

Kept Through Faith: Eternal Security in 1 Peter 1:5

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Eternal security is an important doctrine for those of us who have placed our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation. We take great comfort in the fact that, if we have experienced true conversion, God will keep us safe and will not allow us ultimately to fall away from Himself. Some important New Testament passages that teach eternal security are John 10:27–30, Romans 8:28–30, Ephesians 1:13–14, 1 Peter 1:5, and 1 John 3:9. In this article I would like us to look at 1 Peter 1:5 and see what it teaches us about eternal security.

Peter opens his first letter with a burst of praise to God for His work of salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ. God in His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope. There is reserved in heaven for us an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading (1 Pet 1:3–4). Praise God for the gift of salvation granted to undeserving sinners!

While our full and final salvation has already been prepared (ἐτοίμην) for us by God, it will not be revealed (ἀποκαλυφθῆναι) until “the last time” (ἐν καιρῷ ἔσχάτῳ, v. 5). How, then, do we get from point A to point B? How do we make it from past experience of new birth to future possession of full inheritance? Is it all up to God? Does it all depend on us? Or is it a cooperative effort between God and us? Peter answers this question at the beginning of v. 5, declaring that it is “by the power of God [that we are] being kept through faith unto salvation.”¹

Four things are noteworthy here. First, we see that it is by *God’s* power that we are kept safe. Peter places the phrase *by the power of God* (ἐν δυνάμει θεοῦ) in the first position of the clause in order to emphasize this fact. *God* is the one who does the keeping, and that by *His* great power. Second, we are *being kept* (φρουρουμένους). This is a present passive participle from the verb φρουρέω, which means “to guard, keep watch over.” In other words, the keeping is God’s *constant, continuous* work. He keeps keeping us. Third, we note that God keeps us *through our faith* (διὰ πίστεως). It is important for us to remember that faith is “the means God uses to guard his people.”² Fourth, we see that we are being kept by God *unto salvation*. God’s powerful work of keeping us will not stop short of full and final salvation. Wayne Grudem draws the following conclusion:

¹ This is my translation of ἐν δυνάμει θεοῦ φρουρουμένους διὰ πίστεως εἰς σωτηρίαν.

² Wayne Grudem paraphrases v. 5 this way: “God is continually using his power to guard his people by means of their faith.” This, according to Grudem, “seems to imply that God’s power in fact energizes and continually sustains individual, personal faith” (*Systematic Theology* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994], 792).

This last phrase makes it difficult if not impossible to see any end to God's guarding activity. If God's guarding has as its purpose the preservation of believers until they receive their full, heavenly salvation, then it is safe to conclude that God will accomplish that purpose and they will in fact attain that final salvation. Ultimately their attainment of final salvation depends on God's power.³

How do Arminian theologians who reject the doctrine of eternal security explain 1 Peter 1:5? The response of Robert Shank centers around the words "through faith," which he claims "do not seem to register in the minds of many."⁴ They are crucial for Shank who thinks they present faith as "the essential condition governing the keeping grace of God."⁵ In other words, God will keep keeping us as long as we keep believing in Him. If we stop believing (and we certainly can according to the Arminian), God will stop keeping.

In response to Shank, it is highly unlikely that διὰ plus the genitive case (διὰ πίστεως) indicates cause or result here.⁶ This is instead the very common construction for means.⁷ Rather than being the *condition* under which God *may* or *may not* keep us, faith is the *means* by which God *does* and *will* keep us.

Grant Osborne, another Arminian scholar, also flags the words "through faith," concluding that Peter is calling upon his readers "to persevere in their faith-belief."⁸ But there is no such call here, only a stated *fact*: God by His power **is** continually keeping us unto salvation *by means of* our faith. This is not to discount our faith, or make it optional. What Peter is telling us in this great verse is that while our faith is *essential* and *ours*, it is *anchored* in the person and power of *God*. It is through our faith that we are saved (Eph 2:8); however, "Ultimately [our] attainment of final salvation depends on God's power."⁹ That is security!

³ Ibid.

⁴ Robert Shank, *Life in the Son* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1989), 272.

⁵ Ibid.; cf. 279.

⁶ J. N. D. Kelly translates διὰ πίστεως "as a result of their faith," but offers no support (*A Commentary on the Epistles of Peter and Jude* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981], 52). Walter Bauer submits three passages where διὰ plus genitive "seems" to be causal: Rom 8:3; 2 Cor 9:13; and 1 John 2:12 (*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979], 180). But Grudem notes that all three cases are ambiguous (*Systematic Theology*, 792, n. 9).

⁷ H. E. Dana and Julius R. Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (New York: Macmillan, 1955), 101.

⁸ Grant R. Osborne, "Exegetical Notes on Calvinist Texts," in *Grace Unlimited*, ed. Clark Pinnock (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1975): 183.

⁹ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 792.