



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Systematic Theology

“Once Saved, Always Saved, or The Doctrine of the Perseverance of the Saints,
part II – Logical Support”

TRANSCRIPT

We’re just going to read just one verse and then have the word of prayer and launch into our subject, John chapter 19 in verse 30, John chapter 19 in verse 30.

“When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished: and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost.”

Now, let’s bow our heads in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father we thank Thee for the privilege of the study of the word of God again tonight. And we thank Thee for the opportunity to study it in its great doctrine. And we pray that for each one of us there may be the ministry of illumination that the Spirit may take of the things of Christ and show them unto us. We give Thee thanks and praise and express our gratitude to Thee for the sovereignty of divine grace and mercy toward us.

And this we say in Jesus’ name and for his sake. Amen.

[Message] Now, we are studying the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints or as some like to call it the perseverance of the savior or as others like to call it the doctrine of eternal security. I mentioned last time by way of introduction that it is probably best for us to call it simply the doctrine of eternal life. For we get away the difficulties that are inherent in the term the doctrine of eternal security, which is not really a biblical term. We have often said, however, that it is not necessary that a term be precisely biblical to be biblical in the sense that it is taught by Scripture, and the shining illustration of this is the doctrine of the trinity. There is no word trinity in the New Testament but it is one of the clearest of the New Testament doctrines. But the doctrine of eternal life is true to Scripture and it expresses also the teaching of the word on the subject that is before us.

The doctrine of the perseverance of the saints lays stress upon the fact that those who have truly believed will persevere. And the doctrine expressed as the doctrine of the perseverance of the savior expresses the cause and looks at it from the standpoint of the efficient cause of our perseverance which is, of course, the perseverance of the savior.

Now, we said that this doctrine was one of the five points of Calvinism which was set forth in answer to the views of the remonstrance or the Arminians, but the real question was is it in the word? The remonstrance set forth the views that man is depraved but not totally. God elects on the basis of foreseen faith or unbelief, Christ died for all men, divine grace may be resisted, and the perseverance of the regenerate is not clearly taught. Arminius himself seemed to continue to believe in the perseverance of the saints but his followers believed that men could fall from grace. The Calvinists in answer to the views of the remonstrance at the senate of Dort in sixteen hundred and eighteen and nineteen set forth the answers which have come to be known as the famous five points of Calvinism: Total depravity, unconditional election, particular redemption, not limited atonement that was the term that their opponents applied to their doctrine, particular redemption, irresistible or infallible grace, and the perseverance of the saints.

Now, last time as we were setting forth the introduction I tried to distinguish between the doctrine of assurance, which we studied a few weeks ago, and the doctrine of security. The doctrine of assurance has to do with our assurance of salvation now. It says, in effect, that we can be sure that we have salvation at the present moment. The doctrine of eternal security has to do with the assurance of our salvation now and forever. It is by this doctrine that we are able to say that we are not only sure that we are saved now, if we stopped there that would be the doctrine of assurance, but now and forever and thus the doctrine of assurance becomes the doctrine of eternal life.

And I also said that it was important that we correctly define this doctrine. And we tried to do it negatively and positively. Negatively it is not the teaching that the believer is saved no matter what his practice is, but positively it is the doctrine that God secures in grace the salvation of true believers keeping them from sinning as a practice and then, of course, keeping them from apostasy. So the doctrine of eternal security then is the doctrine that God secures in grace the salvation of true believers keeping them from the sin of apostasy and from sinning as a practice.

And we began last time to defend this from the expressed statements of Scripture. And we pointed out and discussed a claim that the believer is secure because of the purpose of God. And we turned to Romans 8:28 through 30, John 6:39 among several passages. Then we said secondly the believer is secure because of the power of the Father. And we turned to 1 Peter chapter 1 in verse 5 and we pointed out that that passage teaches that we are kept safe by the power of God through faith, which is initial faith, that is the faith by which we come to salvation through faith unto a salvation that is complete and final. And then we spent a great deal of time on the claim that the believer is secure because of the promise of the Son. And we turned to John chapter 10 verses 27 through 30 and laid a great deal of stress upon the statements of that tenth chapter “I give unto them eternal life and they shall never perish.” And we tried to point out that the statement that our Lord makes is one of the strongest in the Bible, could be rendered they

shall by no means ever perish. We are in the savior’s hand. We are in the Father’s hand. We are in the hands of both. There is a double protection the hand of the Father, the hand of the Son. And, consequently, we can be sure that we are saved.

