

Kept by the Power of God

S.L.H.

Soli Deo Gloria!

“. . . God . . . hath begotten us again . . . who are **kept by the power of God** through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.” (1 Peter 1:3-5)

The Bible reveals that a person is saved by the grace of God, through personal faith in Jesus Christ, entirely without any works on his part (Ephesians 2:8-9; John 20:31; Romans 4:5), and that the saved believer is given by God the gift of eternal life (Romans 6:23; 1 John 5:13). This is part and parcel of the gospel itself. The teaching of the Bible on this issue is clear and unequivocal, against which no Christian would argue.

Argument arises among Christians, however, over the question of whether a genuine believer can ever lose his salvation, which (at least at a particular time) he actually possessed. Arminians answer this question, “Yes”. They argue that salvation is conditioned on personal faith, and that once a person ceases to believe he is no longer saved, nor is he in possession of eternal life, though at one time he may have been in actual possession of it [1]. In their view, a “believer” who commits heinous and/or habitual sin is one who has ceased believing and has, as a consequence, lost his salvation. Thus, in Arminian theology, the maintenance of a believer’s salvation is the responsibility of the believer.

Calvinists answer the question, “No”. They argue that the salvation of an individual is a sovereign work of God that is unconditional and immutable. God even supplies as a sovereign gift the personal faith upon which salvation would appear to be conditioned. In Calvinistic theology, there is no possibility of ever reversing God’s sovereign work that bestows upon an individual the entire package of personal faith, regeneration, salvation, and eternal life. In their view, since personal faith is part of an unconditional and immutable work of God on behalf of an elect person, a genuine believer will necessarily persevere in faith to the very end of his life. Any “believer” who commits heinous and/or

habitual sin is one who was never actually in possession of salvation, even though at one time he may have professed personal faith and even appeared to manifest behaviors associated with salvation.

Both of these theological positions result in scenarios in which a genuine believer can never find rest, having an unshakeable confidence that he is saved and can never lose his salvation. The Arminian believes he can, through a lapse in faith or temptation into sin, lose his salvation and the eternal life he once possessed. The Calvinist believes that, in order to be assured he is one of God's elect who has been sovereignly regenerated, saved, and granted eternal life, he must persevere in his faith and good works without significant lapse until death or the rapture [2]. In practice, neither Arminianism nor Calvinism afford a believer the confidence one finds revealed in the New Testament (John 10:27-29; 20:31; 1 John 5:13).

The New Testament answers the question, "No". A genuine believer who has been born again and received from God the gift of eternal life can never lose his salvation. The reason for this conclusion, however, is different than that offered by Calvinism, and it undergirds the basis of a believer's assurance, peace, and rest. The security of the believer in his salvation is a gracious and certain work of God. This is clearly seen in 1 Peter 1:3-5. The "who" of the relative clause in 1 Peter 1:5 hearkens back to the "us" in 1 Peter 3:3 (i.e., believers, recipients of the new birth). Believers are said to be "kept" (a present passive participle, '[are] continually being guarded'), that is *preserved*. The believer's preservation is "by the power of God" (the efficient agency), "through faith" (the secondary cause), "unto salvation" (the result); for this reason it is sure, depending on the promised work of God alone. This is perhaps the strongest assertion of the **eternal security** of the believer in his salvation to be found in the New Testament.

Endnotes:

- [1] One does have to wonder how something described in the New Testament as *eternal* life could endure for only a finite, and perhaps very short, period of time.

[2] Most Reformed theologians, of course, would not make a distinction between the rapture and the second coming of Christ.