

Security: Following Jesus

2 Peter 2:1-22

October 14, 2018

Last week, Pastor Eric began digging into 2 Peter 2, and he did a great job of warning us about the vital importance of spotting counterfeit teaching, lest we follow a counterfeit gospel. If you missed it last week, you'll want to visit our website and download the written transcript or listen to the audio recording.¹ This morning, I'd like us to take another look at 2 Peter 2, but with a focus on a different theme: the theme of security, specifically, Spiritual Security.² **Before reading this transcript any further, stop and take time to read 2 Peter 2:1-22....** Peter gives 2 key reasons why Christ-followers can enjoy the peace and confidence of spiritual security. The 1st reason Christ-followers have spiritual security is because...

1. God has perfect discernment. Sometimes it may seem to us like God is not very discerning. It may look to us like the bad guys are getting away with all the bad stuff they are doing. In fact, it may have seemed like that to Peter's original audience. The bad behavior of these false teachers is described in 2 Peter 2:13-14, "Their idea of pleasure is to carouse in broad daylight...reveling in their pleasures...With eyes full of adultery, they never stop sinning; they seduce the unstable; they are experts in greed—an accursed brood!" We can't help but wonder if the behavior of these false teachers made Peter's audience feel a little insecure: "If these guys are so bad, then why isn't God doing something about it? If God is so discerning, then why doesn't He put an end to all this sinful behavior? He's just letting them get away with it! Peter addresses this in 2 Peter 2:3, "...Their condemnation has long been hanging over them, and their destruction has NOT been sleeping." In fact, Peter goes on from there and in vv. 4-8 he gives **3 examples of God's perfect discernment:**

1) Verse 4 tells us about the sinful angels that God did not spare.

Even though they were angels! They were sent to hell and put in chains of darkness to be held for judgment.

2) Verse 5 tells us about how God brought a flood on the ungodly people in the ancient world. It then goes on to explain how God, in His perfect discernment, made sure to protect righteous Noah and 7 others.

3) Verses 6-8 tell us about God's discerning judgment on Sodom/Gomorrah. Verse 6 says God made them "an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly." It then clarifies for us that God rescued Lot. Why? Because he was a righteous man!

In each of these historical examples, God punishes the ungodly and He rescues the godly. He never makes a mistake. He never lets the ungodly get away with their ungodliness. Nor does He ever accidentally punish the wrong person or forget to rescue the godly from the evil that surrounds them. These examples give us great spiritual security because they demonstrate God's perfect discernment. 2 Peter 2:9 goes on to summarize, "if this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials and to hold the unrighteous for punishment on the day of judgment." You see, for the time being, it may seem that these false teachers are getting away with their heresy, greed, and fabricated stories, but it is only for a little while. God is not fooled nor is He failing to discern this evil.³

I read an interesting article recently by an author named, Michael S. Heiser, called "*Heavenly Bookkeeping*."⁴ The article talks about how throughout Scripture God makes mention of various books, that He keeps records in. The most familiar example of this is probably Revelation 20:15, "And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book

¹ Visit www.efcbemidji.org/media and click on the date you are looking for.

² Feelings of insecurity often drive us into our worst decisions, our worst attitudes, and our worst actions toward ourselves and others. Most things in life are made much worse by feelings of insecurity. Whether it be insecurity in our marriage or dating relationships, insecurity in our finances, insecurity in our politics, or insecurity in our faith, insecurity can rob us as Christ-followers of the peace and joy that God intends for us. Security is important in just about every area of life. However, spiritual insecurity can also drive us to our knees and get us back on track, taking our faith more seriously, as we should.

³ Read Proverbs 17:15. If we think that we hate injustice, God hates it all the more. Our dislike of injustice actually stems from the conscience God gave us and our recognition that there is right and wrong in this world. Further, "God's wrath is not a capricious and irrational rage... but the pure and consistent response of a righteous and just God when confronting all that is evil in his creation." *Evangelical Convictions*, Free Church Publications, Minneapolis, MN, 2011, p. 117. See also Nahum 1:3.

