

## Panel #1: Assurance, Eternal Security, and Justification

If 20 centuries of church history have taught us anything, it's that doctrinal controversies take time. In the early church, God resolved the "Gentile question" in an instant, but it took a couple of decades for the whole church to catch up. It took the better part of 300 years to get a definitive resolution on the Trinity at Nicea, and another century to get a conciliar decision on the hypostatic union—and then they kept fighting about it for another couple centuries after Chalcedon. The issues we'll discuss today have flared up in the last five years or so, and the positions are still developing. If you doubt this, ask yourself: who in this debate is still saying exactly the same things they said, say, two years ago? Nobody that I know of; everyone's position has developed a bit. People on all sides have rushed to judgment prematurely, and it has created a lot of misunderstanding. I'm grateful to the FGA for hosting this discussion in an effort to clear it up, and I'm honored to have been asked to help. Let me quickly give you a broad-strokes idea of where I'm coming from, and dispel some common misunderstandings.

I believe John is an evangelistic book. I believe John is unique in this regard. Luke/Acts states right up front that it's addressing a reader who has already been catechized; Matthew and Mark hold to the same basic structure as Luke, and all three begin their accounts of Jesus' ministry by emphasizing His call of believers to discipleship, and continue in that vein: they're books of discipleship for believers. I trust in this company I need not defend the idea that the church epistles are also written to believers.

I think we all know that a bunch of believers sitting around talking to each other about the Lord is not the same thing as actually evangelizing. And what we have in 26 books of the New Testament is exactly that—believers (inspired by the Holy Spirit) talking to believers about the Lord. It's great stuff, but when we want to see how God evangelizes, we need to go to the book where He's actually *doing* that. It's a matter of respecting God's promises about His Word: "My word shall not return to me void...but it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it." John is sent for evangelizing unbelievers; Matthew or Romans is not; it's that simple.

It's also a matter of authority: sure, you can probably cobble together a sufficient message from various different places, but at some point you have to stop and say "This is enough." But how do you *know*? With John, I don't have that problem, because God *tells* me that John contains a sufficient message.

What is that message? John tells his unbelieving reader his purpose: "that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, in order that by believing, you might have life in His name." We have 3 terms to define here: "Jesus" is the man bearing that name in the preceding 20 chapters. The other two terms—"Christ" and "Son of God"—also thwart attempts at a fast-food definition. As with "Jesus," the context nowhere supplies a one-liner to define them. Both terms are bound up with the major themes of the book.

To mention just a few: The cross and resurrection are huge. Taking away sins gets a mention or two. Jesus' deity is a major theme. His promise of life is a major theme. John's very excited about the promise of everlasting life. When I begin to present John's

sufficient message, I'm going to present all of this, and as much of the rest of the book as I have time for, too. Like John, I don't just want them to believe some bare minimum that fits in a fortune cookie; I want them to believe the whole book.

That brings us to a couple of misconceptions I'd like to answer. Lately I've heard people argue that "everlasting life" does not refer to life that lasts forever. Now *aiwnioj*, the Greek word we translate "everlasting," might not mean "forever" in all places. But in this context, it's regularly paralleled by phrases like "will not perish" "is not condemned" "will not come into judgment" "never hunger" "never thirst" "never perish" "never die" – you get the idea. So maybe *aiwnioj* means something else in other places, but it's pretty clear that in John, "everlasting life" means life that lasts forever.

Now I've also heard people say that eternal security is just too complicated to be part of the simple gospel message. I can tell you from personal experience that's not true, but let me show you how simple it can be with a lighthearted children's catechism. I meant to get a puppet, but I ran out of time.... Please understand, this is *not* a whole gospel presentation; it's just a catechism on eternal security.

**Tim: What happens when you believe in Jesus?**

Hand-Puppet: God makes me His child forever.

**T: So if God makes you His child on Monday, are you His child all day?**

H-P: Yes.

**T: What about on Tuesday? Are you still His child then?**

H-P: Yes.

**T: When you're old and bald and wrinkly like Grandpa, are you still His child?**

H-P: Yes.

**T: And if you're God's child, then what happens when you die?**

H-P: I go to live with Jesus forever.

**T: Suppose you go to live with Jesus on Monday. Do you live with him all day?**

H-P: Yes.

**T: What about on Tuesday?**

H-P: Yes.

**T: What about in a million billion zillion years?**

H-P: Yes.

**T: What if you're bad? How do you know God will let you live with Jesus then?**

H-P: 'Cause He promised.

**T: What if you're really, really, really bad?**

H-P: He STILL promised.

**T: And does God always keep His promises?**

H-P: Yes.

...and that, my friends, is eternal security that even a child can understand.