

The Orthodox Church Affirms Conditional Security

Both Clark Carlton, in *The Life: The Orthodox Doctrine of Salvation* (Salisbury: Regina Orthodox Press, 2000), and study notes in *The Orthodox Study Bible* affirm the conditional security of the believer.

Carlton writes:

This brings us to the topic of eternal security. According to . . . all of the Church's spiritual writers, a man must be humble in order to *stay on* the right path and attain that for which he seeks. In other words, success in the spiritual life is not guaranteed. . . . ["Once saved, always saved"] presupposes that salvation is a completed "event" that happens at a particular time. . . .

The Orthodox Church rejects the concept of eternal security because she rejects the framework that it presupposes. Salvation is a living relationship with God. It cannot be said to have become complete until the resurrection, when Christ will be *all in all*. Remember that God will never override our free will. As long as we are in the flesh, we have the capability to reject God. St. Paul spoke about why he strove so valiantly in the spiritual life:

I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as on that beateth the air: But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway (1 Cor. 9:26-27).

In other words, St. Paul worked at his salvation to attain that for which he hoped. And yet, he knew that he was not working under his own power but in the power of God. Thus he urged the Philippians:

Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do His good pleasure (Phil. 2:12-13)

The Orthodox do not doubt the power of God. We do not doubt that God is able to keep all that come to Him. *But*, He will not keep them against their will. Salvation must be a *free* relationship, or it is no relationship at all. . . . Therefore, the Christian remains ever vigilant *lest* he fall.¹

¹ *The Life*, 167-168, 171-173.

The Orthodox Study Bible: New Testament and Psalms by St. Athanasius Orthodox Academy (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1993), editors Peter E. Gillquist, Alan Wallerstedt, Joseph Allen, Michel Najim, J. N. Sparks, and Theodore Stylianopoulos.

Mark 13:13

There is security of salvation of him **who endures to the end**, but it is not ours to say when the race is over. The modern innovative doctrine of “eternal security”—once saved, always saved—is not the teaching of Jesus; rather, He teaches the endurance of the faithful through God’s strength and grace.²

Philippians 3:12-16

Thus we are zealous to **press on** (v. 12) toward the completion of our salvation, **the prize of the upward call of God** (v. 14)—the resurrection to eternal life.³

Hebrews 3:12

Those in Christ are not immune from turning away from God. There is a temporary attractiveness in sin, which leads to a hardened **heart** and ultimately to apostasy. Constant care must be taken not to be deceived and thus fall away (see Mark 4:4, 6, 16, 17).⁴

Hebrews 3:14

Union with Christ belongs to those who persevere in their faith to **the end**, not to those who stop with a one-time profession of faith.⁵

Hebrews 4:6

Faith (3:19) and obedience are inseparable. Lack of one is lack of the other. Lack of either bars entrance into rest.⁶

² *The Orthodox Study Bible*, 119.

³ *The Orthodox Study Bible*, 459.

⁴ *The Orthodox Study Bible*, 517.

⁵ *The Orthodox Study Bible*, 518.

⁶ *The Orthodox Study Bible*, 518. The “rest” in Hebrews 4:6 is explained in the notes of 4:9: “**Rest** here is a reference to . . . the perfect, final rest of the kingdom of heaven” (Ibid., 518).

Hebrews 6:4-6

This refers to those who have apostatized—that is those who, after being baptized, have rejected Christ and His saving power.⁷

2 Peter 1:9

Gnostics claimed to know God without becoming godlike. Peter make it plain this is not Christian, for we reach participation with God though the increase of spiritual virtues, not the absence of them. Here, as with all eschatological warnings in the New Testament, admittance to God's kingdom is conditional upon a faith which exhibits perseverance and holiness.⁸

1 John 1 Introduction

Danger of Worldliness. Some Christians are so romanced by the world (2:15-17) that they stand in danger of falling away from God (5:21). John exhorts us to detach ourselves from the world in order to serve the living God.⁹

1 John 5:13

When we **know** we have been given the gift of **eternal life**, we are to **continue to believe** and follow **the Son of God**.¹⁰

Revelation 2:10-11

Christ encourages faithfulness to the end. The **crown of life**, an allusion to the wreath awarded to a victor in an arena (Phil. 3:14; 2 Tim. 2:5; 1 Pet. 5:4), is the reward of eternal life granted to those who conquer in Christ. The **second death** (v. 11) indicates eternal damnation, the "lake of fire," wherein sinners will receive their reward of final and lasting estrangement from God (20:6, 14, 15; 21:8).¹¹

⁷ *The Orthodox Study Bible*, 521.

⁸ *The Orthodox Study Bible*, 562.

⁹ *The Orthodox Study Bible*, 568.

¹⁰ *The Orthodox Study Bible*, 577.

¹¹ *The Orthodox Study Bible*, 595.

Revelation 21:6-8

And, repeating the concluding exhortation of each of the seven letters (chapters 2; 3), only **he who overcomes** (v. 7), who persists in his allegiance to God, will **inherit**, becoming a permanent son of God. Those who fall away through cowardice or unbelief face instead **the lake** of fire (v. 8). They lose God's inheritance, receiving instead the damning recompense of sin and death (see 20:15; 22:15), in company with the Beast, the False Prophet, Death, and Hades.¹²

Revelation 22:18-19

This severe warning refers to the Book of Revelation, not to the Bible as a whole, and admonishes those in the communities addressed not to distort its message. To do so is to threaten one's very salvation (see Deut. 4:2; 12:32; Gal. 1:8, 9).¹³

¹² *The Orthodox Study Bible*, 631.

¹³ *The Orthodox Study Bible*, 634.