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SPIRITUAL SECURITY

**A meditation on the mutual responsibility of the Lord
and the believing soul for Eternal Salvation**

By Harry E. Jessop
President Emeritus:
Chicago Evangelistic Institute
President: Central Florida Bible Institute

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"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand." John 10:27, 28.

"Loved with everlasting love,
Led by grace that love to know;
Spirit breathing from above,
Thou hast taught me it is so!
Oh this full and perfect peace!

Oh this transport all divine!
In a love which cannot cease,
I am His, and He is mine.

"His for ever, only His;
Who the Lord and me shall part?
Ah, with what a rest of bliss
Christ can fill the loving heart!
Heaven and earth may fade and flee,
Firstborn light in gloom decline;
But while God and I shall be,
I am His and He is mine."

-- Wade Robinson --

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"Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure; for if ye do these things ye shall never fall." 2 Pet. 1:10.

"A charge to keep I have,
A God to glorify;
A never dying soul to save
And fit it for the sky.

"To serve the present age,
My calling to fulfill;
Oh may it all my powers engage
To do my Master's will.

"Arm me with jealous care,
As in Thy sight to live;
And oh, Thy servant, Lord, prepare,
A strict account to give!

"Help me to watch and pray,
And on Thyself rely,
Assured, if I my trust betray,
I shall for ever die."

-- Charles Wesley

* * * * *

HIS FOREVER! That is God's supreme purpose for your life and mine. Once the entire nature has been wholly yielded to Him so that we have become altogether His own, He becomes jealous over us with a holy jealousy which will not easily let us go.

"WHEREFORE GIVE DILIGENCE": That is the Divine warning to all who would make their calling and election sure.

It is the purpose of God that every soul who has responded to Christ's redemption claims should know the joy of unbroken union, and of constant communion with Him. Moreover, it is the deep desire and determination of all who have yielded completely to Him, to be His altogether and His for ever. Such is the nature of the covenant they make; therefore, having made it, there should be no suggestion of presumption when they exultantly exclaim:

"His for ever, only His,
Who the Lord and me shall part?"

Yet about all this there is always a twofold danger: on the one hand of assuming too much, and on the other hand of not expecting enough.

The Bible nowhere promises any soul a state of unconditional security. There is no Scripture passage which, when reasonably interpreted, would give ground for the belief that one past act of believing on Jesus as the atoning Saviour would furnish a passport to Glory with no conditions attached. It does, however, very definitely teach the possibility of the reception of a salvation intended to last without break in relationship, and the enjoyment of a continual fellowship until Jesus comes, or calls us Home.

Yet while the fact of falling from grace must always be regarded as a possibility as long as we are in this world, it is not to be looked upon as probable (Gal. 5:4; Heb. 12:15). The ties which bind a faithful God and a believing soul are such that no power on earth can sever. This, however, does not make the fact of falling away from grace to be impossible. It only adds to the tragedy of the situation, should it ever take place. The chief danger does not come from outside powers which may attack, but rather from within the soul itself. This danger, however, does not arise so long as the soul, cleansed from indwelling sin, obediently abides in the keeping power of its faithful Lord.

Our Lord Himself taught this glorious possibility of spiritual security, leading His people to expect a life of unbroken triumph, yet always, either by declaration or implication maintaining a warning accent both definite and clear.

"My sheep hear my voice," said He, "and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand."

Here is one of the most precious utterances which ever fell from the lips of our Lord. The fact that it has been the ground of endless controversy in no way affects its spiritual value and sweetness to the believing soul. The controversy is occasioned, not by the Scripture itself, but by the interpretation which in support of their creeds men have put upon it.

Some among God's people have been insistent in claiming it as a proof text for their teaching of unconditional eternal security. Others have been inclined to shun it because of what they have considered to be this mistaken emphasis, and have not known how to answer it.

