

Eternal Security: A Biblical and Theological Appraisal

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Introduction

In polemical doctrines such as this, one victim of many of the discussions is Christian charity. Opposite positions are often caricatured, variant interpretations of Scripture merely declared spurious, and the Christian integrity of those who hold other views impugned. Such approaches, while rhetorically functioning to strengthen sociologically how one's group understands its superior position, too often denies true Christian love in Jesus Christ for fellow believers.

In this light, I will not presume that those who teach eternal security are merely antinomians seeking to avoid the call to holy living. One point to keep before us in theological discussions such as this is that God does not demand uniformity, but as the triune one-in-three who exists as one in differentiation calls and makes possible our commitment to others Christians with whom we may disagree at (significant) points.

This is not to deny, however, the significance of such differences. Every theological position that is truly held and not merely declared shapes Christian existence in the present. The reason, therefore, why we should be concerned with these differences in perspective is not so that we can assure ourselves of our superior faithfulness to God, but because of God's prevenient and continuing faithfulness to us: we are called to articulate faithfully the breadth and scope of the Kingdom's reality in our culture.

In terms of the topic of this paper, we must ask a twofold question: what is the biblical understanding of eternal security or perseverance, and what does this imply for how we are now called to live as God's people as we await our Lord's return?

To explore this topic, we will begin with a basic definition of what is meant by eternal security or perseverance of the saints in two primary groups, Calvinism and Moderate Calvinism. This should not be interpreted to imply that only these two groups espouse eternal security. Rather, it is a historical fact that our tradition, the Church of God (Anderson) Reformation Movement, stemming from its Wesleyan roots, has most often associated this doctrine with its expression in these two groups. For example, while Luther himself asserted the perseverance of the saints from an Augustinian perspective, seldom have we entered into prolonged discussion with Lutherans over this subject. Second, I will look at several points of commonality that we hold with those who contend for eternal security as an important context for understanding this doctrine.

Doctrinal themes never occur in isolation, but always stand in relation to other doctrines or theological themes. The second section is intended to place eternal security in a brief conversation with other doctrinal themes that impact it.

The third section is a consideration of several biblical passages that are relevant for understanding the doctrine of eternal security. Finally, I will turn to two considerations that I find at times have hindered our understanding on this significant theme. To begin with, however, we need to be clear about what is meant by eternal security.

Basic Definitions

It will be good to begin with some definition of what we mean by our terminology. Eternal security, sometimes referred to as being “once saved always saved” or the perseverance of the saints in classical language, is intended to describe the assurance that one may have as a believer in Jesus Christ that one’s union with Christ through faith will come to fruition in eternal salvation. This can take a couple of different forms, with various shadings of each position.

In classical Calvinism, eternal security is the logical outworking of God’s divine sovereignty: only those whom God has elected will be saved. Salvation is from the beginning not a human accomplishment but divine in that those whom God elects he also effects faith in Christ. Therefore, since it is God who elects and produces faith, so that individual’s salvation is tied to God’s sovereign, divine decision, God likewise causes to

persevere to final salvation those whom he elects. This means any possibility of apostasy is excluded, for once one is regenerated faith is indefectible.

In a more moderate Calvinism, that is in groups like the Baptists, while rejecting the classical position of Calvinism on predestination, continue to hold that God will preserve those who have once been regenerated. Therefore, those who at some point exercise faith in Jesus Christ are eternally secure, for Christ's atoning work has been imputed to them and God has promised that those who have faith in Christ will be saved. As the Church of God (Anderson), our understandings of eternal security have generally rejected both of these broad positions, asserting instead the necessity of holy living for salvation.

This is not to suggest a monolithic approach to the issue in our tradition, for there has been diverse understandings of what is necessary for one to lose one's salvation: does simply one conscious sin remove you from life in the Son, is it a falling back into a habitual lifestyle of sin, or is it a conscious act of apostasy that is the cause of losing salvation? Whichever view one holds, it is our tradition that one can lose one's salvation. What may we say as we seek to allow Scripture to shape our understanding of this important topic?

