

Can You Be Sure Where You Will Spend Eternity? – Part 5

Held in God's Hands: The Doctrine of Eternal Security

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Dr. John Ankerberg: We're talking about the important topic of how you can be certain that you'll spend eternity with God. Every one of us wants to be certain, right? The question is, "How?" What do you have to believe? What is God's way? Erwin, Ted Turner, the guy that used to own CNN, made some interesting statements about Christianity in his own personal life. Tell us about that.

Dr. Erwin Lutzer: Well, according to a newspaper he said, "I was saved seven or eight times, but when I lost my faith, I felt better about it." Here's an example of someone who says that he was saved, apparently brought up in a Christian home, but it didn't take.

So our topic really has to do with assurance, and that's connected with this whole idea of what we call "Eternal Security." What do we do with people who say, "Well, I've been saved," and then they fall back into sin; or, the person who thinks that he loses his salvation every time he sins? How do we handle all of these problems? We hope to unravel some of them.

Ankerberg: People might think that we're crazy for even stepping into this topic because this is a question that the church has grappled with since Day One. But we're going to, because people do have doubts and it relates right to this topic. If you can commit a sin after you're saved and lose your salvation, then we're in the boat of Ted Turner or other people that you know. Tell us the story about Harry Ironside.

Lutzer: Harry Ironside said that one day somebody came to him who said, "I've been saved 99 times!" A woman was in our home one time who was brought up in a church that taught that you lost your salvation every time you sinned, or at least if you committed a reasonably big sin, however those are defined. She said that there was this town drunk who got saved every Sunday. And of course, then on Monday he was drinking again and he'd come back and get saved again. Finally, the pastor was so exasperated, he said, "You know, the next time you get saved, we just ought to shoot you to make sure that you're going to Heaven," because he was going to lose his salvation anyway, so let's get him while he's saved.

Ankerberg: Now, we're laughing about this, but I bet there are many people that are exactly in that spot. So what's the answer to this?

Lutzer: What I think what we should do, John, is first of all to turn to the Scriptures and show that the true believers are secure. And then maybe at some point we have to address the Ted Turner issue, because there are other things that he said that gives us reason to believe, though we are not the final judge, that he never understood the Gospel; never appreciated really what happened when Jesus died on the cross. And he is an example of those who go through the motions, but it never takes. We talked about some of those in preceding sessions.

Ankerberg: Let's look at the Scripture and plunge in.

Lutzer: Let's talk about those who truly have believed on Christ. I call this five unbreakable links in God's purposes. You know, just like you would never build a building without a plan, God doesn't bring us onto this earth, His people, without a plan for those who believe – and also as far as that's concerned, perhaps for others – but most assuredly, for those who believe.

This is what it says in Romans 8:29: "For those whom God foreknew He also predestinated to be conformed to the likeness of His Son, that He might be the Firstborn among many brothers; and those He predestinated, He also called; those whom He called He justified" and now notice this, John, "those whom He justified, He also glorified." Wow! Takes your breath away.

Five things that God does for those who believe. First of all, He foreknows them. It means more than that He knows them ahead of time. It means He has a relationship with them. For example, in the Old Testament God said of Israel, "You only have I known of all the families of the earth." It doesn't mean that God didn't know about the other nations. It means God says "I have this relationship with you."

So those whom God foreknows – fore-chooses, we could almost say – He predestinates. Now, that's a tough word. Some people think we make it up. No, it's in the Bible all over the place. It means He maps out ahead of time His desire for them. He predetermines it, just like a surveyor might set the limits of a city. "To be conformed to the likeness of His Son." God's plan is for us to become like Christ. Now, notice, "And those whom He predestinated, He called." I was called at the age of 14 when I accepted Christ as my Savior. How old were you, John?

Ankerberg: Seven.

Lutzer: Seven. All right, so in that sense, God called us and we believed in Christ. And then notice that those who are called, "He justified. And those whom He justified" –and this is where it takes our breath away – "He glorified." God says, "As far as I'm concerned, you're in Heaven already. And those whom I foreknew, who are my children, this group is the group that ends up over here glorified." And there's no leakage, there's no slippage of events and nobody falls through the cracks. So what this means is that if we have really believed on Christ, and we can talk about what true faith is, but if we really believed on Christ, we will be saved. We'll be brought all the way to Heaven.

The first two things God does in eternity past: He foreknows us and He predestinates us. The middle one – *called* – is something you and I experience when we're saved. The other two – justification and glorification – take us all the way safely to Heaven.

Ankerberg: I've got to ask you, because people are thinking, "Okay, how do I know I'm one of those chosen?"

Lutzer: We know it through the promises of Christ. You know, despite what the Bible says about predestination and election – and it has much to say about that – I always tell people, "Don't get hung up on it because you can know whether or not you are the elect, whether or not you are part of God's chosen. If you come to Him, you will thereby prove that you are one of His." You know, Jesus Christ says, "If any man come to me, I will not cast him out. I will give him eternal life." It's cleaving to the promises of Christ. And we need to do that. The simple fact is, it comes down to whether or not I'm trusting in myself plus, or if I'm trusting in Christ alone. If we believe that when Jesus died on the cross He did all that ever will be necessary for us to enter into God's presence, and we trust that, we will be saved and we will know it.

