How secure is Dr. Charles F. Stanley’s eternal security?

Some time ago I stumbled upon a Christian TV Channel here in the Netherlands called “Family7”. I witnessed a broadcast from the First Baptist Church in Atlanta, ministered by Dr. Charles F. Stanley (born in 1932). I was very impressed by what I heard and saw. Dr. Stanley is the founder of [In Touch Ministries](http://www.intouch.org/about/about-in-touch) . What struck me particularly was not only the reverence for the Word of God which I felt was abundantly present in this church but also the great wisdom of Dr. Stanley. I curiously went to the website of [In Touch Ministries](http://www.intouch.org/broadcast/this-week-on-tv) and started to watch and hear many more sermons from Dr. Stanley. Listening to all these sermons you can almost sense the lifelong experience Dr. Stanley has in dealing with all the major biblical issues a believer has to deal with in his or her lifetime. I also noticed that Dr. Stanley puts heavy emphasis on so-called ‘Eternal Security’. One of the many books Dr. Stanley has written deals with this subject and this best seller is called: ‘Eternal Security: Can You Be Sure?’ As I understand it, in my own words, eternal security means that our security of salvation is in what God has done for us when he sent His Son to the cross at Cavalry to pay for all of our sins. Elsewhere Dr. Stanley quite rightly writes: “*The very gospel itself comes under attack when the eternal security of the believer is questioned. Placing the responsibility for maintaining salvation on the believer is adding works to grace. Salvation would no longer be a gift. It would become a trade—our faithfulness for His faithfulness. This is a far cry from the good news Jesus preached”.*  I could not agree more with Dr. Stanley. However, Dr. Stanley also states: “*Eternal life is received by grace through faith. It is a once-and-for-all transaction that can never be undone. Because of the nature of God’s grace, once you become a Christian, you are always a Christian*”. Here I sense the beginning of a problem. To state this more accurately from a Biblical point of view, I would rather say that once you become a ***true*** Christian, you are always a Christian or once you are ***truly*** saved, you will always be saved (e.g. I John 2:19). Eternal security has therefore all to do with the doctrine of the so-called ‘Perseverance of the Saints’.Perseverance of the saints advocates the Calvinistic doctrine that if God has elected to save you, you are going to be saved forever and nothing can snatch you out of His hand (e.g. John 10:27-30). Because I have **never** heard Dr. Stanley say that once you become a ***true*** Christian, you are always a Christian, I had some doubts and wanted to know exactly where Dr. Stanley stands on this issue, so I sent him an email. I received a reply from his staff and his staff confirmed to me that indeed Dr. Stanley believes that this doctrine of the perseverance of the saints is supported by the Bible. That was quite a relief. Perseverance of the saints represents the ***P*** in the acronym **TULIP**, which is commonly used to enumerate what is known as the five points of Calvinism.
However, Dr. Stanley’s staff did more than I asked for and returned a document to me which states Dr. Stanley’s stance on *all* five points of Calvinism summarized in the acronym **TULIP.** What appeared? Dr. Stanley only believes that the **T** which stands for **T**otal Depravity of man and the **P** which stands for **P**erseverance of the Saints are scripturally supported. Dr. Stanley believes that the other three points - the **U** which stands for **U**nconditional Election, the **L** which represents **L**imited Atonement and the **I** which represents **I**rresistible Grace – are **not** scripturally supported. I was really surprised to learn this from Dr. Stanley. Why? Because we feel – as history has clearly shown - that these 5 points are closely connected to each other and you either accept them all as scripturally supported or you reject them all as *not* scripturally supported. Those who reject **TULIP** entirely, mostly take their starting point in the **T** of **T**otal depravity. They deny the **Total** depravity of man because they believe that although man may have fallen into sin and is in need of divine grace, there is something good left in him which leaves him at least some power to do well and – through good works – contribute to his own salvation. This stance has a lot of consequences for the interpretation of the rest of the contents of **TULIP** and most of the time the rejection of the **T**otal **D**epravity gives reasons enough to reject the rest of **TULIP** acronym. This chain of reasoning to reject all five points of **TULIP** runs as follows:
If man has (part) his own salvation within the reach of his own capacity, he may chose for himself what way to follow and does not need any divine election as basis for his salvation, therefore he will denounce the **U** of **U**nconditional election. Consequently he will also reject the **L** of **L**imited Atonement because man himself has the capacity to decide whether he will belong to the total number of those who will be atoned. The result of this is that he will also denounce the **I** of **I**rresistible Grace because he is free to either accept or **resist** the offer of God’s grace and companionship and finally he will also reject the **P** of **P**erseverance of the Saints because man feels he has free choice to either persevere in his faith or to give it up entirely.
