

Eternal Security

1 Corinthians 15:2

The last lesson focused on Paul's unique message, the Gospel of Grace. This gospel can be more than just the good news of salvation in this dispensation of grace, for it often includes the whole body of doctrine revealed to Paul in what he calls the Mystery. This can be seen in Galatians 2:14 where Paul accuses Peter, and other believing Jews, of not walking according to the truth of the gospel. Since Paul is addressing believers, he was correcting them because they were not following the doctrine of grace which Paul was preaching. This doctrine treats Jews and Gentiles as equals. Peter and his group from Jerusalem were treating the Jews as if they were a special, set apart group, which is exactly what Israel was as the Gospel of the Kingdom was being preached. 1 Timothy 1:10–11 likewise shows that the term *gospel* can have a broad definition by referring to it as sound doctrine. It can also be inferred from the book of Romans, and other Pauline books, when Paul addresses the believers at Rome saying that he is ready to preach the gospel to them. Obviously, he did not need to tell them how to be saved, but he did need to train them in the doctrine of grace.

I believe that 1 Corinthians 15:1 is reminding the Corinthians about the message of salvation which Paul gave to them, in accordance to the revelation of the Mystery. This was the gospel which they ultimately received, believed, and were standing upon. Though they were a carnal group, Paul always treated them as believers since they were secure in their salvation. Because of their carnality, Paul uses chapter 15 to refresh their memories about what they originally believed to be saved, and details their sure hope of eternity with Christ. With that background, it should be easier to understand the verses which follow.

Believing in vain

After stating that the Corinthians were standing on the gospel, as taught by Paul, he seems to put a contingency upon their salvation. Many read verse 2 to say that they were saved, and would remain saved, only if they didn't turn away from the truth of the gospel by which they were saved. This verse is often used in conjunction with verses given to the nation of Israel under the preaching of the Kingdom to "prove" that we need to do works to keep our salvation.

This is a gross misunderstanding of this verse, and the idea that it disproves eternal security is sustainable only by "cherry picking" select verses. Paul makes it abundantly clear that there is nothing we need to do beyond believing in the Person and work of Jesus Christ for our salvation. Verses which are more obscure (like 1 Corinthians 15:2) need to be interpreted in light of verses which are more obvious and clear and written directly to us. Doing this will help greatly in understanding our security in Christ (such as Ephesians 1:13; 2:6, 8–9). If we are required to do anything to retain our salvation, then it would be effected through works, not faith (Romans 3:27–30; 4:3–5; Galatians 2:16; 2 Timothy 1:9). The whole book of 1 Corinthians really proves that salvation is not gained through works. They were the most carnal of all the churches, yet they are called saints (1 Corinthians 3:1–3; 1:2). As 2 Timothy 2:12 states, "If we believe not, yet He remains faithful" (see also 1 Corinthians 1:7–9). Those who understand that there is nothing good in any person should also understand that our justification (salvation) is a gift given to us by God regardless of any good or bad works (Romans 7:18; Jeremiah 17:9; Isaiah 64:6; Titus 3:4–7; Matthew 15:19; Galatians 5:19–21). We are never required to do works to gain or even to prove our salvation. We do works because of our salvation. (1 Corinthians 3:13–14; 15:58; Ephesians 2:10; Colossians 1:10; 3:23; 1 Timothy 3:1; 2 Timothy 2:15).

People often become confused over the interpretation of verse two because they fail to understand what it means to believe in vain. Looking at other passages which use this term will help to define this word. Romans 1:21—They became vain in their imaginations by believing a lie. 1 Corinthians 3:20—The

thoughts of the wise are vain because there was no truth in them. 1 Corinthians 15:14, 17—Paul’s preaching would be in vain and the Corinthians faith would be in vain if the Lord had not risen from the dead. Paul’s teaching would have been false and the people would be believing false doctrine. Ephesians 5:6—Being deceived with vain (false) words.

These examples help to show how the word vain can be used to indicate an acceptance or belief of a false idea or doctrine. Plugging this idea back into 1 Corinthians 15:2 shows that they were saved by holding fast (believing) the doctrine given to them by Paul, but this would not be the case if they had believed in a false doctrine or a lie. The idea that a person is saved as long as they hold onto their belief is not the proper interpretation of this verse. Again, Paul clearly teaches eternal security, so this somewhat obscure verse (1 Corinthians 15:2) must be interpreted in light of Paul’s clear teaching.

The gospel Paul preached to the Corinthians

Verse 2 shows that the Corinthians were saved if they accepted (held fast to) his teaching of the gospel. Verses 3–4 show exactly what he had preached to them concerning salvation. It is this doctrine that they needed to hold fast to as truth. It would be vain for the Corinthians, or any other person in this dispensation of grace, to believe any other doctrine for salvation.

Salvation in this dispensation requires us to believe in the Person of Jesus Christ and in His work on the cross. This is in contrast to Israel, who had to believe in Jesus as their Messiah under the preaching of the gospel of the Kingdom. It was also required that they do the works of the Law as evidence of their faith because faith without works was dead (James 2:14–26; John 14:21). Paul never taught that we needed to prove our faith by our works, in fact, he taught just the opposite (Romans 3:28). Many who do not understand that Paul was given a special doctrine, or gospel (the Mystery) find it abhorrent that mid-Act adherents teach there is more than one gospel in Scripture. However, Paul teaches that he was given this special revelation, which was hidden in past ages, directly from Jesus Christ (Romans 16:25). He calls himself the apostle to the Gentiles, to distance himself from Peter’s ministry to Israel with the preaching of the gospel of the Kingdom (Romans 11:13). These Kingdom saints, the Little Flock who were saved under Peter’s ministry, were meeting at the Jerusalem church (Acts 8:1). Paul had no jurisdiction over them because he was appointed as the apostle to the Gentiles and ministered to those who were saved into the Body of Christ. This is why Paul never interfered with the Jerusalem church, but reprimanded Peter and others from the Jerusalem church when they separated themselves from the Gentiles while in Antioch (Galatians 2:11–21). This separation was in accordance with Paul’s and Peter’s agreement after the council at Jerusalem when Paul presented the doctrine he was preaching and they accepted that his preaching was given to him by Jesus Christ (Galatians 2:1–8).

It is important to understand that salvation in every age is dependent upon faith in God. Those who believe what God says will receive eternal life. Going back to Abraham, he believed and God counted his faith for righteousness. Abraham had faith in God and demonstrated his faith by being willing to sacrifice his son. Abraham was a pattern for both the nation of Israel and for the Body of Christ. In both cases, salvation comes by faith (Romans 4:11–13). However, Israel was to demonstrate their faith by doing the works that God set forth including being baptized and following the Law. We are also responsible to follow what God demands, which is to add nothing to prove our faith. Doing nothing seems to be a harder task for people to understand than adding some sort of work to salvation. Salvation by faith alone just does not “feel” right for most people. We are saved by grace through faith without any works. By faith, Israel would do the works of the Law, and by faith, we do nothing (Romans 4:5).

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