A Brief Doctrinal/Theological Context

As stated earlier, doctrinal themes should always be seen and are only rightly understood in their relationship to other themes. To help us understand more clearly the theme of eternal security, it is therefore necessary to explore briefly this doctrine's relationship with the rest of theological understanding.

To keep this manageable, I will look at four other doctrines to which any understanding of eternal security must be related. These four points are also points of convergence between the Church of God's understandings and those who hold to other understandings of eternal security. It is significant that we begin with aspects of commonality that form the context for describing differences, for one finds many points of agreement that should inform our interpretation of eternal security.

First, I believe we share with those who hold to doctrines of eternal security as previously described the belief in God's sovereignty. Although how we understand that

to work out may differ, I would not want to imply that God's basic design of creation and redemption will be frustrated. In divine grace, God will bring creation to the consummation of redemption: it is thankfully not we who have the last word, but God.

Second, I likewise recognize a commitment to the sole atoning efficacy of Christ's redemptive work. Christ's life, death, and resurrection alone is sufficient for our salvation, and our only appropriate response is faith and trust that in Christ God has acted to restore us to relationship with Himself. God's actions for us in Jesus Christ therefore are the only covering for all of our sins, whether prior to or subsequent to saving faith.

Third, though while we do not usually employ this language, we also share a belief in some form of perseverance of the saints. In Jesus Christ, we are secure, because he is trustworthy. Likewise, if any do persevere it is not simply because of their own volition. More fundamentally, it is because of the faithfulness of God that makes possible our continued faithful response. While I will argue that this perseverance is not absolute, we must begin with Scripture's starting point of the prevenient acting of God for us.

Fourth, serious consideration must be given to human agency and volition. This is rooted in the fact that God takes seriously our actions, and bestows upon us the capacity for personal, intentional acts. A doctrine of eternal security must exercise caution not to denude the human subject of agency, but neither should it elevate the human as actor to a level that makes us wholly self-determining. Grace is and remains the context for understanding human agency in Christian terms.

I would suggest that this fourfold context is important and necessary to avoid the common charge that our position is merely Pelagian, elevating the human in a manner that substitutes human freedom for divine grace and sovereignty. While that is seldom the intent, some repudiations of eternal security that have failed to retain this fourfold context have tended in that direction. We need to know turn to Scripture and ask, first, what is its teaching on eternal security, and second, how can we hold this together with God's grace.

Scriptural Prospects for Eternal Security

As we turn our attention to Scripture, we must acknowledge that there are points where those who assert the eternal security of the redeemed appear very solid. For example, Jesus' words in John 6: 37-39 appear to foster an understanding of faith's indefectibility, for it is the Father's will that the Son lose "nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day."

Unfortunately, this interpretation overlooks both context and the full passage. The context for 6:37-39 is Jesus' discussion with the Jews who had witnessed his miracle of the feeding of the five thousand. They have followed Jesus to Capernaum apparently in hopes of either experiencing more miracles or of receiving more physical bread, for they did not understand the meaning of the miracle. Jesus, instead, insists that what God desires is that they believe in him. The people respond that if Jesus is really from God, he should be able to perform miracles like Moses, to which Jesus replies that it is the God the Father who gives the real bread of heaven, which is himself.

Verses 36-40 follow, in which Jesus continues that, though the people have seen him, they continue to refuse to believe. Jesus has come from heaven to do the will of the one who sent him, and the Father's will is to give life to all who will believe in Jesus. The emphasis falls upon verse 37, that Jesus will not "drive away" (or the term can be used as "to throw out") any whom come to him in belief. Who has Jesus been given? It is those who believe in him.

