

## What Did the Early Church Believe About Salvation and Eternal Security?

Today there is often conversations about eternal security. Once a person is saved are they saved forever—once saved always saved? Did the early church fathers believe that once a person was saved and could never lose their salvation?

In our religious world today there are two major views on salvation and eternal security. We have the Calvinistic view and the Arminian view. However there are at least two other views which are gaining traction in the religious world today. They are modifications of the two major views. Many Christians today may not be aware that: **“There was a group back in the second and third centuries who taught eternal security. These were the Gnostics.”**[David Bercot in What the Early Christians Believed About Eternal Security, Scroll Publishing Co., 2012]. Around 225 A.D Origen wrote the following statement criticizing them for believing in eternal security: **“Certain ones of those [Gnostics ] who hold different opinions misuse these passages. They essentially destroy free will by introducing ruined natures incapable of salvation and by introducing others as being saved in such a way that they cannot be lost.”**[Ante-Nicene Fathers Volume 4 page 308] Origen a church father of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century was condemning the Gnostics for teaching and believing that a person could be saved and cannot lose their salvation.

It may come as a surprise to some that Augustine who lived in the fourth century was the first Christian theologian to formulate the eternal security view. He also introduced infant baptism into the church during the fourth century which the church at that time accepted.. When Saint Augustine introduced the doctrine of eternal security the church rejected his teachings. His doctrine of eternal security was revived and modified by Martin Luther during the time of the Reformation. **“Augustine’s doctrine of predestination was revived by Luther and was promulgated by Calvin.”**[David Bercot, What the Early Christians Believed About Eternal Security, Scroll Publishing Co., 2013] Bercot further states: **“According to Luther, there is nothing to fear no matter how little of your life you give to Christ or how much you deny Christ by the way you live. In contrast, Calvin would say that an ungodly life would indicate you are not of the elect.”**[What the Early Christians Believed About Eternal Security] Luther is attributed with the modern teaching of unconditional eternal security followed by John Calvin.

What did the early church teach about salvation and eternal security? Many of the church fathers living from the first to the third centuries believed and taught conditional security. They taught that a person was saved by faith through the grace of God but they had to live a life dedicated to Christ until the end. Let’s examine some of the quotes from their writings. Justin Martyr wrote around 160 A.D.: **“I hold further, that those of you who have confessed and known this man to be Christ, yet who have gone back for some reason to the legal dispensation [i.e., the Mosaic law], and have denied that this man is Christ , and have not repented before death— you will by no means be saved.”** [Ante-Nicene Fathers Volume 1 page 218] **“If you do not guard yourself against [anger], you and your household will lose all hope of salvation.”** [Hermas written around 150 and is quoted from Ante-Nicene Fathers Volume 2 page 23 as recorded in A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs, David W. Bercot published by Hendrickson Publishers, 1998] Irenaeus wrote around 180 A.D. **“Those who do not obey Him, being disinherited by Him, have ceased to be His sons.”**[Ante-Nicene Fathers Volume 1 page 525 as recorded in A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs, David W. Bercot published by Hendrickson Publishers, 1998] Clement of Alexandria around 195 A.D. wrote: **“It is neither the faith, nor the love, nor the hope nor the endurance of one day; rather, ‘he that endures to the end will be saved.’”**[Ante-Nicene Fathers Volume 2 page 600 as recorded in A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs, David W. Bercot published by Hendrickson Publishers, 1998] Below are a few of the

several scriptures used by the early church fathers to teach conditional security:

**2 Chronicles 15:2 (KJV)**

<sup>2</sup> And he went out to meet Asa, and said unto him, Hear ye me, Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin; The LORD *is* with you, while ye be with him; and if ye seek him, he will be found of you; but if ye forsake him, he will forsake you.”

**Ezekiel 33:12 (KJV)**

“Therefore, thou son of man, say unto the children of thy people, The righteousness of the righteous shall not deliver him in the day of his transgression: as for the wickedness of the wicked, he shall not fall thereby in the day that he turneth from his wickedness; neither shall the righteous be able to live for his *righteousness* in the day that he sinneth.”

**Matthew 10:22 (KJV)**

“And ye shall be hated of all *men* for my name's sake: but he that endureth to the end shall be saved.”

**2 Timothy 2:12 (KJV)**

“If we suffer, we shall also reign with *him*: if we deny *him*, he also will deny us.”

**Hebrews 10:26 (KJV)**

“For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins.”

**2 Peter 2:20-21 (KJV)**

<sup>20</sup> For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning.

<sup>21</sup> For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known *it*, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them.”

**John 8:31-32 (KJV)**

<sup>31</sup> Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, *then* are ye my disciples indeed.”

<sup>32</sup> And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”

**John 15:1, 6 (KJV)**

<sup>1</sup> I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman.

<sup>6</sup> If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast *them* into the fire, and they are burned.”

### **Hebrews 6:4-6 (KJV)**

<sup>4</sup> For *it is* impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost,

<sup>5</sup> And have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come,

<sup>6</sup> If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put *him* to an open shame.”

### **Galatians 6:9 (KJV)**

“And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.”

There is a book in my library which list around 85 scriptures cited by those who believe in conditional security to show that this is the kind of salvation taught in the scriptures. Here are a few more scriptures which are used to teach conditional security.