This fact, however, must always be kept in mind: No Scripture portion can ever become the exclusive property of any one school of thought, no matter how aggressive its adherents may be. The whole Bible is for all time the undisputed heritage of the entire Church. When viewing the Bible as the Word of God, inspired by the Holy Ghost, there can be no dividing of passages, some Calvinistic and some Arminian in their content. If you are a child of God, Spirit-born, the passage which we are here to consider belongs personally to you no matter to what school of thought -- Calvinist or Arminian -- you may belong, and it means for you exactly what it says.

The background of the passage is significant and must be carefully considered in connection with it if the passage itself is rightly to be understood. Chapters nine and ten of this Gospel according to John should be read and re-read until their broad details have become clear.

Arising out of the incident of the healing of the man born blind, there had come an open clash between Jesus and the religious leaders of His day. These leaders of Israel had persecuted the man, questioned him, argued with him, threatened him, and finally decreed his excommunication from the Jewish fold. The Gospel writer puts it plainly: "They cast him out." Chapter 9:39.

It was with this in view that our Lord told the story of the Good Shepherd, leading to the words we are here discussing in Chapter 10:37, 38.

These antagonistic Pharisees and their hypocritical associates were false shepherds. Theirs was a dead and formal religion possessing no spiritual power. By a decree which was nothing more than a formula of empty words, they had placed this man outside the bounds of Jewish recognition. Now, according to their view of things, he was left to perish; no longer was he within the shelter of Father Abraham's protecting hand.

What a fallacy! As though any soul's eternal destiny could be influenced by a few parroted words coming from the lips of prejudiced men.

It was at this point that the Master introduced this precious truth of spiritual security--a truth which, though often so badly abused that it has become the basis of dangerous error--is meant to be a means of sustenance to the entire Church of God for all time. Its explanation is perfectly simple if only we can eliminate that old human proneness to read into the statement more than the speaker actually said. Read the passage again. Read it carefully, breaking it into sections, and pondering it as though approaching it for the first time. Here it is:

"My sheep hear my voice -- and I know them -- and they follow me -- and I give unto them eternal life -- and they shall never perish -- neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand."

Note the recurring "and -- and -- and -- and." With what is the Master dealing here? Obviously with the believer's experience as related to obedient believing and to the impossibility of any successful outside interference between a believing soul and a faithful God.

They cast him out. Chapter 9:34. No man, says Jesus, can do that in the affairs of the soul. Spiritual relationships are of so vital a nature that no man has power to break them.

"A stranger doth not intermeddle with his joy," said the wise man of the Old Testament, and he spoke the truth.

Between the soul determined to be wholly the Lord's and a faithful God to whom that soul belongs, there is a sacred union, a spiritual bond, invisible yet fast binding and strong, with which no outside power may interfere.

Taking up our Lord's statement, two things are to be noted, one by way of positive declaration and a second by way of implication. They are both to be considered as His age-long teaching for His believing people.

1. Here is a declaration of Spiritual union which guarantees to the believing soul a full Salvation.

2. Here is an implication of Spiritual danger which calls to the believing soul for a watchful heart.

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I. THE UNION DECLARED

Under one of the simplest and most familiar figures of His day, our Lord here sets forth the spiritual relationship between Himself and His people, namely, the Oriental shepherd and his sheep.

A simple analysis of the passage may be stated as follows:

a. Concerning the Shepherd in His relation to the Sheep. He calls them. He knows them. He gives to them eternal life.

b. Concerning the Sheep in their relation to the Shepherd. They hear His voice. They follow Him.

c. Concerning the results of the relationship thus sustained. They shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of His hand.

And now, looking beyond the figure which our Lord here uses, to the great spiritual truth He is desiring to convey, we shall consider:

1. Our Lord as He relates Himself to His people.

Three things are stated by Him concerning this:

(1) It is the relation of a tender Ownership.

We belong to Him. Not all ownerships are so tender in their manifestation. Here, however, is an Owner whose very nature is love.