Dr. Stanley however rejects three of the five points of **TULIP** and in my opinion that does not seem to make any sense to me. Why not? Because Dr. Stanley over and over, has emphasized that people are saved **only** by an act of divine grace which does not depend at all on any deeds of the individual believer and there is nothing a person can do to influence his or her salvation. Dr. Stanley even takes this to the point that once a person is saved there is nothing the believer can do to *undo* his or her salvation, even if this seems to happen at the expense of the sanctification of the believer. I’m sure that Dr. Stanley’s thesis of eternal security would make much more biblical sense, would be much more coherent and convincing if he would accept *all* the five elements of the **TULIP** acronym**.** The fact is that all these five elements support eternal security and now, by rejecting 3 of the elements of **TULIP,** Dr. Stanley tremendously weakens the case of eternal security. Let me try to explain how *all* 5 elements of the TULIP acronym are indispensable to make eternal security Rock solid:
Because of my sins and trespasses (Ephesians 2:1) I am completely lost and helpless and unable to save myself. By nature I am so fully **Depraved** that I amand even hostile to God (Romans 8:7), therefore for my salvation I am a 100% dependent on God’s mercy in Jesus Christ (Ephesians 2:5). So the first thing I need to embrace to get eternal security is the doctrine of **Total Depravity.**But if there is one thing which gives me eternal security, then it surely must be **Unconditional E**l**ection.** By nature I was a sinner and a trespasser and hostile towards God. There was nothing in me, not any works, not even my faith, no reason at all why God should love me, on the contrary, and yet He has chosen me to be His child forever. He really has chosen me **unconditionally.** God had chosen me before I was even born (Psalm 139:16), He had chosen me even before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4). He has chosen me from all eternity and into all eternity. There is nobody and nothing in this world which can undo His election as is stated Romans 8:33: ‘*Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect?*’. To make my election even more secure, God has sealed me with the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1: 13) which is the guarantee of our childhood and our participation in His inheritance (Ephesians 1:14).So **Unconditional Election** is one of the corner stones of eternal security.
But I also need to embrace the thesis of **L**imited **A**tonement to get eternal security. Although the blood of Jesus Christ is more than sufficient to atone for the sins of the whole world, not all will be saved. Saving grace through the blood of Christ is available for the whole world but not all will be salvaged. The effectiveness of Christ’s death works itself out in the elect only and that is saving grace. Through saving grace I am elected to be a sheep in the flock of the good Shepherd Jesus Christ. He laid down his life *for the sheep* (John 10:11). As a sheep in His flock, He gives me eternal life, and I will never perish, and no one will snatch me out of His hand. (John 10:28). The total number of sheep however, is **L**imited to those given to the good Shepherd Jesus Christ (John 17:9). Being a sheep in His flock makes me grateful and gives me eternal security.
The love and **G**race of God, the Father, is **I**rresistible for me. By nature I am hostile to God (Romans 8:7) but His sovereign grace simply overwhelms me and conquers my natural resistance, resistance and hostility which is a bad fruit of my total depravity. I am not saved because my conscience is tenderer than that of other men or that I was more willing to accept His offer of salvation than other men – such a thought would again mean: works! -, on the contrary, there is no reason in myself which would give God reason to save me. God is my loving Father and loves me for His own sovereign reasons and that is why His grace is so **I**rresistible, like it says in John 6:44–45: *"No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.... Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me."* Therefore the doctrine of **Irresistible Grace** gives me great comfort and makes my soul rest in Him and brings me eternal security.
The Bible teaches me that there is also **Perseverance of the Saints** .Indeed: ’Once saved is always saved’.I am His child forever and God will never give up on me, no matter what happens to me in life .I may fall into sin and even, for some period in my life, lead a rebellious life, I may for some time have the feeling that I have lost my faith, for some time it may be dark in my life but my loving Father will *never* forsake me. Because I am His child, through the Holy Spirit, He will, in due course, surely make me repent and restore the joy and comfort of faith in me as it says in 2 Timothy 2:13: *‘if* *we are faithless, he remains faithful — for he cannot deny himself’*, and also what it says in I John 3:9: *‘No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God’s seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God’.* Therefore, the doctrine of the **Perseverance of the Saints** is fullybiblical andgives me great comfort, consolation and eternal security. So I repeat the question: why does Dr. Stanley not accept all the five elements of **TULIP** when *all* these elements support eternal security? Please feel free to respond to this article. Please push the button ‘reacties’ and write a comment on this article.