⁴ *Bible Study Magazine* by Faithlife, September/October 2018, Vol 10, #6, pp. 8-9.

was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books.” Verses like this beg the question, “If God is omniscient (all-knowing), why does he keep written records?” That’s a good question. And, here’s the answer: “The Bible isn’t expressing some deficiency in God’s memory or denying his omniscience. The idea of record-keeping is a useful metaphor for our benefit. It is a way of communicating [to us] that God does indeed know all things, good and evil. Nothing escapes his attention, and his perfect attention is the basis for his [perfect] justice.”⁵ Therefore, one of the key reasons Christ-followers have spiritual security is because **God has perfect discernment.**

Before I share a 2nd reason why Christ-followers can have security, I want to invite you to go down a rabbit trail with me.⁶ Please turn your Bible back to 2 Peter 1:10. (We’ll come back to chapter 2 in a little while.) 2 Peter 1:10 says, “Therefore, my brothers and sisters, make every effort to confirm your calling and election. For if you do these things, you will never stumble.” When I first read this phrase, “you will never stumble,” I figured that “stumble” was referring to “sin.” If I do these things, pursue the godly qualities listed back in vv. 5-7, then I won’t stumble into sin. That seemed pretty straightforward.⁷ That is until someone pointed out the word “never.” 2 Peter 1:10 says, “...For if you do these things, you will NEVER stumble.” Really? NEVER? Is Peter really saying that by practicing godly virtues, it’s a sure recipe for a Christ-follower to NEVER sin? So, I dug into the word “never” wondering if perhaps there was some nuance that I was missing. And in the original Greek, it’s actually even stronger. This particular grammatical construction is reinforced. It’s as if Peter is saying “Never, EVER.”⁸ Now, it could be that Peter is just exaggerating here a little bit to get his point across, but it seems unlikely that Peter would teach that somehow Christians can live so righteously that they will NEVER, EVER sin. So, if Peter isn’t talking about “stumbling into sin,” what is he talking about?

When Peter says “stumble” in v. 10, he may actually be referring to abandoning one’s faith or to falling away from God. This is what we call “apostasy.” And, “Abandoning one’s faith” would make sense in the context of 2 Peter 1:10-11, “Therefore, my brothers and sisters, make every effort to confirm your calling and election. For if you do these things, you will never stumble (i.e. never abandon your faith), AND you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” Peter puts together the ideas of confirming one’s election and of “never stumbling,” right next to the promise of receiving a rich welcome into heaven. One Bible commentator, Peter H. Davids, writes, “That is, it means, ‘Stumble (and fall away) on the path to God’s kingdom and thus fail to arrive.’”⁹

And so, this rabbit trail leads us down the rabbit hole of the debate over Eternal Security. Eternal Security is the belief that once a person is genuinely saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, he/she can never lose their salvation. They are locked in and completely secure spiritually. It is also referred to by some as the “perseverance of the saints,” which can also be coined as “once saved, always saved.” However, there are others who believe that Scripture teaches that a Christian can indeed wander away from his/her genuine salvation. They believe that Christ-followers can be “once saved, then later not saved.” In other words, they believe that Christians can lose their salvation. Before we go any further, let me say 2 things:

1. The issue of Eternal Security is not considered a major issue of orthodoxy in the EFCA. There are pastors in Efree churches that hold to both sides of this issue. And, there are people who attend our church that feel conviction on both ends of this spectrum. 2. Our church, Efree Bemidji, does not have a particular stance on this issue. We are open to robust dialogue and debate regarding Eternal

⁵ *Bible Study Magazine* by Faithlife, September/October 2018, Vol 10, #6, pp. 8-9. See also Colossians 2:13-14.

