

LifeWay Explore the Bible Series for July 1: The decision dare

June 22, 2012

What a great lesson before us this week. This passage from Joshua is a challenging word about what is expected of those who live in covenant with the Lord. As I have reflected upon it, I've been challenged to think about how well we practice this truth in our churches today.

Many of you probably grew up, much like I did, celebrating the our Baptist belief in the eternal security of the believer. Once someone truly is saved, they will always be saved. No one loses salvation. Those who appear to have received Christ and later renounce their faith never were truly saved, we believe.

This is a precious truth. I love it. It brings comfort. Just as "the Lord had given rest to Israel" (23:1), so believers today can rest in the assurance that God, "who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion in the day of Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:6). Salvation is of the Lord, beginning to end.

Yet this passage (and several others like it) gives us a warning not to pervert the beautiful doctrine of assurance. I'm afraid I have to admit that I can look back in my own life and see how I've done just that.

Once while I was in college, I shared the gospel with a friend of mine. I'd build a relationship with her over several months and had constantly thrown out gospel seeds, waiting for the day when she might be open to more. That day came, and I shared the good news that Jesus died for sins

and rose again to new life. I said all who confess Jesus is Lord and believe God raised him from the dead would be saved. She said she believed that, and I led her in prayer. She had tears in her eyes and then hugged me.

Then I said to her something like this: "This means that you are saved. Forever. Nothing and no one can snatch you from his hand. You've been forgiven by Jesus, and you are going to go to heaven when you die."

I still keep up with my friend. She never got involved in a church, never reads her Bible, claims to pray "sometimes." She is in a sinful relationship and not in the least bit grieved over her sin. She shows no concern for sharing Christ with others and believes things we'd all had a problem with, like Jesus is not the only way to heaven.

When I confronted her about her lack of fruit, she said, "But I believe." I hope she does. I pray she confessed Christ genuinely and has saving faith in him. I certainly don't claim to know her heart. But passages like the one we we're studying to day (Joshua 24:14-25) and many others cause me to wonder if I said the right thing to her. Joshua did tell the Israelites, "Okay, you're God's people, and you're going to be okay no matter what."

In fact, Joshua called on them to live out their covenant relationship with God by giving total allegiance to the Lord and ridding themselves of everything else competing for their devotion (v. 14). He warned them that if they did not remain faithful to the Lord, they would not receive the blessings of the covenant (v. 20).

At first, we might say, "Well, that's the Old Covenant. Now that we are in New Testament times, things are different." But I'm not so sure that is true. Consider the following passages.

When the Gentiles in Antioch believed the gospel, Barnabas did not tell them now they were saved no matter what. "When he (Barnabas) came and

saw the grace of God, he was glad, and he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose” (Acts 11:23).

When the Apostle Paul and Barnabas saw many respond to their evangelism, they “spoke with them, urged them to continue in the grace of God” (Acts 13:43). Then at the end of their first missionary journey, Paul and Barnabas strengthened the new believers by “encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22).

The pattern we see in Acts is after someone receives the gospel, the apostles called on them to remain steadfast, to persevere, to hold fast, to continue in the faith. Let us be careful to note they were not told they needed to perform works to remain saved. They were to continue in the faith and in the grace of God.

This seems to fit very well with the well-known verses from Ephesians 2:8-10: “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”

Just as Joshua called on God’s people to hold fast to their covenant commitments to the Lord, so Christians are to hold fast to their own covenant commitments. In baptism, we profess our union with Christ in his death, burial and resurrection. In the Lord’s Supper, we proclaim the Lord’s death as our source of spiritual life until he comes again. Our covenant commitments of repentance and faith are to mark our entire lives, not just an initial moment of salvation.

Peter puts this truth very succinctly. After writing about the sufferings of Jesus for sinners, calling on sinners to humble themselves and resist the devil, Peter writes, “This is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it” (1 Peter

5:12).

The gospel is our treasure. We who trust its message are forgiven, made new and sealed by God's Spirit. We're adopted into his family, made to be a kingdom of priests and placed in Christ by faith. We're seated with him in the heavenly places, and nothing can ever separate us from his love.

And on top of that, we are called from the same Bible with gospel authority to stand firm in this grace, to continue in this faith. Let us remember this truth for ourselves and for those with whom we share the good news of Jesus.