While there is a characteristic priority of the Father's action, it is those who believe that are the Son's possession. Belief is the fundamental human response to the prevenient grace of God, and those who continue in belief are those whom the Son will raise up on the last day, the ones from which he will lose none (verse 40). Yet, in the passage there is no indication that all those who at some point profess faith in Jesus Christ will persevere.

This is clear from the end of the chapter, where verse 66 indicates that "many of his disciples turned back and no longer went about with him" after his claim to be the bread of life.¹ Jesus even questions the 12, "Do you wish to go away?" Peter offers the paradigmatic response: only Jesus has the words of life, and the disciples believe and know that Jesus is the one sent from God. Thus, there is no one else to whom they can turn. Yet, it is not that the disciples are incapable of leaving, but their continued

perseverance is connected to their continuing faith in the reality of whom Jesus is, the one sent by God.

Similarly, John 10:28 is often cited as strong evidence for eternal security, and at a first read would seem to point in that direction if the verse is taken from its context. Jesus is portrayed as a shepherd whose strong grasp of his sheep cannot be broken: no one can pluck believers from Jesus' hand or from that of His Father's.

Yet, this fails to consider the context of verse 27: who are Jesus' sheep? It is those who hear Jesus' voice and follow it (the verbs are present tenses, as are the tenses in John 3:15-16, 5:24, 6:35 and 40). If one refuses to hear and follow Jesus' voice, it does not seem appropriate to offer that person hope of eternal security.

On the other hand, if one is hearing and following Jesus' voice, one can be appropriately assured (not self-assured) of Christ's power that is able to keep us in relationship with him even within the vicissitudes of human existence. It is the Father's will not merely that we hear Jesus, but that we begin to know the newness of life that is granted to us in the Son. It is those who continue believing that have the assurance that they cannot be taken away from the Son.

This highlights what I find to be a deficiency in the manner in which eternal security or perseverance is articulated, especially among moderate Calvinists. One characteristic of popular declarations of eternal security is a representation of salvation as primarily a static state that is achieved once-for-all. Salvation, in other words, is in essence a condition bestowed by God on the basis of the confluence of Christ's work and human faith in the efficacy of Christ's life, death, resurrection and salvation. That status divinely conveyed by God is inherently irrevocable, for it is a divine action not rooted in human agency.

However, this overlooks the relational and covenantal understanding of salvation found in Scripture. As Leslie Newbigin points out, covenantal relations are two-sided, and both sides are called to keep the covenant. In the New Testament the relationship of salvation is never a contract, whereby if we keep the rules (e.g. have faith) we thereby establish some claim upon God's grace.² Rather, it is founded in the human response to the overwhelming grace of God (e.g., Romans 12:1ff exhorts Christians to a new form of life on the basis of Paul's exposition of what God has and is doing in Romans 1-11; the

writer of Acts 2 places the call to repentance in verse 38-39 only after the preaching of the Gospel and the peoples' request for the appropriate response to the Gospel; Ephesians 3:14-21 leads to the call to life in conformity with the Gospel starting in Ephesians 4:1). Salvation is not merely a one-time event, but an ongoing relationality between God and the humans through Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. It is, as John 15 suggests, life in Christ through the Spirit in which we likewise are made one with the Father.

It is the nature of salvation as a transforming relation with God that I believe the biblical witness suggests is counter to the teaching of eternal security. For example, John 15:1-8 offers important consideration on the issue of a believer's standing before God. While it is an overstatement to reduce the issue in this passage simply to human volitional considerations, John 15 does reflect the continued necessity of believers remaining in union with Jesus Christ.

However, there is also in this passage an awareness of the divine primacy: it is the Father in verse 2 whom prunes and cleanses, and it is the Son who is the vine and the Father the vinedresser in verse 1. Without the antecedent and ongoing work of the Father and Son through the Spirit, there would be no vine, and thus no branches. Divine grace thus comes first, and it is to this preceding faithfulness of God that we are called to respond in our faithful living. Continuing to abide in Christ is our corollary of Christ's continued indwelling and faithfulness to us.