Ankerberg: The point I think that you're making with the five points, five links if you will, is to step back and say that if you have placed your faith in Christ, you need to recognize God's been involved ahead of time mapping this out, and when you accepted Christ, even though you did it freely, God can see all of this. And if you have accepted Christ, the Bible says you're secure because God says you're headed toward Heaven to be glorified. It's a done deal.

Lutzer: And also it says that when we receive Christ we receive the Holy Spirit, and it talks about the sealing of the Spirit. The sealing of the Spirit, the imagery is that of when a letter was sent. A king would write a letter, he would put wax on the closure of the letter, and put his ring's insignia on that. And if anyone tampered with it, it would be known because the wax would be broken and cracked. That was sealed to be taken to the person. And there are people who, when we receive Jesus Christ as Savior, "we are sealed unto the day of redemption" (Eph. 4:30).

In fact, did you know that I'm in Heaven already, John? It says in Ephesians 2 that "We are raised up with Christ and we are seated with Christ in Heavenly places." Now, it would be possible for me to be sitting in Chattanooga and win a lawsuit in Los Angeles at the same time if I had an attorney representing me. Jesus Christ is our attorney who represents us in Heaven. That's why the Apostle Paul goes on to say in Romans 8:33-34, "Who shall lay any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he who condemns? Jesus who died – more than that, who was raised to life."

Jesus is our attorney. So we can imagine Satan coming and saying, "The soul that sins shall die. Here's a sinner who deserves to die. Damn him." But Jesus is our representative and Jesus is our attorney and says to the Father, "Father, here's someone whom I have redeemed. I have paid his debt. Let him go free." The Father agrees.

You know, that illustration that's been used a hundred times but I have to tell it one

more, about the man who was driving too fast and got fined \$100. He's standing before the judge and he doesn't have \$100. But the judge leaves the bench, takes off his robe and goes around to stand next to the defendant. Then the judge takes the \$100 out of his own pocket and lays it on the table. He goes back, picks up his robe, comes and sits at his desk, takes the \$100 and says, "Thank you, sir. Your debt is paid. You are free."

That is the Gospel. God demands a payment from us. God supplies what He demands. God the Father demands that His holiness be appeased. Jesus dies on the cross and therefore salvation is fully of God and you and I are forgiven. "Who shall bring a charge against God's elect?" the Bible says. "It is God who justifies." Now, if that isn't good news in the world, where are you going to find the good news? That is the Gospel.

Ankerberg: We all realize that people who get saved understand that it's a free gift that God gives to us. There are some people who take that and can misuse and abuse the free gift of God. We all see illustrations. We can't judge the heart, but let's talk to those who have a feeble faith, if you want, who are saying, "You know, Erwin, I truly believed in the Lord Jesus Christ but there have been some sins that have come up and they're unconfessed sins or even worse." What can you say to those people?

Lutzer: John, before I deal with that I want to go back just a bit and talk to this issue, because somebody is saying, "Oh, you know, you believe that you can accept Christ and live like the devil" and I think we have to address that.

Imagine a young woman who is in love with a young man. He asks her to marry him and they are engaged. Now, she knows that he's trustworthy, absolutely. They're as good as married because he's such a trustworthy person. Does she say, "Oh, now that I'm secure and I know he's going to marry me, I can sleep with every man in town?" No, of course not; because she loves him; and the fact that he is willing to love her.

In the very same way, when someone accepts Christ as their Savior, do they say to themselves, "Oh, now that I'm sure of Heaven, now I can live like the devil"? If a person thinks that, it's almost certain that he never has accepted Christ. Now, having said that, I think that grace can be misused, I do need to emphasize that. But the simple fact is this, let us never omit or de-emphasize that divine nature that God implants within us with new desires and a love for Christ. That is one of the earliest signs of a true believer.

I know a woman who has fallen into alcoholism repeatedly because of a terrible abusive background as a child. But you know, I believe that she's a true believer because every time she prays, the first thing out of her mouth is, "Oh, God, you know how much I love you, and I'm so sorry that I committed this sin. Please help me to love you and to overcome this for your glory." I mean, that's the prayer of someone who is saved but struggling with sin. It's very different from the person who says, "Oh, well now I've accepted Christ I can go do whatever I like."

Ankerberg: We have to admit, too, there are a lot of folks that have grown up in

homes where the moms and dads have been strict and your relationship depends on your performance. And it's rugged to understand what grace means where your standing, your relationship with God does not depend on your performance.

Lutzer: Right. That's a whole other issue, John. Once a person is free from that, it doesn't free them to sin. It frees them to love and frees them to be joyful in enjoying the Christian life.