Irresistible Grace :According to Calvinism, those who obtain [salvation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Salvation) do so, not by their own "free" will, but because of the sovereign grace of God. That is, men yield to grace, not finally because their [consciences](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conscience) were more tender or their faith more tenacious than that of other men. Rather, the willingness and ability to do God's will, are evidence of God's own faithfulness to save men from the power and the penalty of [sin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sin), and since man is so corrupt that he will not decide and cannot be wooed to follow after God, God must powerfully intervene. In short, Calvinism argues that [regeneration](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Regeneration_%28theology%29) must precede faith.

The doctrine of Limited Atonement states that though the death of Jesus Christ is more than sufficient to atone for the sins of the whole world,[[1]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Limited_atonement#cite_note-dort2.3-1) yet it was the entirely free plan and very gracious will and intention of God the Father that the enlivening and saving effectiveness of Christ's death would work itself out in the elect only, thereby leading them without fail to salvation.[[2]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Limited_atonement#cite_note-dort-2) This is in contrast to a belief that it depends not only on God's election but also on individual human being's decision whether Christ's atonement will be effective to that individual.

Free Grace doctrine[[edit](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Perseverance_of_the_saints&action=edit&section=3" \o "Edit section: Free Grace doctrine)]

The [Free Grace](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Free_Grace_theology) or non-traditional Calvinist doctrine has been espoused by [Charles Stanley](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_Stanley), [Norman Geisler](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Norman_Geisler), [Zane C. Hodges](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zane_C._Hodges), [Bill Bright](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bill_Bright), and others. This view, like the traditional Calvinist view, emphasizes that people are saved purely by an act of [divine grace](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Divine_grace) that does not depend at all on the deeds of the individual, and for that reason, advocates insist that nothing the person can do can affect his or her salvation.

The Free Grace doctrine views the person's character and life after receiving the gift of salvation as independent from the gift itself, which is the main point of differentiation from the traditional Calvinist view, or, in other words, it asserts that justification (that is, being declared righteous before God on account of Christ) does not necessarily result in sanctification (that is, a progressively more righteous life). Charles Stanley, pastor of Atlanta's megachurch First Baptist and a television evangelist, has written that the doctrine of eternal security of the believer persuaded him years ago to leave his familial Pentecostalism and become a Southern Baptist. He sums up his deep conviction that salvation is by *faith alone in Christ alone* when he claims, "Even if a believer for all practical purposes becomes an unbeliever, his salvation is not in jeopardy… believers who lose or abandon their faith will retain their salvation."[[6]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Perseverance_of_the_saints#cite_note-Stanley-6) For example, Stanley writes:

Look at that verse [[John 3:18](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+3%3A18&version=NIV)] and answer this question: According to Jesus, what must a person do to keep from being judged for sin? Must he stop doing something? Must he promise to stop doing something? Must he have never done something? The answer is so simple that many stumble all over it without ever seeing it. All Jesus requires is that the individual "believe in" Him.