There is also in this passage, however, an implicit aspect of human agency that must not be overlooked. In verse 4, for instance, we are instructed to "abide in" Christ. To be given this instruction presupposes that remaining in union with the vine is not something automatic, but requires action on the believer's part. As I. Howard Marshall notes, "John uses the verb 'abide' to express the need for disciples to continue in their persona. Commitment to Jesus; the abiding of Jesus in them is not an automatic process which is independent of their attitude to Him, but is the reverse side of their abiding in Him. Just as men are summoned to believe in Jesus, so they are summoned to abide in Jesus, i.e., to continue believing."³ Verse 6, furthermore, speaks of those who do not continue to abide in Christ. To not continue to abide presupposes that a connection with Christ already existed.

There is nothing in the context of this passage to suggest that the branches of verse 6 are different from the branches of verses 2-5, except for their lapse from union with Christ. Because of this lapse, they have been “cast out” and “withered” (aorist passives suggesting that the action is described as assured, as if it has already happened). As Francis Moloney contends, John 15:1-8 is not controlled by the metaphor of the vine but by the language of abiding.⁴ The language of the vine is structured to emphasize the call to abide. This gives the passage the following important structure: verses 1-5a speak of the necessity of abiding in Christ, verses 5b-8 indicate the results of abiding in Jesus Christ, while verse 9-11 highlights the nature of this life in Christ: to abide in Christ is to act in love. If we are not acting in love, however much we claim to be in Christ, we have no fruits to demonstrate that we are in Christ.

John 15:1-6 thus portrays the Christian life not as a static, irrevocable relationship. Rather, Christian existence can be described as a continuing perichoretic relationship in which Jesus Christ and the believer mutually indwell each other through the Holy Spirit.

Perichoresis is an ancient theological term by which the early church described the relations of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: each person of the Trinity exists not in isolation from the other members of the triune life but each exists only in its relation to the other members of the Trinity. As such, each person indwells the life of the other, and apart from this indwell each member would not be who they are.

In a comparable manner, the believer is who she is only in her vital relation with the Father through the Son by the power of the Holy Spirit. As the believer remains in this vital relationship, she is secure in Jesus Christ. Likewise, the power for this relationship is not merely my human volitional decision, but flows from the branch to which we are attached. If we are severed from the branch, that power is likewise removed. It is just such a result that verses 7-8 acknowledge.

This severing of the vine from the branch is portrayed as a possibility in the New Testament. Eternal security, however, rejects this possibility. In doing so, however, it repudiates passages that speak of apostasy, or the repudiation of the Christian faith by someone who previously confessed it.

This comes to the forefront particularly in the book of Hebrews, where there are explicit warnings against apostasy that present it as a true possibility for believers against which we must exercise caution. Dale Moody has noted that if we give the warning passages of Hebrews their appropriate significance; we should not have problems likewise with recognizing the validity of other warning passages in the New Testament.⁵ While several passages are worthy of note, we will look at two.

First, Hebrews 3:6 notes that we are God's house "if only we hold our first confidence firm to the end." The conditional nature of this, however, is clearly noted in verses 12-14, for here we are warned against "unbelieving hearts" that turn from the living God, hearts hardened by sin's deceitfulness. Ultimately, our sharing in Christ according to verse 14 is contingent upon our continued holding of our initial faith in Christ. That the writer is addressing fellow believers is evident in verse 12 where he refers to his readers as "brothers" as well as in verse 14 where he switches to the plural "we" to describe those who must beware of turning from God, thereby including himself in the warning.