Now, we want to continue these biblical proofs and I hope also we shall get into the logical defense of the doctrine which is also scriptural, but there are more arguments from the standpoint of logic. And I have two or three more besides these two that we will deal with or try to.

Now, fourth, the believer is secure because of the prayer of the Son. And I want you to turn, first of all, to John chapter 17 verse 11 and verse 15. John chapter 17 verse 11 and verse 15. And we’re going to read these two verses. These are verses that are found in the great high priestly prayer of the Lord Jesus. A prayer that is probably more properly called the Lord’s Prayer than the prayer of Matthew chapter 6. John giving the words of our Lord in his prayer says.

“And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to thee. Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are.”

Now, notice Jesus asks the Father to keep the one’s whom the Father has given to him. Now, he says in the ninth verse “I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine.” And these are the subject of the savior’s prayer “Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are.” And so you can see that Jesus Christ has prayed that the Father would keep those whom the Father has given to the Son.

Verse 15, “I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil.”

And so again Jesus has prayed not once but twice, several times it is mentioned here. He prays for those whom the Father has given to him. Are the prayers of Jesus Christ answered? Does Jesus Christ pray in the will of God? Does he pray not knowing the will of God? If he knows the will of God and prays in the will of God, does God answer the prayers that are within his will? Well, the answer to all these questions, of course, is yes. Jesus prays in the will of God and the Father answers the prayers that are in his will.

Now, in John chapter 11 verse 42 we read these words. Jesus is at the tomb of Lazarus and he says.

“And I knew that thou hearest me always: but because of the people which stand by I said it, that they may believe that thou hast sent me. And when he thus had spoken, he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth.”

Jesus is simply saying this I know that the Father always answers my prayers. He always hears my prayers but I’m going to utter this prayer audibly in order that, as he said, in order that they may believe that thou hast sent me, “Lazarus, come forth” and Lazarus came forth, “But I know that thou hearest me always.” And so since our Lord’s prayers are always in the will of God, since they are always answered, and since he prays for the believer’s security, we can be sure that we are secure because our security is guaranteed by the prayer of Jesus Christ.

Now, fifth, the believer is secure because of the presence of the Spirit. And let’s turn to John chapter 14 verses 16 and 17. Now, I think since we have a little time, I intended before I turn to this point E, I intended to turn to a passage in Romans chapter 8 and I think I’m just going to do it anyway. So let’s wait a moment and let’s turn over to Romans chapter 8 because here we have another text that pertains to our Lord’s Prayer for

us. And I’m in no hurry and so if you’re in no hurry, we won’t lose anything. Romans chapter 8 and we’re going to read beginning at verse 31. This is a kind of response to the great theme of the purpose of God which has just been completed in verse 30. And Paul writes “What shall we then say to these things?” this great purpose of God “If God be for us, who can be against us?” Now, isn’t that a wonderful text? If God be for us and he is for all who are in the purpose of God, who can be against us? Now, we don’t really have anything to worry about. The trials of life, the tragedies of life, the troubles of life all the difficulties of life, they are very real and they upset us and they disturb us and they send us through some terrible experiences but basically we do not have anything to worry about because God is for us.

Now, he says in verse 32 “He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? If he has given us the Son, why then everything else is secondary to that. Who shall lay anything to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that justifieth” If it is God that justifies how can anyone stand before the throne of God and complain successfully. You may stand before the throne of God and complain but you are sure to come off without the decision for the God who sits behind the desk of the judicial authority is the God who has justified. So “Who shall lay anything to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that justifieth.” He’s the final arbiter. He’s the Supreme Court, the Supreme Court, and he’s a Southerner too. [Laughter]

“Who is he that condemneth? Who is he that condemneth? How can anyone condemn? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.” Now, this is what I wanted you to notice. “Who also maketh intercession for us.” Now notice the protection that the believer has. He has a God who has justified. He has a Son who has died, who has risen again, who has ascended to the right hand of the throne of God, and who there continually makes intercession for us. Notice, who maketh present tense who maketh intercession for us. Now what do you expect if you have a God who is completely for

you, if you have a God who has is the final arbiter of man’s destiny, and he has justified the elect. And you have a Son who has laid the judicial foundation for salvation in his shed blood, and you have a Son who prays constantly for you what should you expect? Well, you should expect that nothing should ever separate you from the love of God. And that is precisely what we read “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?” And did you notice the connection between “Who maketh intercession for us” the climax and then the next statement “Who shall separate us form the love of Christ.” It’s almost as if the climax of the blessings of God is a redeemer who prays constantly for us, therefore, “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ.” And the apostle details all of the things that might be thought to separate and everything is included within them. For he says “Or any other creation, any other created thing, nothing can separate us.” And, consequently, we are safe because of the prayer of the Son.

