

A couple from Minneapolis planned a getaway to Florida one particularly icy winter. Something at work came up for the wife, so she had to postpone her flight by a day. They decided the husband would go ahead and fly to Florida on Thursday, and she would follow the next day. After checking in to their hotel, he sent his wife an e-mail back in Minneapolis. However, he made a typo in her email address and sent the message without ever realizing his mistake.

Meanwhile, in Houston, a widow had just returned from her husband's funeral. He had been a faithful minister for many years. She was checking her email to read heartfelt condolences from friends and family. Upon reading the first message, however, she fainted and fell to the floor. Her son rushed into the room, found his mother on the floor, and saw the computer screen which read:

To: My Loving Wife
 From: Your Departed Husband
 Subject: I've Arrived!

I've just arrived and have checked in. I see that everything has been prepared for your arrival tomorrow. Looking forward to seeing you then! Hope your journey is as uneventful as mine was.

(P.S. Sure is hot down here!)

That would be quite a shock wouldn't it? To think you're going to heaven, and then to think you're going to hell.

There was another widow. This one's a true story. Her name was Dorothy. I'd come by and have lunch with her every week. She was one of my biggest encouragements in my early years in the ministry. She was well into her 80s and during one bout illness when the outlook wasn't so great, she expressed doubts about going to heaven. The conversation went something like this.

"Aren't you looking forward to heaven?"

"I just hope I make it."

"Dorothy, you've been a devoted Christian all your life. Aren't you sure you're going to heaven?"

"I don't know. It just depends on when I die. What if I die when there is some problem in my life? What if there is some sin I haven't confessed. I just hope I've been good enough.

There are certainly several layers to Dorothy's lack of assurance when it comes to her salvation. For instance, she misunderstood the role of grace and works. But one of her biggest problems is that that she didn't believe she could have any assurance of her salvation. She could hope for the best, but she couldn't have the confidence that her salvation was assured.

Dorothy is not alone. There are a lot of Christians who struggle with this question— How can I know that I am saved? Is it possible we can have that kind of assurance? The Core 52 title or theme this week is eternal security, and I want to look at this through the lens of assurance.

Jesus wants you to have assurance that your salvation is real. In his love, He doesn't want you trembling in uncertainty, not knowing from day to day where your eternal destiny lay. John 10 is a chapter filled with assurance. With echoes of the 23rd Psalm Jesus reassures that like the Father, He is our shepherd. *"I am the good shepherd,"* Jesus promises. The Good Shepherd guides and gives and guards his sheep. He knows His sheep. He loves His sheep.

And in our Core verses down verses 28 and I'm also adding verse 29, because they go together, Jesus gives us this assurance.

I give (my sheep) 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 my Father's hand."

Jesus' promise here tells us three important things.

Our Salvation is a Gift

First, it assures us that our salvation is a gift. Jesus says, *"I give them eternal life."* You don't earn it. You don't deserve it. It's not a reward for how good you are or how hard you work, or how much you attended church. Salvation is something Jesus gives you. It is His gift given in His love and in His grace. A Good Shepherd doesn't give something to His sheep to just yank it back away.

Our Salvation Promises Eternal Life

Secondly, this gift means eternal life. Life without end. FOREVER. In case we missed the point, Jesus restates in the negative. *"They will never perish."* The word translated *perish* means to destroy, kill, demolish, to be ruined, to be lost, or disappear. And Jesus says, *"That will NEVER happen to my sheep. Not probably won't happen. Not shouldn't happen. Not a 95% chance it won't happen. No, "They will NEVER perish."* Eternal Life. That's our assurance.

Our Salvation is Secure

Thirdly, our salvation is secure. Listen to this promise. *"No one will snatch them out of my hand."* We've all had that experience where your hand, your phone, an embarrassing picture, the last treat, and someone grabs it right out of our hand. What do you do? *"Give it back! Give it back!"* You try to grab it back, right?

Jesus is saying there is nothing and there is no one who can grab you out of his hand. The picture here is that we are sheep in the hands of the Good Shepherd, and He is telling us that we are safe and secure in his hand. There is no thief, no predator, no danger that can take us out of the hand of Jesus.

I've told you before that when the Jews want to emphasize something, they repeat it. That's exactly what Jesus does here. At the end of verse 29 he repeats, *"No one is able to snatch them out of my Father's hand."* He buttresses that with a promise. *"My Father who has given them to me is greater than all."* So, not only does Jesus have us safely in His hand, you have God the Father, who is greater than anything that might try to snatch us, He has His hand over us as well. Jesus doesn't want us to miss it. Our salvation is secure.

I really believe our Savior wants us to have a personal assurance of our salvation. He wants us to have confidence in the mercy God. We can rest in His grace.

There are a number of Scriptures which speak of the security of our salvation in Christ and our personal assurance of salvation.

Romans 8:38-39 *For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor 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.*

Ephesians 2:8 *For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God.*

Now, here's where the struggle comes. In Scripture there is a tension between these verses of promise and security and assurance, and a whole different set of verses filled with warning against falling away from the faith. And often these cautions often come from the very same books, the very same authors, the very same speakers as the other verses.

Check this out. In Hebrews 10:19-23 we read these verses of assurance

19 Therefore, brothers,[c] since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, 20 by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, 21 and since we have a great priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. 23 Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.

But two verses later, we read this:

For 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.

In John 15:5-6 Jesus says, *I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. 6 If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.*

Jesus certainly doesn't teach once in the vine, always in the vine.

Romans 11:20-21 Paul uses Israel as an example, *They were broken off because of their unbelief, but you stand fast through faith. So do not become proud, but fear. For if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will he spare you.*

Now I could line up a dozen more such verses on both sides. But that's not the point. It isn't a battle between who can quote the most verses. What usually happens is that people pick and choose sides on this issue. We entrench ourselves in one position or another. We emphasize one set of verses, and explain away the other set of verses. Christians have been fighting over this issue for centuries.