Throughout the chapter is to be noted the tone of affectionate possession, the realization of which makes the possessed one proud to belong. Those expressions, The Sheep, My Sheep, His Own Sheep, with their respective pronouns occur about twenty-five times. They ooze with affection and overflow with love.

It is hardly surprising that after pondering this fact of an Ownership so precious, the poet should burst forth and adoringly sing:

"The King of love my Shepherd is
Whose goodness faileth never;
I nothing lack if I am His
And He is mine for ever."

If Spirit-born, Spirit-filled, and therefore Spirit-led, the soul becomes truly His, and will be safe in His keeping so long as the necessary conditions are fulfilled. The Divine right of Ownership is threefold, a threefold cord, each strand of which is needed to bind and keep us bound to Him. We are His, first of all, by His Own blood purchase.

"I lay down my life for the sheep," says He. Ver. 15. The fact of His tender love, and even His wonderful life with its marvelous teaching and glorious example, would not have sufficed to make us His own, needy sinners as we were. The cost was His own blood. This, as every devout student of the New Testament is well aware, is the theme of the entire Book.

"While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Rom. 5:8.

"Our Saviour Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us." Tit. 2:13, 14.

"The Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me." Gal. 2:20.

"Ye were redeemed, not with corruptible things as silver and gold... but with the precious blood of Christ. 1 Pet. 1:18, 19. R. V.

Bought with the Saviour's precious blood! What a tremendous price He paid for us! His blood is our only hope.

We are His, further, by His Father's bestowment.

"My Father which gave them me," said He again. Ver. 29.

Also, in His High Priestly prayer before going to the cross He prayed for "The men which thou gavest me out of the world." John 17:6.

Every believing soul is a sacred trust to Jesus the Son by the will of the Father; a love gift, but nevertheless a sacred trust for each of whom He will give account. John 17:12.

We are His, finally', by our own free choice.

"By me, if any man enter in he shall be saved." Ver. 9. This entering in is by no means compulsory, although love's pressure exerted freely, helps and enables the will to decide. It is entirely a faith action, the exercise of the volition, and therefore a personal act consciously wrought. The door of which Jesus speaks is thrown wide open to any man, and the assurance is given that whoever will meet this simple condition of entering in SHALL BE SAVED.

Who is there among us, having made this choice, does not remember when it happened? It was a crucial moment. There could just as easily have been a cold refusal. Yet, paradox though it be, there was a strange compulsion, which we shall never be able to explain, urging us on.

O the joy of that sacred moment-the thrill of which has been the supreme memory of all the years which have followed-when we made the choice and He sealed the transaction, hallowing our souls to God.

Philip Doddridge has embodied this twofold thought in the familiar stanzas of his great hymn:

"O happy day that fixed my choice
On Thee my Saviour and my God;
Well may this glowing heart rejoice
And tell its raptures all abroad.

"O happy bond that sealed my vows
To Him who merits all my love;
Let cheerful anthems fill His house
While to that sacred shrine I move.

"'Tis done! the great transaction's done;
I am my Lord's and He is mine;
He drew me and I followed on,
Charmed to confess the voice divine.

"Now rest my long divided heart,
Fixed on this blissful center rest;
Nor ever from Thy Lord depart
With Him of every good possessed."

Thus, we who are truly His belong to Him and He to us, anchored within each other, and bound together by this threefold cord which cannot be broken while all the strands are kept intact by both parties concerned.

(2) It is a relationship fraught with unfailing knowledge.

"I know them," says He. What an assuring word! and yet, how searching. In it is the thought of awareness, perception, approval and understanding. He knows them: knows who they are.

Not one of His people, however insignificant they may be in the sight of men, is overlooked by Him. Not one of them needs to be pointed out to Him. Everyone of them is Divinely marked and just as Divinely known.

