

“Conditional Security” vs. “Unconditional Eternal Security”

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I. HISTORY: There is no trace of unconditional eternal security for the first 1,500 years of Christianity.

A. Irenaeus’ (disciple of Polycarp, disciple of John) comments are typical:

*“And to **as many as continue in their love towards God, does He grant communion with Him.** But communion with God is life and light, and the enjoyment of all the benefits which He has in store. **But on as many as, according to their own choice, depart from God. He inflicts that separation from Himself which they have chosen of their own accord.** But separation from God is death, and separation from light is darkness; and separation from God consists in the loss of all the benefits which He has in store. Those, therefore, **who cast away by apostasy** these forementioned things, being in fact destitute of all good, do experience every kind of punishment. God, however, does not punish them immediately of Himself, but that punishment falls upon them because they are destitute of all that is good. Now, good things are eternal and without end with God, and **therefore the loss of these is also eternal and never-ending.**”¹*

B. Catholics, Orthodox, & most Protestant Reformers (including Martin Luther) taught “Conditional Security,” that true believers can fall away and be lost if they abandon the Gospel (do not continue to actively believe).

C. “Unconditional Eternal Security” was first taught by John Calvin (1509-1564) as a necessary inference from the other 4 points of Calvinism: *Total Depravity; Unconditional Election; Limited Atonement; Irresistible Grace – requires Perseverance of the Saints.*

1. 5-point Calvinism held by Presbyterians, Reformed Baptists, and about 30% of Southern Baptists (poll by SBC LifeWay Research)

2. Modern resurgence: John Piper; R.C. Sproul; Sovereign Grace Churches; “Seeker-Friendly” Churches influenced by Piper & Sproul

D. Most Baptist groups reject Calvinism’s first 4 points but accept the 5th point, calling it “once-saved-always-saved” (OSAS) or “Eternal Security.”

II. “Conditional Security” is the ancient teaching. The primary Scriptures and arguments for this position are:

A. Apostasy is possible for a Christian

1. 1 Chron. 28:9 God has always cast away His people who forsook Him

2. 1 Tim. 4:1 many will depart from the faith in the last days

3. 2 Thess. 2:1-3 a great apostasy will precede the coming of Antichrist

4. Matt. 24:9-13 most Christians will fall away in the last days

5. Luke 8:5-15 Parable of Sower, some believe for a while, but fall away

¹ Irenaeus, Against Heresies, Bk. V, ch. xxvii:2

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6. John 15:1-7 Parable of True Vine, some branches are destroyed

7. 1 Cor. 9:27 Paul himself could become disqualified

B. Promises of Life are **conditional**

1. Rom. 11:17-22 *“IF we continue in His goodness,”* otherwise *“cut off”*

2. 1 Cor. 15:1-2 *“IF you keep”* otherwise *“you have believed in vain.”*

3. Col. 1:21-23 Presented to Christ *“IF you continue in the faith ... and are not moved away from the Gospel”*

4. Heb. 2:1-3 We will not escape *“IF we neglect so great salvation”*

5. Heb. 3:5-5-19 We partake of Christ *“IF we hold the beginning of our confidence unto the end...”* otherwise, *“depart”*

a. Psalm 95:6-11

6. 1 John 2:24 You will continue in the Son and the Father *“IF what you heard from the beginning continues in you.”*

