
THE SECURITY OF THE BELIEVER

This statement on the security of the believer was adopted by the Assemblies of God General Presbytery, August 21, 1978.

The Assemblies of God has declared itself regarding the security of the believer in its bylaws (Article IX, Section 1):

In view of the Biblical teaching that the security of the believer depends on a living relationship with Christ (John 15:6), in view of the Bible's call to a life of holiness (1 Peter 1:16; Hebrews 12:14); in view of the clear teaching that a man may have his part taken out of the Book of Life (Revelation 22:19); and in view of the fact that one who believes for a while can fall away (Luke 8:13); The General Council of the Assemblies of God disapproves of the unconditional security position which holds that it is impossible for a person once saved to be lost.

This paper seeks to explain further why this position has been taken.

In the matter of the security of the believer, The General Council of the Assemblies of God stands between the extreme positions of Calvinism and Arminianism. It accepts the scriptural elements found in both teachings.

The Calvinist stresses, rightly, God's sovereignty and divine prerogative, while the Arminian stresses, also rightly, man's free will and responsibility. The two positions, however, must be considered together if they are to be properly understood. The General Council of the Assemblies of God believes in the sovereignty and divine prerogative of God untainted by arbitrariness or caprice. It also believes in the free will and responsibility of man.

In order to explain the position taken by the Assemblies of God on the security of the believer, four points need to be emphasized:

1. Salvation is available for every man (2 Peter 3:9; John 3:16; Romans 10:11-13).
2. Salvation is received and kept by faith (Ephesians 2:8; Philippians 3:9; Hebrews 10:38; 1 Peter 1:5; Romans 3:28; Galatians 2:20, 21).
3. Continued sin will adversely affect the believer's faith (1 John 1:8; 3:8; Romans 3:5-8; 1 Corinthians 3:1-3; Hebrews 3:12-14; 12:1).
4. The believer's salvation is forfeited by rejecting Christ (John 17:12; Hebrews 10:38; 1 Timothy 4:1; 5:12, 15; 1 John 5:16; 2 Peter 2:20; Hebrews 10:26, 27; 6:4-6).

I. Salvation Is Available for Every Man

Two questions may be asked: “Are some predestined to be saved and others to be lost?” and, “Who are the elect?” The answer is clear when it is recognized that the message of the gospel is one of “whosoever will.” No one reading the New Testament can miss the impact of this great truth.

However, in Romans 9-11 there are some statements that seem to imply that man’s free will is excluded in the matter of the believer’s salvation and that God in His choice of the elect exercises His divine sovereignty entirely apart from man’s volition. For example:

(For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth;) . . . Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated . . . I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy . . . Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth (Romans 9:11, 13, 15, 16, 18).

When this passage is considered in the light of all that God’s Word teaches concerning election, however, it is evident that man’s will is involved in his election. Jacob was chosen before having done good or evil, but God’s choice was on the basis of what He foreknew Jacob would do.

This truth is brought out in Peter’s letter to “the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia.” These believers were recognized to be “elect according to the foreknowledge of God” (1 Peter 1:1, 2).

This same truth is stated in Romans 8:29. Paul wrote, “For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son.”

God determined beforehand the conditions on which He would show mercy. And on the basis of His foreknowledge believers are chosen in Christ (Ephesians 1:4). Thus God in His sovereignty has provided the plan of salvation whereby all can be saved. In this plan man’s will is taken into consideration. Salvation is available to “whosoever will.”

II. Salvation Is Received and Kept by Faith

The Bible clearly states that we are saved by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8) and that the just shall live by faith (Hebrews 10:38; Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11; Habakkuk 2:4). As the believer’s salvation is received, not by an act of righteousness but by an act of faith, so the believer’s salvation is maintained, not by acts of righteousness but by a life of faith!

Being a Christian then is not a matter of works; it is a matter of faith. This must be emphasized. In no case is the sinner accepted by God on the basis of any good that he has done. He is saved totally and solely by grace through faith. By faith he accepts the

fact that Christ died in his stead. By faith he throws himself upon the mercy of God and accepts Christ as his Saviour. By faith he sees himself clothed with the righteousness of Christ—a standing imputed to him through no merit of his own (Philippians 3:9). He knows that he is accepted through faith, and this knowledge gives him peace and joy.

The believer's state must not be confused with his standing, however. He stands secure because of faith. His standing is the result of God's grace which he has accepted by faith. He stands justified, clothed with the righteousness of Christ!

The believer's state, or the working out of the righteousness of Christ in the believer, is another matter. It involves spiritual growth, a progressive sanctification by obedient cooperation with the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:5-7; Romans 6:12, 13; 8:13; Colossians 3:1-5). During this maturing process the believer must learn by his mistakes as well as by his victories. Nevertheless, his security is never in doubt as long as his faith in Christ is steadfast, for he is kept by faith.

His spiritual growth varies in excellence and degree according to the yieldedness and attention he affords to the Spirit who is at work within him. Yet all the while as the perfecting processes go on, he is credited with the perfection through the imputed righteousness of Christ by faith. Through the process of "becoming conformed" he is secure; his salvation is sure. "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1).

The believer's security, then, is solely through faith, both in the receiving of salvation and in the keeping of salvation. This security is made possible through the mercy of God in imputing the righteousness of His own Son to the fallible and faulty believer as long as he maintains a living faith in Christ. "For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him" (2 Corinthians 5:21).

III. Continued Sin Will Adversely Affect the Believer's Faith

The Bible makes it clear that in this life Christians do sin and that the Christian's recourse when he has sinned is forgiveness through Christ (1 John 1:8, 9; 2:1).