Now, let’s turn to John 14:16-17. We are also secure because of the presence of the Holy Spirit. Now here we read in verse 16. “And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for six months.” He may abide with you until you sin. You may abide with you until you apostatize from the faith. He may abide with you until you give it all up. No. “I will pray the Father, and he will give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you forever,” forever. So when the Holy Spirit comes to indwell us he indwells us permanently. Jesus continues “Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you (before the cross), and shall be in you (after the time of the cross.)” So in the Old Testament time the ministry of the Spirit was a ministry of empowerment.

He was unable to come and indwell us permanently for the work of redemption has not yet been completed. The benefits of his work may be imputed to us, but they are not really ours permanently and finally until Christ sheds his blood. But since Christ has come, has shed his blood, the Spirit has come, and he indwells us forever, forever in us

shall be in you. That’s what took place on the day of Pentecost. Not only was the group of believers baptized into the one body of Jesus Christ united to him, but from that moment they are permanently indwelt by the Holy Spirit. Is that a wonderful thing to realize that I am indwelt by the third person of the trinity? Amazing thing. Amazing. And further, he is in us forever, forever. That means I cannot go anywhere that he does not go. I cannot say anything that he is not with me when I say it. It’s a solemn thing too to realize that fact. So we are secure because of the presence of the Spirit. We may grieve the Spirit but we cannot grieve the Spirit away. The church may clutch the Spirit but they cannot extinguish the Spirit’s presence in their midst.

Now, sixth, the believer is secure because of the possession of the new nature. Involved in the possession of Jesus Christ is security because his life is eternal. Now, let’s turn over to 2 Peter chapter 1 in verse 4. 2 Peter chapter 1 in verse 4. And I just want to read this verse, point out only one thing, and then we want to look at 1 John 3:9. 2 Peter chapter 1 in verse 4 Peter says “Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature.” Notice that we are made partakers of the divine nature. We have become, since our conversion, one person with two natures. We have one personality but now we have two natures. We have an old nature, some like to call it a lower nature. That’s all right with me. But we also have a new nature, and it is a divine nature.

Now, being a divine nature involved in that very fact is security because the divine nature is eternal. But John has a word to say about that too in the 3rd chapter of his first letter he says “Whosoever is born of God does not practice sin for his seed (that is God) God’s seed remaineth in him and he cannot sin because he is born of God.” And notice in your English text that word remaineth in the present tense. “For his seed remaineth or abideth in him.” In other words, God’s seed continually abides in us and he cannot go on sinning because he is born of God. And so one the things that is made necessary by the

new birth is the presence of the divine nature continuing within in us and the incapability of the believer continually practicing sin.

Now, if we had time we could talk about the relation to this to divine discipline when a believer does persist in sin but God does something about it. And we cannot, as believers, go on sinning without God doing something about it because we have a divine nature that goes on abiding within us. And because it goes on abiding in us we have security.

Finally, the believer is secure because of his reconciliation and I want you to turn with me to Romans chapter 5. Now, this evidence for eternal security is one of the most significant in the New Testament but one of the most likely to be omitted because it requires a little thought. And in the twentieth century, the latter part of it, we don’t like to think about spiritual things too deeply, you know. So let’s notice this. Paul is talking about the fact that since we have been justified by faith we have peace with God and this inevitably means that we have eternal life. And when he reaches his climax near the end of the passage beginning at the 1st verse through the 11th he says in verse 9 “Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him.” Notice that much more than. In other words, if we are justified by his blood much more shall we be saved from wrath? He continues “For, to explain, if when we were enemies. Notice that if when we were enemies. Did you know that’s what you were? You were enemies of God. That’s what you were. That’s what you were naturally, an enemy of God.

Can you remember when you were an enemy? I can. I remember when at the mention of the word church I suddenly had an uncontrollable urge to play golf. [Laughter] I can remember when someone would say, Christian, and I thought of having a party at the fraternity house. And Bible class that turned me pale. These are expressions of our enmity towards God. How many of you, the first time came into contact with anything Christian, would just turn handsprings and said I’ve just been

waiting for someone to talk to me about spiritual things. Well, let me assure you if that did happen it was because of the work of the Holy Spirit in efficacious grace because naturally we are enemies of God. That’s illustrated in the Garden of Eden when man sinned. What did Adam do? Said, Eve, we’ve got to seek the Lord about this. Let’s go wait where he usually comes in order we’ll be able to meet him the moment that he comes into the garden.