C. No repentance from apostasy is permitted

1. 2 Tim. 2:12-13 If we deny Him, He will deny us

2. Heb. 6:4-8 Impossible for an apostate Christian to repent & be forgiven

3. Heb. 10:23-31 Apostates headed for destruction

4. Heb. 12:15-17 Esau as an example to Christians

a. Reference: Deut. 29:10-20

D. Examples of Apostates

1. 1 Tim. 1:19-20 Hymenaeus & Alexander

2. 2 Tim. 2:16-18 Hymenaeus & Philetus

3. 2 Pet. 2:1 false teachers

E. “Eternal life” (immortality) actually received in the resurrection.

1. Dan. 12:2 received at the resurrection

2. Matt. 19:28-30 inherit eternal life in the Kingdom

3. Matt. 25:46 Righteous go into eternal life when the King returns

4. Matt. 10:30 in the age to come

5. Rom. 2:5-10 eternal life received at judgment

6. Rom. 6:22 received in the end

7. Gal. 6:8 we will “reap” eternal life after first “planting” to the Spirit

8. 1 Tim. 6:12,19 Believers told to take hold of eternal life

9. Titus 1:2; Titus 3:7 eternal life is our **hope** (cf. Rom. 8:22-25)

10. James 1:12 “crown of life” received after being proven

11. 1 John 2:24-25 eternal life is promised to us

III. “Unconditional Eternal Security” Scriptures and arguments used to support

A. **John 3:16** OSAS Claim: If you “believed” at any time, you cannot perish.

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1. **LGV: 16** *For this is how God loved the world, inasmuch as He gave His Only-Begotten Son so that the whole collective of the believing [ones] unto Him should not be destroyed, but may have age-enduring life.*

a. “so that” ἵνα (hina) + subjunctive verb (should ..., may ...) = purpose/intended result, describes God’s intent.

b. “Whoever believes” is a poor translation of πᾶς ὁ πιστεύων (pas ha pist-ew’-own) by incorrectly implying uncertain referents or implying a conditional statement (no “if this, then that” statement).

1. πᾶς = all, the whole, the entire

2. ὁ πιστεύων = “the believing” (singular present participle)

a. the present participle indicates continuous action.²

b. singular number (believers viewed as a unit)

c. Lit. “the whole believing” (the entire collective of “the believing” viewed as a single unit).

c. “should not be destroyed” is the converse of “may have age-enduring life,” implying one instead of the other **at the time of the judgment.**

d. **Summary Paraphrase:** “The extent of God’s love for the world is displayed by His giving His only begotten Son so that the whole collective characterized by continually “believing” might not be destroyed [along with the wicked], but instead may inherit immortality.”

e. John 3:16 is based on the following OT prophecies:

1. Psalm 2, Isa. 9:6-7 – the only begotten Son given by God

2. Psalm 37 – “the righteous” will inherit the earth **when “the wicked” are cut off** – they “should not be destroyed but may have age-enduring life.”

B. John 5:24 OSAS Claim: If you “believed” at any time you already have “eternal life” now and cannot be condemned.

1. **LGV: 24** *Truly, truly, I tell you that the one hearing my word and believing unto the one sending Me has age-enduring life, and is not going into condemnation, but has stepped out of death into life.*

² Wallace, Daniel B., Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics, pp. 620-621: Category, Substantive use of the present participle: “[T]he participle is concrete, speaking of the person who or thing which does. ... John 3:16, ‘everyone who believes’ – the idea seems to be both gnomic and continual: ‘everyone who continually believes.’ This is not due to the present tense only, but to the use of the present participle πιστεύων” ... [Footnote]: “The present was the tense of choice most likely because the NT writers by and large saw continual belief as a necessary condition of salvation. Along these lines, it seems significant that the promise of salvation is almost always given to ὁ πιστεύων [lit. ‘the believing’ – present participle].” The above statement is a remarkable admission given that Dr. Wallace is a Calvinist, teaching New Testament Studies at the famous Calvinist school, Dallas Theological Seminary.