But I want to speak to the other issue that you raised. What about somebody who does sin? Do they lose their salvation? We began this session by talking about that. Listen to the words of Jesus. We quoted Paul, but now Jesus. I'm in John 10:27: "My sheep listen to my voice. I know them and they follow me. I give them eternal life and they shall never perish. No one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all. No one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. I and my Father are one."

You know what I call this? I preached on it one time and I called it "Hands in Harmony." You have the hand of the Father and you have the hand of the Son holding the sheep that belong to Jesus. You know, if you were a shepherd, John, and I entrusted 100 sheep to you, and then you came back in the evening with 93, what do you think the other shepherds would say? What do you think I would say if they were my sheep? I'd say, "John, you're a lousy shepherd." And you'd say, "Oh, but these sheep were so stubborn! They went their own way. They found false paths and they took them." I'd say, "John, I don't care whether those sheep were stubborn! Take those stubborn sheep and use your crook and get them in line and get them here!"

You can't imagine that those who belong to Jesus, who are a gift, the Bible says, from the Father to the Son, and from the Son to the Father, those who are saved, that Jesus has been given a certain number and then in eternity some of them are going to be missing. "Well, because they had free will. They were so rebellious." Listen, once they're saved and they belong to God, He's going to bring them all the way home.

I've had people say, "Yeah, but you know, it says that no man can pluck them out of my Father's hand, but we can pluck ourselves out of God's hand." Well, it's a little more complicated than that. Biblically, we actually are God's hands. Remember Jesus said, "You are members of my body, of my flesh and of my bones."

So here's what I want to do right now, John. I want to give security to those who trust Christ as Savior, but I also want to give a warning to those who think they've trusted Christ as Savior and never have.

Ankerberg: You've got a great illustration about what true saving faith is. Go slowly but give us that illustration.

Lutzer: John, I'll give you that illustration but I want to add something else also, if I may. There could even be somebody out there who asks me this question, which I've often been asked: can a true Christian commit suicide?

You know the answer to that question is, "Yes." I've known missionaries who came back from the mission field depressed and committed suicide. A Bible col-

lege professor has committed suicide. And you say, “Well, what happens to them?” I believe that they also are in Heaven.

Now, please don't hear me and think that I'm saying, “Hey, commit suicide.” Suicide is a permanent answer to a temporary problem. It is murder. It is a life of defeat. You do not go there. And I would say to anybody, “Someday the sun will shine again, so don't you dare do this.” But even there, Christ died and brings His sheep home, all the way home.

Ankerberg: Yeah, stay right there before you move on because it's true what you just said. The fact is, if you're going to outlaw suicide as being a sin that takes you out of God's kingdom and out of His hand, how do you know that and why did you stop with suicide? Because then there are other sins that you might have to include in that list as well. The thing is, it's a terrible sin, but why is that person still secure even though it's suicide?

Lutzer: It's because he belongs to Jesus and Jesus will bring His sheep home. But here's somebody who perhaps says, “Oh, that's absolutely awful.” You're just thinking that you can commit suicide. Listen, there's somebody who perhaps has accepted Christ as Savior and we are talking about genuine Christians, and you know what's going to happen to him? He's going to commit a sin – maybe it's the sin of lust; maybe it's the sin of covetousness; maybe it's the sin of pride – and he's going to die without having had a chance to confess it. Is he going to go to Heaven? The answer is, “Yes, of course, if he's a believer.” In other words, when a person accepts Christ as Savior, legally Christ then becomes your representative all the way to Heaven. So we need to emphasize that: God's people make it home at nightfall.

Ankerberg: It's also because it's not, again, their performance that does the saving, it's Christ and what He's done.

Lutzer: And John, while we're at it, Ted Turner, you remember he said he was saved seven or eight times? We need to be very careful about these things. Listen to what else he says. He talks about the fact that he ridicules the atonement, and because he ridicules the atonement, ... well, let me read it. He says, “If you accept the Bible the way it's generally interpreted, everybody is going to hell. This idea of sin is horrible and disgusting. Christ had to come down here and suffer and die on the cross so that with his blood our sins could be washed away – weird, man.” The simple fact is, he has not understood the Gospel. And as a result of that, we need to say that there are many people who think they have believed but haven't.

Can I close with a quick illustration of what saving faith is? You know, there is this parable about a man who is walking along a cliff. He slips down. He's hanging onto a stump and he looks up and an angel is next to him. The angel says, “Do you believe that I can save you?” The man looks at the strong arms of the angel and he says, “Yes, I believe that you can save me.” The angel says, “Do you believe that I will save you?” The man sees the smile on the angel's face and he says, “Yes. I believe you will save me.” Then the angel says, “If you believe that I can save you and will save you, let go.”

When we come to Christ, what do we do? We let go of our self-righteousness. We let go of everything that we want to control. We let go of all of our prestige. We let go of our pride and we cleave to the only One who is able to save us. And that's the way we become one of God's sheep.