Now, you know what happens when he came down in the garden, they hid themselves and that’s what man’s been doing ever since, hiding from God. That’s an expression of the fact that he is an enemy of God. Now, Paul says “If when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son.” That is we were brought into the relationship of friendship by the death of Jesus Christ much more. In other words, it is much more reasonable to expect that since we are now friends, we shall be saved because we participated in his light.

Now, the apostle is not talking about the victorious life. If you’ve ever heard any Keswick speakers speak on Romans 5, 10, and 11 about the victorious life just forget all that they ever said because this has nothing whatsoever to do with that. The Apostle is not talking about two planes of Christian living here. Unfortunately, I have heard some use this text and use it out of context. And, consequently, Christians are upset and disturbed listening to that kind of exposition of this text. What Paul is talking about is our salvation and our security. He says look if when we were enemies God moved in our heart through the death of Jesus Christ to woo us and to win us so that we became reconciled to God, became his friend, how much more will he now that we are his friend save us on through the end because now we share in the life of his son. You’ll notice that the preceding verse says we shall be saved from wrath through Him. So he is talking about salvation from wrath.

So if when we were enemies God moved upon our hearts to bring us to the place of amity or friendship, now that we are friends, he surely will keep us. For you see, if he

has done the most for us, he surely will do the least. If he has done the best thing possible to bring us from the state of enmity into amity, he’s done the best thing for us. He surely will complete the job. He would do that. He will save us into his presence. You see this is a tremendously logical argument. If you, for example, are an enemy of God and he goes to all the trouble through Jesus Christ, his Son, to make you a friend. Now, won’t he do something that’s less for you now that you’re his friend? If he did all these things for you when you are an enemy, he surely will do something that is less now that you’re a friend. So if he saves you will remember him he’ll keep you now that you’re a friend. That’s good foreign logic. Do you like it? I like it. I really like it. I think that’s great.

But Paul doesn’t stop there. Notice, he said and not only so. Now, unfortunately, the translators of the Authorized Version rendered a participle in verse 11 by a finite verb. But we also joy. Strictly speaking the Greek text simply says “and not only so but boasting or joining in God through our Lord Jesus Christ by whom we have now received the reconciliation.” Now, it is possible to render that by a finite verb. The translators did not err in the sense that they did something that is impossible. Occasionally, a participle may be rendered by a finite verb. But, I think, it is evident from the fact that we have the little noun in that last clause that Paul is talking about the future.

And since he has said in verse 10, “For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.” We shall be brought into the presence of the Lord. We shall be saved from the wrath that comes because we share in his life since he speaking about the future. Well, I’m quite convinced that verse 11 should be rendered not only shall we be saved but we shall be saved boasting in God through our Lord Jesus Christ by whom we have now at the present time received his reconciliation. Let me tell then what Paul is saying. He saying look when you were enemies God through the cross of Jesus Christ brought you to the place where you are a friend. In efficacious grace, he moved into

your heart and through his saving work by the Spirit he brought you into the family of God gave you life.

Now, that he has done that he surely will keep you. He surely will save you into his presence from the wrath to come. But look he’s not going to save you and bring you into his presence with a frown, with a sour look upon your face with any question of doubt whatsoever but he’s going to bring you into the presence of God boasting in God through our Lord Jesus Christ. In other words, we are going to have a triumphant entrance into the presence of God. No good brings a Christian into the presence of the Lord, but only those who are boasting in God through our Lord Jesus Christ. So we shall be saved not only shall we be saved but we shall be saved boasting in God through our Lord Jesus Christ and you now what this means. Really, it means that all of the company of the Christians when they come into the presence of the Lord safe and secure forever, there is going to be a tremendous doxology of praise and thanksgiving on the lips of every single one of you, all of you who are even legalists. You’re going to be happy finally then, too.

Now, that’s a wonderful text. And that little word now shows us that that participle should be rendered in agreement with we shall be saved future. We shall be saved boasting. Isn’t that wonderful to think about that? No sad woebegone countenances at our entrance into glory but everybody is going to be happy. So we can say the souls that are on Jesus that lean for repose I will not, I will not desert to his pose, that so though all hell should endeavor to shake, I’ll never, no never, no never forsake. This is a tremendous body of positive teaching to the effects that you are safe and secure.