⁶ Back in September, when I was preparing my first message from 2 Peter, I came across this curious little phrase in 2 Peter 1:10, “you will never stumble.” At first, this sounded simple enough. But, as I probed into some of my Bible commentaries, it piqued my interest to learn that there was actually more to this little phrase than I first imagined. I found myself on a rabbit trail; a rabbit trail that led me down a rabbit hole. Believe it or not, I found myself immersed in several hours of study, just over this one little phrase.

⁷ In other words, I’ll keep myself so busy focused on the things of God’s Kingdom, that I won’t get distracted or pulled down by the lesser things of this world.

⁸ In verse 10, the *NIV* translates the word “never” from a “marker of reinforced negation, in combination with οὐ, μή has the effect of strengthening the negation.” Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000). *A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature* (3rd ed., p. 646). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

⁹ It goes on to say, “This is the meaning of the same root in Jude 24 (‘keep you from falling’), and it makes more sense in this context. Virtue will keep one from the disaster of stumbling and never arriving at the eschatological home.” Bigg, *St. Peter and St. John*, 261; Kelly, *The Epistles of Peter and Jude*, 309; Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, 191; Vögtle, *Der Judasbrief, der zweite Petrusbrief*, 154; Davids, P. H. (2006). *The letters of 2 Peter and Jude*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., p. 189.

Security but we choose not to divide over this issue. That's our stance on many secondary issues. We major on the majors and minor on the minors. And, even though some would say that Eternal Security is not a minor issue to them, our church chooses not to make it a major issue.¹⁰

Getting back to 2 Peter, the evidence in this text seems to best support that the word "stumble" in verse 10, means "stumbling so as to abandon one's faith and to fall away from God."¹¹ However, I would add that those who are falling away, are not falling away from a genuine faith but from a false faith.¹² The context seems to support that a genuine faith reveals itself in godly living, which then serves to confirm one's calling and election. In other words, our godly behavior is evidence, that our faith is indeed a genuine, lasting faith, and not a pretending or empty faith that stumbles and falls away.¹³ This genuine faith leads right into our 2nd reason for spiritual security:

2. God transforms our being, which then transforms our behavior. These false teachers never actually had genuine faith, which is why they never became new creations in Christ, and why they didn't continue to live godly lives. There were similar to the false teachers that we learned about a while back in 1 John 2:19, "They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us." In other words, the reason these false teachers went astray, is that they never truly belonged to Christ. The false teachers about whom Peter writes lacked a genuine faith, therefore they never experienced the truth of 2 Corinthians 5:17, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!"¹⁴ When we follow Jesus and genuinely place our trust in Him, God's Word says that we become a new creation. As we now get back to our study of 2 Peter 2, it will show us that their basic nature was never transformed; let me show you what I mean.

2 Peter 2:15 points out the origin of their demise, "They have left the straight way and wandered off to follow the way of Balaam son of Bezer, who loved the wages of wickedness."¹⁵ You see, these false teachers used to be headed the right way. They used to be on a course where they were beginning to draw near to God, but then... they wandered off. One way or another they were distracted, deceived, or tempted away from fully devoting themselves to Christ and to the purity of His Truth.¹⁶ 2 Peter 2:20-21 says, "If they have escaped the corruption of the world by knowing our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and are again entangled in it and are overcome, they are worse off at the end than they were at the beginning. It would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than to have known it and then to turn their backs on the sacred command that was passed on to them."¹⁷ So, does Peter mean by these verses that these false teachers genuinely knew Jesus, in terms of actually beginning a personal relationship with Him? Or, were they merely beginning to learn the way of righteous and their need for a Savior, when they then decided to turn away from their opportunity to commit their lives to Christ? Once again, it's hard to say for sure, but I would argue, 2 Peter that these false teachers were never genuinely saved. And here's why: the following context. Look how Peter wraps up his teaching in this chapter. Consider the particular proverb, the particular word picture that Peter chooses to describe the false teachers in 2 Peter 2:22, "Of them the