On one side are those who say our salvation is eternally secure. We are assured of our place in heaven, and nothing can take that away from us. Those who fall from the faith were never really saved to begin with. They may have played the part. They may have looked like it on the outside, but not truly.

On the other side are those that point out that we are free to choose to follow Jesus and we are free to choose not to follow Him. We have a responsibility for choosing our own destiny. The Bible clearly teaches that some fall away.

If the Bible is the Word of God, then it doesn't contradict itself. If Jesus is the Son of God, and Paul wasn't a complete moron, then they weren't talking out of both sides of their mouth. Jesus isn't teaching one thing in John 6 and saying the complete opposite in John 15. There must be a balance in the tension between these two extremes.

Let me offer you some helpful guidelines in finding balance in this tension between these two sides of the security question. I'm taking my cues here from Mark Moore in the Core 52 book. He offers a good set of principles and I've adopted and adapted them for this message here this morning.

1. Hold on to both without neglecting either.

Scripture teaches both, so we should believe both. Does the Bible teach that we are safe in the grace of God in Christ? Absolutely. Does the Bible also teach that we should take great care in growing in our faith and be on guard against sin so that we do not harden our hearts and nullify the grace of God? It certainly does. So, somehow, someway, both things must be true. Don't stake out a position and interpret either biblical truth in such a way that makes the other side impossible.

2. Don't speak in terms of losing salvation.

The question is commonly asked, "Is it possible to lose your salvation?" I don't believe that terminology is helpful or accurate. I lose my wallet. I lose my keys. I lose the password to my account. I don't just lose my salvation. The warning passages are very clear that falling from grace or shipwrecking your faith, or whatever expression you want to use is a willful

choice built on deliberate decisions over time to purposefully harden your heart through repeated sin. There's nothing accidental about it. There's no "oops" involved. Salvation is not lost. It might be abandoned. It may be refused. You could walk away from it, but it never unintentionally lost.

3. Our security depends more on Him than it does us.

Without question, Scripture teaches that we have a role to play. We have a free moral will to choose our eternal destiny. However, salvation is the gift of God through the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross and the work of the Holy Spirit in your life. Trust in the promise of God to do what He said. Trust in Jesus and His Spirit to do what they said they would do.

Philippians 1:6 says, *"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."*

4. Focus more on winning people than winning arguments.

Some people seem more interested in winning this debate than they are in winning people to Jesus. It's far more important to connect people to Jesus than debating the particulars of what happens when someone walks away. Alyssa dated a great Christian guy who constantly argued this issue with her. It wasn't that big of a deal to her, but it was huge to him. Since she didn't agree with him fully, he didn't think he could date someone who didn't believe the same as he did. I'm thinking, but you agree on so much. You agree on all the essentials. You're acting like she's a Satanist and you're fundamentally incompatible.

5. Love necessitates freedom of choice.

Love that isn't chosen isn't love. I suppose God could have created a world where everyone did exactly what He wanted. We could be programmed, if you will, to act in loving ways and say loving things. I suppose God could have even made us to believe we were choosing to love.

But if God had populated the world with automatons with a hardcoded AI, it would not be genuine love. Love is only love if it is freely chosen. If we do not have the capacity to choose against love, then it means nothing when we choose love.

Throughout Scripture God is very clear that we have choice, and this choice is very real. For instance, he tells Israel in Dt. 30, *"Surely this commandment that I am commanding you today is not too hard for you, nor is it too far away ...I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live."*

Nothing can snatch you out of your Savior's hand. You are safe and secure there. However, it's always your choice to leave the security of His hand on your own. God hasn't captured you like a firefly in His grasp, to put you in His jar never free to fly again. God's love for you

is very real. He chose to love you. He wants you to choose to love Him. He invites your love. He tries to win your love, but He doesn't make you love.

6. Allow for some mystery here.

While I believe truth is logical and the Scriptures don't contradict, I also believe there is more going on here than we can fully understand. We are limited human brains trying to comprehend the infinite mind of God. There has to be some acceptance in our faith that we just aren't going to fully get it. This mystery leads us to humility, learning, and worship.

7. Be assured in your faith without being lazy in your faith.

If you are a follower of Jesus, If you have made the conscious decision for Jesus to be your Lord and Savior, and you have been baptized into Him, there is no reason to worry yourself sick over whether you will make it to heaven. Rest in His grace.

At the same time we should be growing in our faith. Being baptized or asking Jesus into your heart is not some "Get out of jail free" card that you can just keep tucked away under the monopoly board of life for use whenever you want no matter what happens. Growing in our faith requires care and effort and attention. As long as you're doing that, there's no reason to worry about the other.

From time to time a disconcerted believer will talk to me. They are worried about falling away. I tell them, "If you're worried about, that means you don't need to be." The very fact they are concerned is proof that they haven't abandoned their faith. The person who has hardened their heart and walked away won't care. They won't care because they no longer believe. It won't bother them because it doesn't matter to them. If it bothers you, then that means it matters to you. If Jesus still matters to you, then he still has you in his hand.

The Bible compares our relationship with Jesus to a marriage, and your salvation isn't a bad marriage where Jesus is going to leave you. The Lord says in Hebrews 13:5, "*I will never leave you, nor forsake you.*" The only one who could ever walk out on this marriage is you, and unless you do, there is nothing that can take it away. Jesus is very clear. Nothing can snatch you out of his hand.

Let this assurance fill your heart. You can abandon Jesus, but He will never abandon you. Hold on to the Savior who is holding on to you.

Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine
O what a foretaste of glory divine
Heir of salvation, purchase of God
Born of His Spirit, washed in His blood