Now, frankly I think the question is settled right there. But we do have problems. And there’re other texts also but we’re not going to hasten. I want to now give you some logical defenses of the doctrine. And then, of course, next week we’re going to begin to consider some of the problems because there are problem texts. And I want since we have just a few minutes, I want at this point I intended to finish that last time but we got

excited and caught up in what we were talking about and weren’t able to do it. And so I’m going to give you a second introduction tonight before we look at the logical defense of the doctrine because there is something that you, as theologians, need to realize. You need, of course, not only to know that this is the teaching of Scripture but it will be useful for you if you know what others teach about the doctrine of eternal life. And so I want to, for a moment, before we look at the rest of the logical defense. I want to say a few words to you about different opinions that have been given regarding this doctrine of eternal security. You would think after everything that is set forth here that there would be no Christians that didn’t believe in the doctrine of eternal life.

Now, we know from practice that there are some genuine Christians who do not accept the doctrine of eternal life, and there are some within the professing Christian fraternity who have historically denied this doctrine too. For example, the church at Rome has answered the question once saved always saved by saying salvation may be lost by mortal sin. The council of Trent which formulated the great doctrines of that church has put it this way all mortal sins render men children of wrath and enemies of God.

Now, immediately their enemies said but what about then the problem of baptism? If that is true then a man is lost and then he must be saved again and he should be baptized again. And because this doctrine of loseable grace posed a problem to Rome they had to reconstruct their doctrine of baptism. And so they said that three of the seven sacraments of the Roman Catholic Church baptism, confirmation, and holy order imprint an inerasable character. They use the term *carat ter in de laebulous*. In other words, an inerasable character is put upon the soul by the three sacraments: baptism, confirmation, and holy order so that these may not be repeated. Therefore, a man may lose his salvation and he may regain it but it’s not necessary for him to be baptized again because the first experience of the sacrament of baptism by which we come to life imprinted an inerasable character upon his soul.

Now, this is a mysterious seal in the soul they say, its lingering life, and it can be healed with confession and penance. The Lutherans vary somewhat but they generally speak in their writings of repeatable regeneration and repeatable justification. They distinguish as Rome between mortal and venial sin.

Now, for you who are Protestants and who are not within the Lutheran and Roman Catholic Church communion you probably do not know the distinction between mortal and venial sins unless you discover this outside of your church. A mortal sin, of course, is a sin of a very severe character. We will say something about that later on which causes us to lose our salvation. It’s not a trifling sin but it’s a very serious sin. And further a venial sin then is a forgivable sin. That’s the meaning of the term venial. It is a forgivable sin.

Now, Lutherans distinguish as Rome between mortal and venial sin. And some Lutherans say that we generated ones may fall totally and finally. In other words, a man may be regenerated and he may fall totally and he may fall finally but the elect can only fall totally not finally. In other words, the elect may lose their salvation but they’re sure to regain it. Well, consequently, Lutherans believe that you can lose salvation too but the elect cannot ultimately lose it. Arminians generally believe that regenerated men may be saved and lost but not one of the elect. In other words, they largely agree with Lutherans. A man may be saved and then he may be lost but one of the elect is sure to be saved. They do not, however, make the distinction between sins that Lutherans make.

And as I mentioned, Arminius himself never wholly abandoned the view that once saved we were always saved. Wesleyans and Pentecostals generally believe that any saved or regenerated man may be lost and they are usually said to be lost from a willful sin or from apostasy from Christ. So if you speak to a Pentecostalist you know that he does not believe in eternal security. He does not believe in the doctrine of eternal life. If you speak to a Church of Christ man, they are Arminian as a rule in their theology and, consequently, they do not accept the doctrine of eternal life. So you can see that the

doctrine of eternal life is a doctrine which is held only by a limited segment of professing Christianity. The Reformed theologians and here we are speaking primarily of the Presbyterians and the Baptists who don’t like to be called anything. They also agree with the Reformed. They teach that the truly regenerated individual will persevere to the end and he cannot be lost. It is said of the Methodist that he knows he has salvation but he is afraid he may lose it. It’s said of a Presbyterian that he knows he cannot lose his salvation but he’s afraid he may not have it.

Now, having said that, we want to continue our exposition here of the logical defense of the doctrine. And first of all, the argument from election. Now, we have accepted the doctrine of election. All of us in this room believe in sovereign election by now. If we don’t, we are underprivileged. Is all I can say. We are underprivileged if we do not believe in sovereign election.