On the other hand, it is unnatural for a Christian to continue in a life of sin. That is, as long as he has the life of Christ within him, he cannot habitually sin. (See 1 John 3:8, 9 where the Greek tense is the continuous present.) The one who practices sin is of the devil. Whoever is born of God does not practice sin, does not keep on habitually sinning. He cannot keep on sinning the way the child of the devil does. Instead, the Christian should grow spiritually and lay aside sin, recognizing that continued sin will adversely affect his faith.

Does this imply that a Christian can sin and still be saved? The first impulse of many may be to say that he cannot. Yet it is necessary in this connection to consider the

fact that worry, pride, envy, and bitterness are accepted as common failings. Few would suggest that believers committing these sins are lost.

Moreover if it be insisted that God demands present sinless perfection from believers, then the question must be raised: “Is man’s standing in Christ based upon his own righteousness or upon the righteousness of Christ imputed to him by faith?” If man is saved only as long as he maintains a flawless life, then salvation is not of grace, but of works!

Then too if man is accepted by God only if he is without fault, Christian living is not free from condemnation as Paul insisted in Romans 8:1. It is rather a continual exercise in soul-searching and penance, full of fear and condemnation and void of the joy and confidence that a knowledge of salvation can bring. (See Romans 5:9-11 where it is clear that the God who loved us enough to provide for our salvation loves us enough to provide for us all the way to glory. This assurance gives us joy in Him.)

A related question is: “What would happen to a believer who commits a sin at that moment Jesus returns?” Those who maintain that a Christian cannot commit a sin and still be saved would teach that such a believer is lost and doomed for eternity. What despair!

The believer is not in a revolving door, moving in and out of the grace of God! He is secure in the hand of God, and neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate him from the love of the Father!

This must be said, however, with further emphasis that it is not the natural thing for the Christian to sin. He cannot keep on sinning the same old sins. Having been born of the Spirit, the believer is a new creature for whom old things have passed away and new things have come (2 Corinthians 5:17, NASB).

It is thus now unnatural to sin. The old life is a thing of the past, a latent force within, subdued and reckoned dead by the new Presence (Romans 6:11). What was the custom and practice before now becomes unnatural and contrary to the new impulses of the heart.

“He that is born of God,” John said, “cannot sin [or keep on practicing sin].” That is, sin is foreign to the new nature. The new nature that is ours by faith does not sin. Thus when the old nature temporarily and unexpectedly regains ascendancy, the whole new being revolts against this unnatural intrusion. The immediate recourse is to Christ.

As the believer who has sinned turns to Christ, he turns not with the despair of a lost soul, but with the secure knowledge that as a son of God he has an Advocate with the Father—who is faithful and just to forgive and cleanse from all unrighteousness. Thus the believer exercises his prerogative as a child of God, never needing to doubt his standing, which he knows is based upon the infallible righteousness of Christ by faith.

Having stressed the sovereignty and grace of God, it is also imperative to bring the free will and responsibility of the believer into focus. God does not withdraw the power of choice from the person who believes. By the exercise of free will the believer becomes a child of God, and by the continued exercise of free will he remains a child of God. To keep on believing is the believer's responsibility.

The believer must also be careful that he does not take a light attitude toward sin. He dare not use the grace of God as a license to sin.

“Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?” asked Paul (Romans 6:1). The answer is an emphatic negative. Paul knew and taught that continued sin will adversely affect a believer's faith, and faith is the very thing that makes a relationship with God possible.

Continued sin becomes presumptuous, high-handed, and is evidence of rebellion. (See Numbers 15:30, 31.) Rebellion is the opposite of the trust and obedience of faith.

Believers must be on guard constantly, “looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God” (Hebrews 12:15). The Bible's exhortation is: “Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves” (2 Corinthians 13:5).

Why such precautions and concern? These repeated warnings are meaningful only when it is recognized that the loss of faith means the eternal loss of the soul. For while it is true that the believer's salvation is not earned by his righteous deeds nor his salvation maintained by them, it is equally true that as the believer obtains his salvation by faith, so he can lose it by unbelief!

Sin and unbelief are closely related. Sin jeopardizes faith, and loss of faith means loss of standing. Hebrews 3:12-14 bears this out. The writer warned the brethren against unbelief which will lead to a departure from the living God. He mentioned the deceitfulness of sin as the cause of unbelief and reminded them that we are partakers of Christ only if we hold the beginning of our confidence unto the end.

Standing in Christ is by faith. Remove faith, and there is no longer any standing. This is why Scripture admonishes the believer to “take heed . . . lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief” (Hebrews 3:12).

IV. Salvation Is Forfeited by Rejecting Christ

God does not let anyone go easily. (See Romans 10:21 where Paul was speaking of Israel, but the principle applies.) But a believer can be lost if he disregards the continuing checks of the Holy Spirit and reaches the point where he rejects Jesus as his Saviour.

It is possible to believe for a while and in time of temptation to fall away (Luke 8:13). It is possible for the weak brother to perish for whom Christ died (1 Corinthians 8:11). It is possible for a name to be written in the Book of Life and then removed from the Book (Revelation 22:19).

It is not always possible to determine whether a person has already turned his back on Jesus as his Saviour. Therefore it is well to leave judgment of these matters in the hands of the omniscient God. Of this we can be certain, however; if God does not give up in His efforts to bring the prodigal back, neither should the church of Jesus Christ. Too often people write off an individual when God has not written him off at all.

The Bible does recognize the possibility of forfeiting salvation, but it never ceases to offer hope for anyone who wants to respond to the entreaty of the Holy Spirit. Jesus' invitation is without qualification. He speaks to all when He says, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28).

Again the Bible speaks to all when it says, "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Romans 10:13).

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