Paralleling Hebrews 3 is another paranesis in Hebrews 6:1-8 that again warns of the danger of apostasy. Verses 1-3 call for the readers to continue on to the full maturity of faith, for this is God's will. Verses 4-6 continue a warning against the failure to do such. While some traditions attempt to diminish the force of this passage by asserting that those spoken of were never actually Christians, the terminology of the passage suggests otherwise. Those who have not gone on to maturity in faith, those who have rejected Christ, are described as having "once been enlightened" (passive voice indicating not human but divine activity), having "tasted the heavenly gift," having "shared in the Holy Spirit," having "tasted the goodness of the word of God and powers of the age to come."

Two things are particularly important. First, it is significant that they are described as those who shared in the Holy Spirit, for Paul in Romans 8 connects the sharing in the Holy Spirit with participating fully in salvation in Jesus Christ. Second, these persons apparently had experienced aspects of the transformation that Christ begins to bring to pass, for they are described as experiencing the powers of the age to come. The text therefore is speaking of those who were once Christians.

However, it does not stop there, for it continues by describing these individuals as those who “have fallen away.” These who once participated in Jesus Christ are now compared to land that is “worthless” and awaits its due judgment. They have, in other words, rejected their previous faith in Jesus Christ, and await God’s just judgment.⁶

One final passage for consideration is the Apostle Paul’s comparison of the Christian life with the life of an athlete. In First Corinthians 9:27, Paul writes, “I pommel my body and subdue it, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.” Paul acknowledges that his race is not yet complete, that the prize remains in the future. However, he implies that if he does not practice this discipline, he may not attain to the goal. If he does not continue in faith in Jesus Christ, then he may himself in the end live in a manner unacceptable to God, and he writes to the Corinthian church to stimulate them to faithful living.

While we could continue looking at other passages (2nd Peter 2:20-22 Matthew 13:3-23, 2nd Timothy 2:16-18, Revelation 3:1-6) I believe that these are sufficient to indicate that some aspects of a biblical understanding of eternal security.

First, salvation is rooted in the prevenient acting of God to bring us into relationship with God and with others. Salvation, while beginning at a particular point in time in each person’s life, is a present and future reality on the basis of the past, present, and future activities of God.

Second, salvation is not a static condition or divine declaration, but is the growing, living obedient trusting of God’s actions for us in Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. Third, our continuance in salvation is never grounded simply in our own human abilities, but we can assert a doctrine of perseverance because of God’s faithfulness. We can be assured that God will never abandon us, for God has given to us the Holy Spirit.

Fourth, to speak of God’s faithfulness, however, does not remove our need for faithfulness. As in the parable of the vines and branches in John 15, there is a mutual reciprocity that should be respected. If we separate from the vine and become unfruitful, we can be assured of God’s judgment.

In light of these considerations, the doctrine of eternal security or the indefectibility of the regenerate is problematic. This should not lead us to despair.

Rather, it should compel us to lives that seek to enact more clearly and fully the new reality that God has given to us in Jesus Christ.

Freedom and Perseverance

In closing, while our traditional rejection of the doctrine of eternal security in the Church of God (Anderson) is well known, it is not without some of its own problems. In particular I would like to highlight two issues that at points beset our rejection of eternal security.

First, in the Church of God (Anderson), we encounter a discrete danger that needs to be addressed. This is, as Dr. Cliff Sanders, a Church of God (Anderson) minister who teaches at Mid-America Christian University, has deemed it, not a belief in eternal security but a functional faith in eternal insecurity.

If I may gloss his point, and realize this is my interpretation, our soteriology has at points been characterized by an anthropocentric orientation rather than a theocentric orientation. Salvation has at times been deemed to depend fundamentally (at its root) upon an innate human capacity to respond positively to the Gospel, not merely in the beginning of faith but likewise in its continuation throughout one's Christian life.

This has produced frenetic attempts at activity and piety in hopes of securing one's salvation. While salvation does call forth our human response, scripturally our hope continues always to be the power and ability of God to keep us as his children. Our hope and assurance as Christians is not in the amount of service we perform or our moral rectitude, the depth of our faith or the depth of our spirituality, though these may all be seen as gifts of the Spirit that we are fool-hardy to overlook. Our hope as true Christian faith rests essentially in the one in whom we hope, our God and his salvific actions for us in Jesus Christ through the Spirit.