¹⁰ Personally, I do lean a certain way in my own conviction on this issue. I don't often publicly declare my stance on this because I've seen how quickly it can become divisive or unsettling to some. In fact, even recently, I've had people who were considering whether or not to visit our church, based on whether or not our church believed in Eternal Security. At this point, I'm going to tell you where I personally land on this issue. But, before I tip my hand, let me assure you that I remain open to healthy dialogue and I humbly admit that I could be wrong. Personally, I believe in Eternal Security. I believe that once a person is genuinely saved, they cannot lose their salvation. I don't have time to lay out all my reasons for this conviction. However, I did feel like today, given the text and topic we are looking at, I should let you know where I stand.

¹¹ I would suggest rather that Peter is saying "if you do these things, (in verses 5-7)" they present the evidence for a genuine, lasting faith. See 1 Peter 1:6-7.

¹² In other words, 2 Peter 1:10 serves as a helpful reminder to those whose calling and election is sure and as a stern wakeup call to those whose calling and election is NOT sure. That said, I must admit, that my own position is hard-pressed when I consider Peter's own closing summary in 2 Peter 3:17, "Therefore, dear friends, since you have been forewarned, **be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of the lawless and fall from your secure position.**" While on the one hand, Peter describes their position as "secure," on the other hand, he warns them not to be carried away by error and fall. This, once again, could be understood to argue against the teaching of Eternal Security. But, see Thomas R. Schreiner's helpful discussion on 2 Peter 3:17 on pp. 399-400, *The New American Commentary: 1, 2 Peter, Jude, Vol. 37*, B&H, Nashville, TN, 2003.

¹³ Put another way, Peter could arguably be referring here to Christ-followers who were once genuinely saved but then go on to lose their salvation, but I am arguing that the text more likely means that they never really were genuine believers in the first place. Also consider James 2:14.

¹⁴ When salvation is described this way, it causes me to lean toward believing in Eternal Security. Once a person has placed genuine faith in Jesus Christ, they become a new creation. This seems like a supernatural act of God that cannot be reversed or undone. Here's a point that makes much of the Eternal Security debate moot: "Only [God] can perceive with absolute certainty whether the faith that is professed is truly believed." *Evangelical Convictions*, Free Church Publications, Minneapolis, MN, 2011, p. 158. (Consider 2 Tim. 2:19 and Mt. 13:24-30)

¹⁵ Balaam = "BAY luhm" and Bezer = "BEE Zuhr."

¹⁶ See Matthew 13:1-30.

¹⁷ Now, it will be even harder for them to return to Christ. They've hardened their hearts against God and they are now even more accountable for their sins because they know the way of righteousness and what a loving and just God expects from them. The *NIV Zondervan Study Bible* adds that they are now more accountable for their sin (see Luke 12:47-48) and less likely to consider God's truth a second time. Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 2555.

proverbs are true: “A dog returns to its vomit,” and, “A sow that is washed returns to her wallowing in the mud.”¹⁸ (I thought it best not to go with the picture of the dog.) You see, it’s not enough to just clean up the pig, because it’s still a pig. At the first opportunity, it will go back to doing what is in its nature: playing in the mud.¹⁹ Following Jesus is about far more than just taking a bath or walking toward God for a little while.²⁰ Just cleaning up the outside for a little while or coming to church on Sunday mornings, really misses the point entirely. We need God to 1st transform our very being, our very nature, so that He can then, transform our behavior.²¹ When genuine faith opens the door for God’s supernatural transformation of our being, rather than running back to our wallowing in the mud, we now desire to be godly.²² As we grow in spiritual maturity, the new creation shows through more and more clearly.²³



I’d like to close with this: God is in the business of transformation. A genuine faith in Christ should change you. If your faith in Christ has NOT changed you and if it is NOT consistently changing you, then you may NOT have a genuine faith.²⁴ You might be sitting there reading this transcript thinking to yourself, “Pastor Jerry, I thought this sermon was supposed to be about security. But what you’re saying is making me feel LESS security. Well... maybe that’s a good thing. I don’t want anyone in our church to hang on to a false security. If you are thinking that you can be spiritually secure, while you are out wallowing in the mud, then think again. That’s Peter’s warning. Perhaps, today, it’s better for some of us feel a little insecure. We need to pay attention to Peter’s warning!