Now, if we believe in sovereign election, remember we said that Paul said in 2 Thessalonians chapter 2 that God has chosen us unto salvation. He has chosen us unto salvation. Remember the words. Chosen us unto salvation. We are chosen to be in him as Ephesians 1 puts it. Chosen in him before the foundation of the world. Romans chapter 8 verse 28 through verse 30. So election has as its end salvation and glorification. The barriers of sin and the human will are sovereignly and graciously removed by the efficacious work of the Holy Spirit. Sin is removed and the barrier of the will is removed and man is brought to Christ sovereignly.

Now, election is election unto salvation. It’s not election unto privilege. It’s election unto salvation. It’s not the enjoyment of the muse of salvation. It’s through these means the enjoyment of salvation itself. We are elect unto salvation, not elect unto the privilege of being saved. We are elect unto salvation. Consequently, an election without involving a proving power would be no real election at all. It would not be an election, if we were not elect unto salvation. If it were simply an election unto the privilege of salvation, what would that mean? That’s no election. So in the very idea of election, we

have a necessity the doctrine of security. For to be elect unto salvation demands that we have keeping power. As Professor Wardloy put it, if this is a viable doctrine that is that election is election to salvation, then it follows inevitably that all who are elected to salvation shall obtain salvation. So suppose any who are of the elect to fail of final salvation is to render election altogether mandatory. That is to nullify. Consequently, when we say a man is elect unto salvation we presuppose he’s going to be kept after he believes. You get that? That should be obvious to you. If it doesn’t, you’re not yet a theologian. Perhaps you knew you weren’t yet anyway.

Secondly, the argument for salvation by Greece. Now, I read tonight John chapter 19 in verse 30. Jesus on the cross said “It is finished.” Now, does my salvation depend upon what Jesus Christ did? Or does it depend upon what Jesus Christ did by which I come into the possession of eternal life and then what I do there after in keeping myself saved. Does it depend on what he did or did he not say it is finished? Well, now if we believe that we are saved by what Jesus Christ did plus our keeping ourselves from apostasy and keeping ourselves from mortal sin after we have believed in Christ what is the basis of our salvation. Why it is what Christ did plus what we do. Jesus then did not finish the work. The very idea of a finished salvation involved an eternal life doctrine otherwise we have a doctrine of salvation by what he did plus what I do. And Jesus when he said it is finished had not really finished it. It only finished when I keep myself and pass into the presence of the Lord.

You know, in the Old Testament one of the great illustration of salvation is Noah’s ark. And when men were in the ark they were safe. Was there any pump in Noah’s ark? You didn’t find the men in the ark pumping madly in order to keep that ship afloat because that boat was afloat by virtue of the fact that Noah had constructed it according to the commandments of God and the dimensions and all of the other things that God had given. B. P. Ironside used to say and he taught by an Arminian, he used to say his old instructor said to him getting to heaven is like riding a bicycle. If I stop pumping, I’ll

fall off. The only trouble with that illustration is that getting to heaven is not like riding a bicycle.

Now, thirdly capital C - I don’t have time to put on the board for you but I’ll just say it. Capital C - the argument from union with Christ. The argument from union with Christ. Now, Jesus Christ is our federal head. That is he stands for us. He has come from God as the one who is to be the redeemer. And he stands for all men, just as the first Adam stood for men and when the first Adam sinned all sinned in Adam. So when the last Adam, Jesus Christ, came and died upon the cross all who are in him are secured and safe forever. We are united to him by fear. He is our federal head. He is our surety. He stands for us. And we abide to him and we live because he lives.

Now, let’s turn to Romans chapter 6 in verse 17 for a text that bears on this particular point. We are united with Jesus Christ. We share his life. As we read in 1 Corinthians 6 in verse 17. First Corinthians 6 in verse 17, what did I say? Romans? Or you just heard it wrong. [Laughter] First Corinthians chapter 6 in verse 17. First Corinthians 6 verse 17 “But he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit.” Have you ever noticed that particular passage? You know that is one of the most unusual texts in the New Testament. “He that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit.” Think about that one spirit. Now, if he had said one body that would have been amazing but one spirit. How can you spirit one spirit? You see we are so reminded that Jesus Christ that we can never be severed from him as Paul said who can separate us from the love of Christ. Turn over to chapter 12 verse 27 “Now ye are the body of Christ and members in particular.” We belong to the body of Christ, the church, the spiritual organism and we are each a member of that body. We cannot be severed from his body. This is the body of Jesus Christ. By virtue of our union with him which is of necessity and eternal union, we are safe.