"Every lamb is sprinkled
With the blood He shed.
Then on each He setteth
His own secret sign;
They that have my Spirit,
These, saith He, are mine."

"The foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are His." 2 Tim. 2:19.

He knows them: knows where they are.

He is never baffled by a change of address. Whether in crowded city or lonely prairie; on the wide continents, on the heaving waters of the great seas; whether on battlefield, in the air, or underground; to Him, every one of His own stands distinctly out.

He knows them: knows what they are.

His penetrating eye and omniscient mind give Him a complete knowledge of every one. Nothing in them is hidden from Him. Every thought and every motive are fully known. His penetrating gaze goes past all outward profession, locating the essential character and exposing the real man.

He knows them: knows what they need.

This knowledge is linked with a sympathetic understanding. There is a sense in which, as God alone, this could not be. Such a thought at first may startle and will probably shock the reader, but it is true nevertheless.

Is it saying too much when we state that there are some things concerning man's experience as man into which God as God could never enter, and consequently could never experientially know? The reason is simple, God, as God, has never trodden that way.

Take for instance some very common circumstances. You are short on cash, accounts piling up through circumstances over which you have no control. We ask with reverence, Experientially, how much does God as God know about that? He has always had everything He has needed, with power to create whatever else he may have desired.

Are you sick in body, the nerves being racked with pain? God does not have a body, and if He possessed one, sickness could not touch it. As God, He has never been limited to an existence like yours.

Do you have difficulties through which you cannot see your way? God has never been perplexed. He sees the end from the beginning. Listen to what He says concerning Himself:

"If I were hungry, I would not tell thee; for the world is mine, and the fulness thereof." Psa. 50:18.

"Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth fainteth not, neither is weary." Isaiah 40:28.

With God manifest in the flesh, however, all this is different. He knew the pangs of hunger, fasting in the desert. Tired, He sat by a well-side, and thirsty, He asked for a drink. Weary, He fell asleep in a fishing boat, and penniless, He had to face His taxes. Well might the writer of the Hebrew Epistle say concerning Him:

"For we have not a high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but was in all points tempted like as we are ..." Hebrews 4:15.

When this great good Shepherd says, "I know them," He is indicating an intimacy which only God as Man, and men who have become the sons of God, can rightly understand. He knows them: knows what they will do.

While they truly follow Him, He can trust them with regard to conduct. They will not disgrace Him while remaining truly His.

"I know Him," said the Lord concerning Abraham, "that he will command his household after him to keep the ways of the Lord." Gen. 18:17-19.

Not only is this warm sense of approval felt by the Lord for His people; it is also made known to them by Him. Of Enoch it is written that before his translation he had this witness that he pleased God. Heb. 11:5.

When God is pleased with any soul, it is surely not too much to expect that He will use some means to make His pleasure known.

(3) It is a relationship wrought by an undeniable experience.

"I give unto them eternal life."

Here is a divine bestowment which of necessity is a pure work of grace. Concerning it, two thoughts immediately present themselves.

It is evident that the life of which our Lord here speaks is not the natural possession of its recipient. Since there is need for it to be given, it is plain to see that it was not originally there. We "were dead in trespasses and sins," and consequently, "must be born again." Eph. 2:1; John 3:7.

But what is this gift of which here our Lord so forcefully speaks? He calls it Eternal life. But what is eternal life? Some there are who speak of it as though thinking almost entirely in terms of quantity-something which must last for ever, and consequently, no matter what they do, something which, once having been received, can never be lost.

Such a conception is surely both elementary and superficial. Eternal life has to do first of all with the fact of quality. It is the life of the Eternal, imparted by the Eternal Himself to those who will receive it.

Nor is eternal life, when it is bestowed, the unconditional possession of its recipient. It is a present possession perpetually sustained always and only on the basis of obedient faith. It centers, not in ordinances, doctrines, churches and creeds, but in an ever present, living Person, Christ Himself. Related to Him as our ever present Saviour, we have eternal life.