A 19th century Anglican bishop named J. C. Ryle once said: “The Lord Jesus has undertaken everything that His people’s souls require; not only to deliver them from the guilt of their sins..., but [also] from the dominion of their sin, by placing in their hearts the Holy Spirit; not only to justify them, but also to sanctify them.”²⁵ One of the great things about spiritual growth as a Christ-follower is the feeling of security it brings. Our sense of spiritual security grows stronger and stronger, as we come to know Jesus better and better. Peter’s purpose in writing this letter is not to once and for all solve the debate over Eternal Security between the Arminians and the Calvinists, rather his purpose in writing this letter, is to urge each Christ-follower to be vigilant in his/her faith!²⁶ As a pastor, my concern today is that you know and experience the security of a close walk with Jesus. That you are standing on a firm foundation of faith, that brings you a confident feeling of spiritual security! As Christ-followers, we’ve been transformed by a genuine faith that is progressively transforming us into greater Christlikeness. That process of sanctification gives clear evidence that God is indeed at work within us. We find spiritual security in knowing that we are in Christ, because that new creation is working itself out in our actions and our attitudes.

So today, if your faith continues to endure, if you are persevering in godly behavior and becoming more and more Christlike, then give praise to God! Praise Him for transforming your very being and for the security you have in living out a transformed life!

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¹⁸ My mind quickly flashed to our Beltrami County Fair. Perhaps you’ve been there to see all the farm animals. One of my favorites is the pigs. (I’ve actually wanted a pet pig for quite a while now.) I think I also heard of a “Paint a Pig” event; that sounded kind of fun! It makes me think of the phrase “lipstick on a pig.” As the *NIV Study Bible* puts it, “The change was merely cosmetic.” Zondervan, Grands Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 2118.

¹⁹ That’s what happened with these false teachers. Peter explained this earlier in 2 Peter 2:10 where they “follow the corrupt desire of the flesh.”

²⁰ Eugene H. Peterson says that the Christian Faith is “A long obedience in the same direction.” Amen.

²¹ 2 Peter 1:4 mentions that Christ-followers “participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.” Consider 2 Peter 2:12 which says, “But these people blaspheme in matters they do not understand. They are like unreasoning animals, creatures of instinct, born only to be caught and destroyed, and like animals they too will perish.” Then, 2 Peter 2:13-15 goes on to explain, “...Their idea of pleasure is to carouse in broad daylight. They are blots and blemishes, reveling in their pleasures while they feast with you. With eyes full of adultery, they never stop sinning; they seduce the unstable; they are experts in greed—an accursed brood! **They have left the straight way...**”

²² In the words of 2 Peter 1:5-7, we “make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love.”

²³ Genuine faith is not BASED ON our behavior but it will TRANSFORM our behavior over time. Consider 1 John 1:5-2:2. Certainly, none of us behave perfectly or without a few mistakes along the way.

²⁴ “Such a godly life is not the earning of salvation but evidence that salvation truly belongs to the readers.” Schreiner, Thomas R., *The New American Commentary: 1, 2 Peter, Jude*, Vol. 37, B&H, Nashville, TN, 2003, p. 308.

²⁵ *Evangelical Convictions*, Free Church Publications, Minneapolis, MN, 2011, p. 189.

²⁶ Schreiner, Thomas R., *The New American Commentary: 1, 2 Peter, Jude*, Vol. 37, B&H, Nashville, TN, 2003, p. 400. He also says, “Those who are on their guard will not fall from their secure position, while those who are careless are apt to slip away because they ignored warning signals.”