “escaped from the defilements of the world”. However, after that time, those people explicitly turned away from Jesus, and were overcome by the world again.

Peter tells us that those people are *worse off* after turning away, than they were before they began to follow Jesus! This tells me that if a person explicitly turns away from Jesus, then he will not be saved – even if he *used to* follow Jesus.

“It is impossible to restore them again to repentance”

The writer of Hebrews also has many important statements to make about salvation. Here is one such passage, about people who turn away from Jesus (similar to the last passage from Peter):

Hebrews 6:4-6 (ESV):

⁴For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, ⁵and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, ⁶and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt.

This passage also talks about people who were once true followers of Jesus – but who later turn away. In the case of those people, it is no longer possible to “restore them to repentance”. I understand that to mean that it is no longer possible for those people’s sins to be forgiven.

As a result, this passage states that people who turn away from Jesus will not be saved – even though those people used to follow Jesus! This completely contradicts the eternal security idea that all that is required for salvation is a one-time “statement of faith”.

“There no longer remains a sacrifice for sins”

Another key passage from Hebrews is as follows:

Hebrews 10:26-27,35-36 (ESV):

²⁶For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, ²⁷but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries. ³⁵Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. ³⁶For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised.

There are two important points brought out by this passage. First, the passage states – yet again – that our actions do have an effect on our salvation. It explicitly states that if a person keeps on deliberately sinning, after he learns the truth about the Gospel, then he will not be saved.

The passage also emphasizes the need for us to maintain our faith. In other words, true faith is not just a “one time event”, but rather, it is a lifelong process. This completely agrees with Jesus’ statement of “He who endures until the end will be saved”.

Additional Statements from Paul

Earlier in this document, some of the statements that the apostle Paul made about salvation were listed.

However, those are not all of Paul's statements – instead, they are only the statements that proponents of eternal security usually quote.

Paul actually made many other statements about salvation – and some of those other statements contradict the eternal security doctrine.

So, let's take a look at what else Paul had to say about salvation.

“Sinners will not inherit the kingdom of God”

The apostle Paul made some very descriptive statements about people who will not inherit the kingdom of God, in 1 Corinthians chapter 6:

1 Corinthians 6:9-11 (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. ¹¹And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

The above passage tells me that anyone who deliberately continues in the above sins will not be saved, when Jesus returns. This completely *agrees* with the statements made in 2 Peter 2 and Hebrews 10.

Proponents of eternal security sometimes point to verse 11, to try to claim that if a person has made a statement of faith, then a person will be saved, even if he continues in those actions. However, the passage does not state that anywhere. On the contrary – that passage implies that true Christians do not participate in those sins any longer!

“Prove your repentance by your deeds”

Acts chapter 26 contains an account of Paul's trial before King Agrippa, in Jerusalem. During his trial, Paul describes his conversion to Christianity – including his vision of Jesus, in which Jesus commanded Paul to spread the gospel to both Jews and Gentiles. Paul continues as follows:

Acts 26:19-20 (NIV):

¹⁹“So then, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the vision from heaven. ²⁰First to those in Damascus, then to those in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and to the Gentiles also, I preached that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds.”

Note what Paul states here – he states that people need to *prove* their repentance, by their *deeds* (i.e., by their works).

In other words, true repentance is *not* a matter of making a one-time statement of faith. Instead, true repentance involves changing a person's *heart*, so that that person will *want* to follow God.

“You have been saved by grace, through faith, to do good works”

One of Paul's statements that I listed earlier is Ephesians chapter 2, verses 8 and 9. When I originally listed that passage, I purposely excluded verse 10 – because most proponents of eternal security also exclude it.

So, let's see how the passage reads, when we include verse 10:

Ephesians 2:8-10 (NIV):

⁸For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—
⁹not by works, so that no one can boast. ¹⁰For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Notice that verse 10 speaks about Christians doing good works. So, my overall understanding of the above passage is as follows:

“We are saved by grace, through faith, to do good works.”

As a result, the above passage demonstrates – once again – the relationship between true faith, and good works. In other words, if a person has true faith, then that faith will motivate him to do good works.

Recap on Eternal Security

So, after all of the passages in this document, we finally reach the original question: What must we do to be saved? There are several conclusions that I have come to, from all of those passages.

First, from what I can see, the doctrine of eternal security is not correct. As mentioned previously, there are two main points about that doctrine:

- Our actions have nothing to do with our salvation;
- We do not need to “maintain” our faith - faith is just a one-time event.

In my view, both of those points are contradicted by Scripture. First, Scripture explicitly states that in order for us to be saved, our faith must *demonstrate itself* in actions. In addition, Scripture emphasizes that we must maintain our faith, in order to be saved.

So, that raises a question – if the eternal security doctrine is not correct, then what doctrine is? The next few sections contain my thoughts on what, exactly, we need to do, in order to be saved.

Summary of this document

From all of the information in this document, I will make the following three assertions:

1. We Cannot “Earn” Salvation

A very important point to note is that we can not “earn” our salvation. In other words, our actions – by themselves – will never allow anyone to be saved – no matter how good we are.

This is because every single human being has sinned at one point or another – and therefore, all of us are worthy of death. For example, Paul explicitly tells us that “All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.” He also states “There is no one righteous, not even one.”

As a result, in order for us to be saved, we must have faith in Jesus. Scripture is very clear about this.

Most notably, Jesus himself tells us: “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

Peter echoes that statement by saying “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men, by which we must be saved.”

Finally, at the end of his gospel, John tells us: “These things are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name”

2. True Faith Changes our Hearts

From the verses in the last section, I am convinced that it is necessary for us to have faith in Jesus, in order to be saved. But what, exactly, is true faith? Is it a one-time “statement of faith”, which does not result in any change in behavior?

Jesus addressed that very question, when he told us: “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.”

Also, let’s reiterate what the apostle James has to say: “What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him?” In my view, the answer to that rhetorical question is “no”.

As a result, if a person has true faith, then that faith will be demonstrated in his actions. In other words, we can determine if a person has true faith or not, by looking at the way he lives his life. This does not mean that anyone will be “perfect” – but it does mean that a person who has true faith will sincerely try to live his life in accordance with God’s will.

3. True Faith is a Lifelong Process

The final point to note is that in my view, true faith is a lifelong process – i.e., it is a commitment to sincerely try to follow Jesus, for the rest of our lives. Jesus explicitly tells us that, when he states “He who endures until the end will be saved.”

The apostle Paul also makes several statements about this. First, quoting the Old Testament, he tells us: “The righteous will live by faith”. He does not say that the righteous will just make a one-time statement of faith – but rather that they will live their lives by faith.

Paul also compares true faith to a race. He tells us that we are “running in a race, to receive the prize” of salvation. Of course, a race does not end immediately after the starting gun goes off – instead, it continues until the entire course is completed. This indicates to me that true faith involves continuing in our faith, for our entire lives.

So, I would encourage everyone to continue in our faith in Jesus, until the glorious day when he returns!