Matt 5:13; Matt 6:23; Matt 7:16-19; Matt 13:1-8; Matt 18:23-35; Matt 24:4-5; Matt 24:11-13

Matt 24:23-26; Matt 25:1-13; Luke 8:11-15; Luke 11:24-28; Luke 12:42-46; John 6:66-71

John 8:31-33; John 8:51; John 13:8; John 15:1-6; Acts 5:32; Acts 11:21-23; Acts 13:43

Acts 14:21-22; Rom 6:11-23; Rom 8:12-17; Rom 11:20-22; Rom 14:15-23; 2 Cor 1:24

2 Cor 11:2-4; 2 Cor 12:21-13: 5; Gal 2:12-16; Gal 3:4-4:1; Gal 5:1-4; Gal 6:7-9; Col 1:21-23

Col 2:4-8; Col 2:18-19; 1 Thess 3:5; 1 Tim 1:3-7; 1 Tim 1:18-20; 1 Tim 2:11-15; 1 Tim 4:1-16

1 Tim 5:5-15; 1 Tim 6:9-12; 1 Tim 6:17-21; 2 Tim 2:11-18; 2 Tim 2:22-26; 2 Tim 3:13-15

Heb 2:1-3; Heb 3:6-19; Heb 4:1-16; Heb 5:8-9; Heb 6:4-20; Heb 10:19-39; Heb 11 :13-16

Heb 12:1-17; Heb 12:25-29; Heb 13:7-17; James 1:12-26; James 2:14 -26; James 4:4-10

James 5:19-20; 1 Peter 5:9-13; 2 Peter 1:5-11; 2 Peter 2:1-22; 2 Peter 3:16-17; 1 John 1:5-3: 11

1 John 5:4-16; 2 John 6-9; Jude 5-12; Jude 20-21; Rev 2:7; Rev 2:10-11; Rev 2:17-26; Rev 3:4-5

Rev 3:8-22; Rev 12:11

**TWO BORN AGAIN ATTORNEYS WHO ONCE BELIEVED IN UNCONDITIONAL SECURITY [ONCE SAVED ALWAYS SAVED] HAVE NOW WRITTEN BOOKS REFUTING THIS DOCTRINE. FOR FURTHER STUDY I RECOMMEND THAT YOU READ:**

Bercot, David , **What the Early Christians Believed About Salvation?** Scroll Publishing Co., 2013.

Bercot, David, **What the Early Christians Believed About Eternal Security?**, Scroll Publishing Co.. 2013.

Smelley, Hutson, **Deconstructing Calvinism**, published by Amazon Kindle, 2011

**OTHER BOOKS NOT WRITTEN BY ATTORNEYS:**

Olson, Roger E., **Against Calvinism: Rescuing God's Reputation from Radical Reformed Theology**, Zondervan, 2011.

Gracely, Daniel, **Calvinism: A Closer Look**, Grandma's Attic Press, 2013.

Hunt, Dave, **What Love is This?** The Berean Call, 2006.

Badger, Anthony B., **Confronting Calvinism: A Free Grace Refutation and Biblical Resolution of Radical Reformed Soteriology**, Anthony B. Badger, 2013.

Lee Jr, James Thomas, **A Bible-Based Argument Against Calvinism**, Published by the author, 2012.

McKinley, O. Glenn, **Where Two Creeds Meet: A Biblical Evaluation of Calvinism and Arminianism**, Beacon Hill Press, 1959..

Pinson, J. Matthew, **Four Views on Eternal Security**, Counterpoints: Bible and Theology, Zondervan.

Stanley N. Gundry series editor, **Four Views on Salvation in a Pluralistic World**, Counterpoints: Bible and Theology, Zondervan, 2010.

The above are a few of the many books written on this controversial subject. Note that most of the books have been written within the past six years. Prior to then most of the books written defended unconditional security but now writers are rising up and writing books defending conditional security. As a teacher of the Word of God I believe individuals should be well versed on both sides of this issue and have an understanding of both sides of the argument. It is my belief that those who lived during the time the events took place or lived nearest to the time events took place are more qualified to give a more accurate history then someone who lived say seven hundred years after the event occurred. The same argument is surfacing today about whether the writings of the apostles are more reliable then the writings of the gnostics [the so called lost gospels which are now surfacing] and those who lived a hundred years after the ministry and resurrection of Jesus. Naturally those who were present and witnessed the ministry and personal appearance of the risen Christ recorded a more accurate account then someone living a hundred or more years later who never

witnessed His ministry and resurrection.

If you are interested in reading additional quotes from the early church fathers I recommend that you read pages 586 to 591 under the subject “Salvation” Section VI titled: Can those who are saved ever be lost? in **A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs—A Reference Guide to More Than 700 Topics Discussed by the Early Church Fathers** edited by David W. Bercot and published by Hendrickson Publishers, 1998. If this does not give you enough information then read the 9 volume set of the Ante-Nicene Fathers. This dictionary can be used as a topical index to their writings. You can read the entire series for free at <http://www.ccel.org/fathers.html> [the entire 38 volumes are available on this site]. They can also be read at <http://www.biblestudytools.com/history/early-church-fathers/ante-nicene/> which may be much easier to read.

I trust that these few lines have motivated you to look more closely at the arguments on both sides of this debated subject. After all you should be able to give an answer for the hope that is within you.

“If a man lets his garden alone, it very soon ceases to be a garden;  
and if a saint lets his mind alone, it will soon become a  
rubbish heap for Satan to make use of.”

Oswald Chambers