Now, that is a logical argument. Capital D - the argument from the ordinances, the argument from the ordinances. Ordinances. By ordinances, we mean baptism. The

Lord suffer. But one question I’d like to ask the audience. You’re readers of the New Testament aren’t you? Surely, if the doctrine of once saved always saved is wrong we could have at least one illustration of a person who is saved and lost and then saved again. And, consequently, we could have someone who has been baptized twice. Please give me an illustration of anyone baptized with Christian baptism twice. Christian baptism twice? There’s no illustration. You cannot give me one for there is none. No one in the New Testament is ever baptized twice. There is no doctrine of re-baptism. You could do that if we believed that we could be saved and lost and saved and lost we ought at least have some activity in the baptistery. In addition, in the New Testament there is no provision for exclusion from the Lord’s Table on account of loss of salvation. There is provision in the New testament for exclusion from the Lord’s table on the basis of immortality because that brother or sister who is immoral is out of fellowship with the Lord, but there is no basis no provision in the New testament for exclusion from the Lords table on account of the loss of salvation not in the New testament. There’s nothing like that. I’m not surprised because the New Testament teaches the doctrine of eternal life.

Now, capital E - argument from the nature of discipline. Discipline in the New Testament. Argument from the nature of discipline. In the New Testament, discipline does not consist in exclusion from the church. Now, that ought to shock some of you because in almost all of the churches with which we’ve had acquaintance it is commonly believed by those who often don’t know the standards of their own church, but it is often believed that the New Testament teaches that a man may be ejected from the local church. That he may be removed from the local church. I deny that. That is not taught in the New Testament at all. In the New Testament, no one is ever excommunicated from the church. The only reason why a man should be excommunicated from the local church is if it can be proved that he is not a believer in Jesus Christ. He could have never have been there in the first place. That is reason. John said “They went out from us” 1 John 2:19 “but they were not of us; if they had been of us, they would no doubt have

continued with us.” And he didn’t object to them being to these people leaving the local church. What does the New Testament teach about a man out of fellowship to the Lord? What should the elders of the church do? Should they excommunicate them from the church? Suppose someone is caught in the act of adultery with some other member of the local church? Should they be excluded from the local church? Oh no, not if they’re genuine believers. Why? Well, because you see once they have come to believe in Jesus Christ, they belong to the body of Christ. Exclusion from the church is contrary to the doctrine of eternal life.

Now, it is obvious, also, that the elders should not allow such to continue with fellowship with other believers for they are not in fellowship with the Lord. Nor are they in fellowship with believers who are in fellowship with the Lord. What is the New Testament doctrine of discipline? Well, the New Testament doctrine of discipline is that they could be publicly excluded from the Lord’s table. For you see, the Lord’s table is the visible representation of the fellowship of the local church. It’s the visible representation of the fellowship of the local church. When we meet around the Lord’s table, we are in effect making a profession of faith that we belong to the Lord and that we belong to each other and we are acknowledging by our partaking of the elements that our life is due to him and that we are in fellowship. In fact, Paul said that we should not sit down at the Lord’s table if we are not in fellowship with him. He goes on to say in 1 Corinthians chapter 11, “Whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup.” So the Lord’s Table is the confession and profession of the fellowship of the local church.

So when a man sins, it is the responsibility of the elders if after profit admonition there is no restoration. It is the responsibility of the elders ultimately to bring the matter to the congregation and to prevent partaking of the Lord’s table. But if they are genuine Christians, they’re still in the family of God and discipline is not designed to exclude.

Discipline is designed to restore. And that does not mean that the Christian who has sinned even aimlessly like that should be excluded from the church. The one thing that he would need more than anything else is to come under the sign of the word of God where he might be convicted and led ultimately to confession and restoration. And so while he may not be allowed to participate at the Lord’s table, he should be encouraged to be present in the meetings of the faith and encouraged to look at his sin in the light of the Scripture in order that he may be restored.

Now, if we had time we could turn to 1 Corinthians and 2 Corinthians and point how the apostle sets this forth. You know a hundred years ago churches took this rather seriously. And I know, for example, in my church in Charleston the First Presbyterian church the Old Scots Presbyterian church you can still go in that church. I think it’s the oldest Presbyterian Church in the United States. They still have among their possessions the old tokens that used to be used for the Lord’s Table and nobody could sit at the Lord’s table who didn’t have one of those tokens. And those tokens were issued by the elders to those who were in the congregation in the membership who were in good standing. And they had to stay in good standing and those tokens were issued and they were issued regularly and you presented those tokens as you came.