2. The Believing Soul as related to its Lord.

While the major responsibility of necessity rests with the Shepherd, there is also a very definite part to be recognized by the Sheep. Three words will comprehend it: Receiving-Listening-Following.

(1) They are the willing recipients of the Saviour's life-gift.

This gift of eternal life is by no means something forced upon a soul. It is a gift of Divine grace, to be personally sought and individually received. It is conditioned by a sustained mutual relationship, the terms of which both parties must faithfully observe.

(2) They are the eager listeners to His gracious voice. "My sheep hear my voice," said Jesus. Those familiar with life in Palestine assure us that in Christ's day this was literally true; in fact, say they, the same thing may be observed with regard to the sheep and the shepherd today. The shepherd calls and the sheep hear and come, the familiar voice being recognized when he speaks.

This at once raises a question of spiritual experience: As a professing child of God, is the voice of your Lord familiar to you? If your relationship is assured, it is assumed, of course, that you do converse with Him. Does He ever really say anything to you? Do you listen intently when He speaks? Does His inward speaking mean anything to you in your spiritual life?

His sheep hear His voice by way of attraction; when He calls they love to respond. They also hear His voice by way of direction; where He leads they delight to follow. They hear Him too in blessed communion; when He speaks, it is their highest joy to listen to what He says.

(3) They are His loyal followers, wherever He may lead.

"And they follow Me." While always fraught with blessing and unbounded satisfaction, that following is often found to be exceedingly tedious, tiring and costly. It is sometimes perplexing, but never disappointing. It calls for an absolute abandonment of ourselves to Him and complete separation with Him; for a rigid self denial of all except the pastures into which He leads; is but it brings abiding satisfaction all the way.

3. The unfailing assurance which this sustained relationship cannot fail to bring.

"They," said He-His people who are following Him, receptive and obedient -- "shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand."

How could they perish while consciously united with and constantly obedient to the Christ, their living Lord? What man is strong enough to pull them away from Him? Who, among their fellow mortals, has the strength to annul their faith and reverse their Lord's keeping power? Through the centuries men have tried to do it; they are trying still, but they have failed every time, and fail they always will.

The Sanhedrin at Jerusalem uttered its threats against the apostles, saying: "Speak no more in this name," only to receive the undaunted reply, "We cannot but speak"; and speak they did. Acts 4:17-20. Again and again the councils of a decadent Church have spoken, and by their authority believing followers of Christ have been tried, excommunicated, burned at the stake and in the minds of these authorities have been left to perish, but neither Papal Edicts nor fiery faggots have ever been able to reach a trusting soul and take it out of the Divine protecting hand. Concerning these trusting souls, it is for ever written: "They shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand."

"Hidden in the hollow of His blessed hand,
Never foe can follow, never traitor stand;
Not a surge of worry, not a shade of care,
Not a blast of hurry, touch the Spirit there.
Stayed upon Jehovah, hearts are fully blessed,
Finding, as He promised, perfect peace and rest."

-- Frances Ridley Havergal

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II. THE DANGER IMPLIED

Danger! exclaims someone enthusiastically and no less sincerely; in view of the Saviour's undoubted keeping power, added to which is His positive declaration that no man can pluck His people out of His hand; Where could the danger be?

We hasten to reply that it is at this very point that the danger appears. It is seen, not in what our Lord says, but in the manner in which some have interpreted His words, taking for granted some things which He does not say, and reading into the passage ideas which are not there.

It is to be noted that the emphasis of this great utterance is concerned entirely with outside influences and their power to affect the security of the believing soul.

No mention is made of the powers within the soul itself, the obvious reason being that in this passage the Master is dealing exclusively with the inability of any human power to move that soul from its position in Christ while obediently abiding in Him. "Neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand."

In this, Paul the Apostle rejoices as he cries:

"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or sword?"

