

**A response to a paper presented by Dr. Greg Robertson:
“ETERNAL SECURITY: A BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL APPRAISAL”
For the 2nd Doctrinal Dialogue
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**Response Paper by
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I wish to thank the School of Theology and the Center for Christian Leadership for this opportunity to share because it is a privilege to be invited to participate in this dialogue where we discuss the things of God. I also want to begin by commending the work of my friend and colleague Dr. Greg Robertson for his effective discussion on Eternal Security. I am grateful also for the challenge to again read the old volumes of Augustine, Calvin, and Wesley and to renew my acquaintance with Dr. Greg since I have debated with him about this topic for the past month.

Establishing methodology and selecting starting points are crucial in doing theology since the system that results is foreshadowed through one's initial assumptions and determined by the techniques chosen. I owe this observation to the reformed theologian Van Til, and we can learn much from reformed theologians.

My orientation and field is from biblical studies, not the common philosophical-systematic-dogmatic approach that underlies Calvinistic-Reformed discussion. The carefully interpreted claims of scripture therefore present the authoritative data for any and all theological discussion.

To do theology we must consider and then identify what is the most significant, crucial, and fundamental question. The foremost question is what is the nature of God and the answer to this fundamental query shapes all other theological discourse by limiting what are acceptable solutions. At this point we must be cautious since the answer to this question cannot be faced in isolation ignoring the canonical input from the New Testament revelation offered by Jesus of Nazareth concerning the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The solution to the nature question establishes the agenda for soteriology, the discussion of the method, objects, and purpose of the saving act of God in Christ.

If the foremost feature, characteristic, attribute of the divine is power then all other discourse would be defined by power. If the foremost feature, characteristic, attribute of the divine is justice then all other discourse would be defined by justice. If the foremost feature, characteristic, attribute of the divine is love then all other discourse would be defined by love, and so forth.

All theological discourse must employ metaphorical language. The choice of terms to depict the divine nature influences the ways we apprehend that God is and acts. This is particularly true in

the choice between the concepts of king and father. With few exceptions God is seen as king in the Old Testament, and in the New Testament God is portrayed as father. This duality mirrors the “new” revelation offered in Christ (Heb. 1: 2) that contrasts with the “old” revelation offered to Israel. The new focus is not without its problems. We should not forget that the Roman doctrine of *patria potestas* itself could introduce some considerable ambiguity into understanding God as father among first century hearers.

I Could Sing Of Your Love Forever

Over the mountains and the sea,
Your river runs with love for me,
and I will open up my heart
and let the Healer set me free.
I'm happy to be in the truth,
and I will daily lift my hands:
for I will always sing of when
Your love came down. [Yeah!]

I could sing of Your love forever,
I could sing of Your love forever,
I could sing of Your love forever,
I could sing of Your love forever. [Repeat]

Oh, I feel like dancing -
it's foolishness I know;
but, when the world has seen the light,
they will dance with joy,
like we're dancing now.

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“I will sing of your love forever, I will sing of your love forever...” and so the song goes.

This is a praise song that we frequently sing in chapel at Warner. Now I confess that discussing theology using a chorus for a basis may appear somewhat flippant. However there is strong tradition here for our movement. For within the Church of God we sang our theology and still do. We dispensed our beliefs through song and still do.

The chorus of this song extols the love of God again and again. This I would assert is the prime starting point for Wesleyan thinking. One of our own church doctors, Dr. Kenneth Jones, should be seen to affirm the same emphasis in his own theological tome, *Theology of Holiness and Love*.

SUMMARY TO “ETERNAL SECURITY: A BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL APPRAISAL”

p. 1 recognizes the animosity and emotion that such talks engender.
the aim should be truth sharing not just group support

focus on two questions----(faith and conduct)

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?

p. 2 recognizes common faith---God is sovereign, unique and effective efficacy of Christ

p. 3 confess that God preserves, respect for grace acting through human agency to avoid Pelagian approaches

starts by addressing texts that have been used to support doctrine of indefectibility (issue p. 3,7, 9)

p. 4 continues pro texts, addresses the problem of a static state....contrasted with ongoing relationality

introduces discussion of parable in John 15: 1-8

p. 5 continues examination of parable that raises questions for the doctrine. those who hold the doctrine repudiate texts that deny it

p. 6 sharing is contingent, connection to Spirit (Heb. 6) is unique to Christians in Rom. 8 indefectibility of the regenerate is problematic

p. 7 two problems in COG rebuttals---anthropocentric focus represents an enlightenment view of human freedom

p. 8 advances the biblical view of freedom with scripture examples of freeing

rejects autonomous (mine) freedom argument

rejects "losing" language and use intentional rejection idea

p. 9 guard against undue confidence in the human

recognizes our own needs of revision

STRENGTHS

1. aims to discuss with grace unlike the other side who cries heretic

2. tells us his plan and then follows it just like a good sermon

3. sets belief within context by establishing commonalities, we have more in common than in difference.

4. examines texts used to support doctrine (Jn 6:37-39 and 10:28) and notes present tenses

5. offers crucial discussion that contrasts static state vs. covenantal relationship

6. examines texts used to question doctrine (Jn 15: 1-8, Heb 3: 6, 12-14, 6:1-8, I Cor 9:27)

7. presents a critique that includes confronting two problems seen in our own Reformation treatments when rejecting the doctrine
the definition and argument from human freedom
the language of “losing”

WEAKNESSES

1. To really set this doctrine in its context the paper should also discuss perseverance within the system of TULIP (total depravity, unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistible grace, and perseverance of the saints since the doctrine stands as a unit. A second way to set the context would be to review the historical development of the doctrine over the centuries.

2. For one whose focus is biblical studies, the paper offers few examples in surveying the scriptural evidence both pro and con. An extended appendix that offers a comprehensive catalog of all relevant texts would strengthen the application of the paper.

3. In its warnings about Reformation use of freedom, more citation of biblical texts could substantiate his critique, including at “frenetic attempts at activity and piety” Paul’s rebuke in Gal. 3: 1-5 and 5:4, inserting in the discussion about freedom constraints imposed by Paul’s analogy of two slaveries in Rom. 6...Paul knows of no absolute autonomous freedom, and citing “the Gospel is by its very nature agential” Paul’s concise summary of redemption found in Rom. 1: 16.

4. The paper’s appraisal of the second problem among Reformation treatments is too limited. More detailed critical discussion is needed on the “losing” term ...at my age I do not need to choose to lose ...the paper should elaborate the concept of apostasy and consider its relationship to human sinning.

Issues to be addressed

- Consider Abrahamic-Davidic form vs. Mosaic-Deuteronomic form as precursor for Reformed vs. Wesleyan-Arminian thought.
- Analyze individual and. church application as an attempt to avoid Western individualism.
- Discuss the historical situation of Augustine and Pelagius and their differing views.
- Survey the New Testament revelation of the nature of God and how it should shape such topics.

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