Now, in the Baptist church they were serious too. It wasn’t long ago before for once a month they used to have a discipline meeting in the Baptist churches of this state of Texas. And it was a time when the deacons came together and they discussed the affairs of the church for the month. And they went over all of the reports and rumors of things that had happened in the congregation. Now, this is scriptural. It is New Testament. And so in the New Testament we do not read that when a man sins he is cast out of the church, for he belongs to the body of Christ. The discipline is exclusion from the Lord’s table until he is restored.

My wife was a member of a Presbyterian church in Birmingham Alabama and so was I. When she became convinced a number of years ago that she did not want to

continue in the church because it had grown rather liberal, we were back in Birmingham. This is a long time ago. And she called the church secretary and asked them to take her name off of the role. And I was listening to one side of the conversation and she said first of all she said I just want you to take my name off the roll. I’m living in Dallas, Texas, now. And I didn’t hear the question but I know what the question was. And she told me afterwards it was. What church do you wish us to send your letter to? Well the Presbyterian Church. She said it’s not a Presbyterian church. And then she said just take my name off the roll. That’s all you have to do just take my name off the roll. And that didn’t satisfy you could hear. And then she said I don’t want you to send a letter to any particular church.

I am attending a church in Dallas but I don’t want you to send my letter to this particular church. And then I heard there was long pause and what happened afterwards I discovered was that the girl who was on the other side of the phone said I’m sorry but I’ll have to ask the pastor about this. And so she was gone for some time and she came back and she said now the pastor said that we cannot take your name off of the roll of the church unless you have another church to which we may send the letter. And I won’t tell you what Mary said to her there after [laughter] because actually I’ve kind of forgotten it. [Laughter] but I know that it was not altogether in the spirit, [laughter] And then she hung up and she said can you imagine that. Oh, but the girl did say I lost the key line. She said we could only take off of the roll if you give us another church to which we may send a letter or if you die. [Laughter] And she said imagine that I can only get off the roll of my church if I join another church or if I die. And she said I’m not prepared to join another church because I don’t believe in a church roll any longer and at the moment I don’t feel like dying. [Laughter] And so far as she knows her name is still on the rolls of that church.

Well now, we laugh, of course, actually they were acting somewhat scripturally. Because you see theoretically if you have become a member of the body of Christ and if

the local church is the expression of it, how can you be eliminated from the body of Christ if you believe in the doctrine of eternal life? Well you can be eliminated from the local church if you die. And you can be eliminated if you move to some other church. But how can you theoretically be eliminated, how can you live in limbo, so to speak, if you believe in that doctrine? Well really you were much truer to the New Testament doctrine than even they suppose.

Now, finally, just take here one more minute. F - argument from the doctrine of sin. Argument from the doctrine of sin. Very few, if any, of those who hold to the possibility of the loss of salvation would hold to such a loss from any sin. For example, the Lutherans make a distinction between venial sins and mortal sins. A man may lose his salvation by committing a mortal sin but he does not lose by a venial sin, an insignificant sin. A trifling word that is spoken that is out of the will of God or the stealing of a penny as the Romanist -- if you steal an ovalus, that was a little coin the term in Europe a long time ago that meant a fraction of a penny -- you don’t lose your salvation if you steal that. You don’t lose your salvation if you just utter a hasty word. You lose your salvation if you commit some great mortal sin.

Now, I would like to say that as so far as the New Testament goes God does not distinguish between the guilt of a little sin and the guilt of a big sin. He said all unrighteousness is sin 1 John chapter 3 in verse 14. So distinction in sin is unscriptural. Oh it is true that some sin brings us into greater condemnation than others, but all bring us into condemnation. And so while it is true that almost all believe that salvation is not lost by a little sin but by a big sin, New Testament doctrine does not distinguish between sins. Consequently, if a man may be lost from a trifling word or the theft of a penny, salvation becomes something of a farce. So from the standpoint of the positive defense of the doctrine from specific Scriptures and from the standpoint of the defense of the doctrine logically I think we have every reason that if we have believed in Jesus Christ we have eternal life.

“The Doctrine of the Perseverance of the Saints, part II” by S. Lewis Johnson
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Let’s bow in prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we thank Thee for this wonderful treat. We rejoice in the
possession of it.

For Christ’s sake. Amen.