This is tied soteriologically to an understanding of human freedom that owes as much to the Enlightenment and Scottish Realism as to the biblical witness. It often employs a deductive logic: God demands for salvation a positive response to the sharing of the Gospel (or for damnation a rejection of the Gospel); only some (often a small majority) respond positively to the Gospel and persevere to the end of life; if this positive response is rooted in an eternal divine decree rather than in human capacity, this would

indicate a capricious God who willy-nilly chooses some while rejecting the majority of humankind. The human must thus be free to respond positively or negatively to the Gospel apart from any form of divine coercion. In other words, the response to the Gospel is free if and only if it is entirely within the undetermined volition of the agent.

While such reasoning is not without some verity, it nevertheless seems to presuppose a definition of freedom that is not drawn from the biblical presentation. Likewise, this sense of almost absolute freedom of the human is one of the major arguments that Calvinists marshal against Arminians.

Robert Peterson and Michael Williams decry the almost libertarian conceptions of some Arminians in their book, *Why I am Not An Arminian*, as unduly limiting divine sovereignty.⁷ For example, in his text *Christian Theology* Russell Byrum writes, “it may first be said that [the doctrine of absolute final perseverance] is inconsistent with human freedom.”⁸ Yet, what is the understanding of human freedom operative at this point?

Biblically, freedom is a construct that is relational in nature. As Colin Gunton suggests, “Freedom is a relational concept in the sense that it cannot be understood merely individualistically. If we are free, it is in large measure because others enable or empower us to be free.”⁹ Peterson and Williams rightly observe, “Freedom in Scripture is not independence from God and his will but dependence upon God and our faithful participation in his kingdom...[it] is the liberty to obey God without restraint, without sin standing in the way.”¹⁰

Freedom must therefore be understood in relation to the God who grants us freedom in Christ. Human freedom is not “known by us on the basis of [a] self-reflection” that is “ontologically or epistemologically prior.”¹¹ This entails that in Christian discussion we are not concerned with a *theory* of freedom in abstraction, but with the concrete actions of God by which God makes us free as the ones whom God creates and to whom God offers guidance and direction through the Holy Spirit.

Apart from Jesus Christ, that is, when we sin, the primary scriptural metaphors do not depict humanity as simply self-determining. For example, John 8:34-36 speaks anyone who sins as a “slave to sin.” Likewise, Paul in Galatians 4:8, describes the Galatians as previously “enslaved to beings that by nature are not gods.” Paul also describes the Colossian Christians as previously “estranged and hostile and mind” toward

God; in other words they were God's enemies. There must, therefore, be divine action if humanity is to be, and if humans are to respond positively to the Gospel.

The capacity to respond to the Gospel follows from God's gracious calling of sinners. It is not merely our volition that is critical in the beginning and the continuing of salvation, for it is God's redemptive work in Jesus Christ that makes us free. In other words, the Gospel is by its very nature agential: the proclamation of the Gospel creates the possibility of human response through the power of the Holy Spirit. That is the force of several passages.

First, John 8:31-36 speaks twice of freedom, but each time it is tied to our continuing in Jesus Christ: "If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free...So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed." Second, freedom is tied to the agency of the Lord and Spirit in 2nd Corinthians 3:17 (cf. Romans 6:1-11). Paul writes that, instead of not understanding the covenants of God, in Christ Jesus we know God's will and are being transformed through the Spirit. In this context Paul refers to our freedom as being in and through the Spirit. "Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom." Third, Acts 13:38-39 points out that those who believe in Jesus Christ are "set free from all those sins which you could not be freed by the law of Moses."