— Charles Stanley[[6]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Perseverance_of_the_saints%22%20%5Cl%20%22cite_note-Stanley-6) (p. 67).

In a chapter entitled "For Those Who Stop Believing", he says, "The Bible clearly teaches that God's love for His people is of such magnitude that even those who walk away from the faith have not the slightest chance of slipping from His hand (p. 74)." A little later, Stanley also writes: "You and I are not saved because we have an enduring faith. We are saved because at a moment in time we expressed faith in our enduring Lord" (p. 80).

The doctrine sees the work of salvation as wholly monergistic, which is to say that God alone performs it and man has no part in the process beyond receiving it, and therefore, proponents argue that man cannot undo what they believe God has done. By comparison, in traditional Calvinism, people, who are otherwise unable to follow God, are enabled by regeneration to cooperate with him, and so the Reformed tradition sees itself as mediating between the total monergism of the non-traditional Calvinist view and the synergism of the [Wesleyan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Methodism), [Arminian](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arminianism), and Roman Catholic views in which even unregenerate man can choose to cooperate with God in salvation.

The traditional Calvinist doctrine teaches that a person is secure in salvation because he or she was predestined by God, whereas in the Free Grace or non-traditional Calvinist views, a person is secure because at some point in time he or she has believed the Gospel message (Dave Hunt, *What Love is This*, p. 481).

Evangelical criticism[[edit](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Perseverance_of_the_saints&action=edit&section=4" \o "Edit section: Evangelical criticism)]

Both traditional Calvinism and traditional [Arminianism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arminianism) have rejected Free Grace theology. The former believes Free Grace to be a distorted form of Calvinism which maintains the permanency of salvation (or properly speaking, justification) while radically divorcing the ongoing work of sanctification from that justification. Reformed theology has uniformly asserted that "no man is a Christian who does not feel some special love for righteousness" ([*Institutes*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Institutes_of_the_Christian_Religion)),[[7]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Perseverance_of_the_saints#cite_note-7) and therefore sees Free Grace theology, which allows for the concept of a "carnal Christian" or even an "unbelieving Christian", as a form of radical [antinomianism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antinomianism). Arminianism, which has always believed true believers can give themselves completely over to sin, has also rejected the Free Grace view for the opposite reason of Calvinism: namely, that the view denies the classical Arminian doctrine that true Christians can lose their salvation by denouncing their faith (see [conditional preservation of the saints](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conditional_preservation_of_the_saints)). Free Grace theology struggles to maintain a middle ground, hoping to grasp the permanency of salvation (Calvinism) with one hand, while maintaining a true believer can still give up faith and choose to live a life of sin and unbelief (Arminianism). Both Calvinists and Arminians appeal to Biblical passages such as [1 Cor. 15:2](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1Cor+15%3A2&version=esv) ("By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain"), [Hebrews 3:14](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Hebrews+3%3A14&version=NIV) ("We have come to share in Christ if we hold firmly till the end the confidence we had at first"), [James 2:21-22](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=James+2%3A21-22&version=NIV) ("faith without works is dead"), and [2 Tim. 2:12](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=2Tim+2%3A12&version=esv) ("If we endure, we will also reign with him. If we disown him, he will also disown us").

Limited atonement (or definite atonement or particular redemption) is a [doctrine](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Doctrine) accepted in some [Christian theological traditions](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian_theology). It is particularly associated with the [Reformed](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Calvinism) tradition and is one of the [five points of Calvinism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Five_points_of_Calvinism). The doctrine states that though the death of Jesus Christ is more than sufficient to atone for the sins of the whole world,[[1]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Limited_atonement#cite_note-dort2.3-1) yet it was the entirely free plan and very gracious will and intention of God the Father that the enlivening and saving effectiveness of Christ's death would work itself out in the elect only, thereby leading them without fail to salvation.[[2]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Limited_atonement#cite_note-dort-2) This is in contrast to a belief that it depends not only on God's election but also on individual human being's decision whether Christ's atonement will be effective to that individual.