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- a. “believing” is a **present participle**, indicating continuous/ongoing action, not one-time or past action.
- b. ἔχει “**has** age-enduring life” A present indicative verb usually indicates present time. However, it is also frequently used for something future **in order to stress certainty**, especially where the context is speaking of our hope.³ (examples: Luke 15:31; 1 Cor. 16:5; Heb. 12:28; Rev. 22:20).
- c. Context (vss. 22-29) points to the resurrection.
- d. The certainty expressed by the present indicative verb “has” and the future tense verb “shall not” refer to the time of the resurrection, for those who are “believing” (continuously). See: *II, E, Eternal life [immortality] actually received at the resurrection.*
- e. “is not **going** into condemnation” [*judgment of the wicked*] – present tense (going) used for certainty
- f. “but has stepped out of death into life” perfect tense in the context and time of the judgment (proleptic use of the perfect tense).⁴

C. John 10:27-28 Believers have “eternal life” and can “never perish.”

1. OSAS Claim: Jesus gives His sheep “eternal life” now, which means His sheep can never perish from the moment of conversion.
2. LGV: 27 *My sheep hear My voice and I know them and they follow Me. 28 And I am giving them age-enduring life, and they will certainly not be destroyed unto the age, and none shall snatch them out of My hand. 29 My Father who has given them to Me is greater than all. And no one is able to snatch out of My Father’s hand.*
 - a. “I am giving” (present indicative) indicates the certainty of a future event or act. See: *II, E, Eternal life [immortality] actually received at the resurrection.*
 - b. “none shall snatch them” refers to external entities. “Apostasy” is always self-induced or self-inflicted, see: II, A,B.

D. Rom. 8:35-39 Nothing can separate us from the love of Christ

1. “Nothing” & examples given are all external things, same as above.

³ Wallace, Daniel B., *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, pp. 536-537: “The present tense may describe an event that is wholly subsequent to the time of speaking, although as if it were present. Key to identification: is soon going to, is certainly going to, will ... Only an examination of the context will help one see whether this use of the present stresses immediacy or certainty. ... (which usually means either ‘I am about to’ [immediacy] or ‘I will inevitably’ [certainty]).”

⁴ Wallace, Daniel B., *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, p. 581: “Proleptic (Futuristic) Perfect, The perfect can be used to refer to a state resulting from an antecedent action that is future from the time of speaking. ... This usage occurs in the apodosis of a conditional clause (either explicit or implicit) and depends on the time of the verb in the protasis. Illustrations: Rom. 13:8; James 2:10; 1 John 2:5.”

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E. **Eph. 1:13-14** “Sealed” by the Spirit; a seal cannot be broken

1. A “seal” is official validation and can be broken, thus rendering the document void. (Ezek. 28:12-15; Rom. 4:11)

F. **Eph. 2:8-9** Salvation is by God’s “grace” not by our “works” so it cannot be lost

1. Falsely assumes that God grace is inexhaustible (Heb. 10:23-31)

G. **Heb. 13:5** God will never leave us or forsake us.

1. Paul was writing to Jewish Christians quoting from Deut. 4:27-31 & Josh. 1:1-9 (cf. Josh. 7:1-12).

- a. The promise that God would never leave or forsake His people was conditional (that they keep His Law) and collective for Israel as a nation, not for individuals who abandoned God’s covenant.

H. **1 Pet. 1:5** We are kept by the power of God, not by our own power. Therefore we cannot be lost.

1. Peter says we are kept by the power of God THROUGH FAITH, which is our part – continuing to believe. This is consistent with II, B,C.

I. **1 John 5:13** We can KNOW that we HAVE (present tense) “eternal life.”

1. This knowledge is linked with continuing to believe in this verse.
2. See: 1 John 2:24-25 which shows continuing to believe the apostolic testimony about Jesus is the condition for receiving the promise – immortality, age-enduring life.

IV. Conclusion:

A. ‘Unconditional Eternal Security’ is based on proof texting a few select verses, ignoring many conflicting Scriptures, taking certain verses out of context, and pressing grammatical points that are not demanded by the Greek text.

1. UEC also relies on redefining critical biblical terminology:

- a. The meaning of “eternal life” (which is synonymous with immortality) cannot be a reality now for the believer if he is still subject to “death,” another term that is altered to mean something other than death of the body (cf. John 5:24).

B. ‘Conditional Security’ is based upon harmonizing all of Scriptures using sound exegetical principles, normal rules of Greek grammar, and taking such terms as “eternal life” (age-enduring life) and “death” at face value.