Finally, Paul makes this point in Romans 10:14-17 when writing of Jews: "But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him? And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent? As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!' But not all have obeyed the good news; for Isaiah says, 'Lord, who has believed our message?' So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ." The free response to the Gospel, therefore, is already a graced response in that it follows from the proclamation of God's gracious Gospel of Jesus Christ.

I would respectfully suggest, therefore, that in our rejection of doctrines of eternal security that we do not invoke concepts of freedom as grounds for our alternative interpretive tradition. To continue in faith in Jesus Christ, to remain connected to the vine, is a free human act in the sense that it is an act whose possibility is created and

maintained by the preceding divine faithfulness. To reject our living Lord and thereby to inhabit another form of life, while a human act, is an act not of freedom but of self-enslavement.

Second, in our tradition we have often described the possibility of defecting from the faith as “losing” one’s salvation. Again, I find that this language is somewhat tenuous. There is a fundamental difference between speaking of losing one’s salvation and, for example, losing my car keys or losing weight.

Choosing to inhabit a form of life that is counter to the new life given in Jesus Christ is more foundational, more relational, than either of these usages, and the metaphor does not seem sufficient to bear the weight of this meaning. In a sense of misplaced love, trust, and fidelity it may be appropriate to use the terminology of losing salvation, but we must acknowledge the general sphere of relationship with Jesus Christ if we do employ it. Defection from the faith is more intentional, more decisive, than something we stumble into: it is the loss of and rejection of the one who has acted for your salvation.

Conclusion

In this paper we have considered the theme of eternal security from both biblical and theological perspectives. Eternal security as the indefectibility of all who are regenerate has been and continues to be a topic of contention with other Christians, and in the Church of God (Anderson) we have traditionally rejected this teaching as inadequate to the biblical witness.

The paper has tried to set the doctrine with the theological context of God’s sovereignty, the efficacy of Christ’s atoning work, perseverance of the regenerate, and humanity as those who are agents. These perspectives help to guard against undue confidence in the human, and elevate the gracious acting of God.

From the biblical analysis, we have concluded that a doctrine of eternal security is at variance with significant aspects of the biblical witness, especially in the Gospel of John and the book of Hebrews.

Finally, I have considered two aspects of our tradition that appear to me to stand in need of revision, the understanding of human freedom that is operative and the

terminology of “losing one’s salvation.” In the end, however, our perseverance is not foremost about us, but about the God who is faithfully committed to us.

To the God whose grace is sufficient for all that we may face, may all glory, honor and power be given.

¹ I am indebted to Dr. James Christoph for pointing out this aspect of the context.

² Leslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), 68-78.

³ I. Howard Marshall, *Kept by the Power of God* (Minneapolis: Bethany, 1969), 13.

⁴ Moloney, Francis J. *The Gospel of John*. In *Sacra Pagina Series, Volume 4* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1998), 417.

⁵ Dale Moody, *The Word of Truth: a summary of christian doctrine based on biblical revelation* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1981), 352.

⁶ The severity of this judgment is indicated in Hebrews 6:4, that it is “impossible to restore again to repentance” those who have thusly rejected Jesus Christ. Craig Koester helpfully points out the similarly terminology in 6:18 that it is “impossible for God to lie.” Verse 18 indicates God’s faithfulness, not an ontological incapacity within God. In a similar way, God’s judgment upon the apostate is to let their rejection to stand, just as God did with the wilderness generation’s refusal to enter the Promised Land. Craig Koester, *Hebrews* (Doubleday: New York, 2001), 322.

⁷ Peterson, Robert A., and Williams, Michael D, *Why I Am Not An Arminian* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 154.

⁸ Russell R. Byrum, *Christian Theology* (Anderson: Warner Press, 1925), 413.

⁹ Gunton, Colin, “God, Grace, and Freedom,” in *God and Freedom* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1995), 122.

¹⁰ Peterson and Williams, 154.

¹¹ John Webster, *Barth’s Moral Theology* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark), 104.