He then goes on to answer his own question in the same comprehensive manner:

"Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that 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 us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." Rom. 8:35-39.

Yet, comprehensive as the statement admittedly is, it would not be correct to say that it is all inclusive. Even the wide embracing phrase, "Nor any other creature," has its distinct limitation, for it omits the one thing which, in the last analysis, is master of the situation on the human side, namely, the volition of the person concerned.

We know of no place within the entire covers of the Sacred Book, where, in the matter of personal salvation, whether in its beginnings or in the deeper experiences of grace, God fails to respect the sovereignty of the human will. In order that man may be brought to a saving knowledge of the truth, God works as only an almighty God can work upon his soul, yet when the final moment is faced, the verdict is with the human will.

In order that the soul may be kept within the orbit of the love of God, that self-same Spirit will exercise the same glorious prerogative, yet, when all the efforts on the Divine side have been accomplished, the appeal must still be made through the will.

This business of spiritual security is distinctly a mutual affair. It has seemed to present itself to the writer under the figure of two hands with fingers intertwined, the left hand representing his own life, while the right hand is taken as representing God. There they are, fingers wide open

and stretched out with the hands widely apart. Then, by mutual willingness, both hands are brought together and the fingers intertwined. Over the back of the left-hand come down the fingers of the right, while over the back of the right hand are brought the fingers of the left. Try it yourself as you read. Now, the fingers of each hand being tightly clasped over the other, start to pull. Pull hard. It will be realized that the harder the pull, the tighter becomes the hold—that is so long as the fingers of both hands retain their pressure. If one side relaxes, however, the connection breaks.

God's side will not let go, Man's side need not. Nothing that either earth or hell can do can break the union. What a glorious bond! It is with this thought in mind that we rejoice to sing:

"I've found a Friend! O such a Friend!
So kind, so true and tender!
So wise a Counselor and Guide,
So mighty a Defender!
From Him who loves me now so well
What power my soul can sever?
Shall life, or death, or earth, or hell?
No! I am His for ever!"

All this brings us to the solemnizing thought of our personal responsibility for the continuation of our own spiritual experience. As the Scriptures are carefully studied, it will be seen that while they are rich in their declarations of Divine keeping power, they are also searching in their demands upon the believing soul, calling for watchfulness and faithfulness on the human side. It is for this reason that in our opening page we placed together those stanzas of Wade Robinson's great hymn, Loved with everlasting love, and Charles Wesley's A charge to keep I have, both of which are accompanied by an appropriate Scripture passage. Between them, when rightly interpreted, there is no contradiction; it is just the honest recognition of two distinct phases of truth governing the same experience.

As we conclude our meditation, one comprehensive expression would appear to cover the need in the believer's life if an ever deepening experience is to be maintained. It is all summed up in three short words, namely, A diligent faith.

"Wherefore the rather brethren," says Peter, "give diligence to make your calling and election sure, for if ye do these things ye shall never fall." 2 Pet. 1:10.

It is here that the Wesleys placed the unmistakable emphasis, the hymn which we have already quoted being the embodiment of their teaching and testimony.

In the early period of his ministry John Wesley had emphasized the thought that once a soul had become entirely yielded to God, that soul could never fall away from grace. Years of experience, however, convinced him of the fallacy of this position which he then emphatically renounced. Like Peter, who had written centuries before him, Wesley came to see that while on the Divine side there was no variableness, yet on the part of the believing soul nothing but a diligent faithfulness to Him who died to purchase our redemption could assure the soul of a Home in the skies.

Give diligence, says Peter. A charge to keep I have, says Wesley. With this the entire range of Holy Writ is in complete agreement, teaching that just as faith alone can receive salvation, only a steadfast faithfulness can retain it.

Wherefore the rather brethren, give diligence -- (diligence in praying; diligence in obeying; diligence in seeking after the deep things of God) -- For if ye do these things ye shall never fall: for so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. 2 Peter 1:10, 11.

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THE END