# Eternal Life, "Just Kidding"?

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When approached in the night by Nicodemus (John 3), Jesus spoke one of the most memorized and quoted verses of all time: *"For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish, but have eternal life."* (John 3:16, NASB 2020)

Was Jesus serious, or "just kidding"?

Whether we admit it or not, most of us have trouble with that verse—not the "loved the world" part, not the "gave His Son" part, not the "believe" part, but the "eternal" part.

It's not that we don't believe it as much as we think there are conditions that might cancel it out—things Jesus never said. Why is that such a big deal?

If you don't understand how eternally secure you are in Christ, it is impossible to fully trust, fully rest, or fully explore and enjoy your relationship with Jesus.

Think about that statement. God didn't save you to work for Him. Jesus saved you to trust Him in every aspect of your being, to rest in Him while He works through you, and for relationship—to enjoy Him!

Jesus said, *"And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent."* (John 17:3)

Bob Warren, who founded this ministry, summed up the essence of our Christian existence as, "to intimately know the heart of our Creator."

However, if your standing with the Lord is based on your behavior or performance, it is impossible to enjoy your relationship with Jesus. Real relationship only grows in an environment of love and unconditional acceptance. It does not happen void of that—when you are focused on unconfessed sin, spiritual failure, doing God's will, or whether you've done enough.

What do I mean by "eternal security?" Eternal security (I-tûr'-nôl sĭ-kyoor'-ĭ-tē)—an unwavering confidence that once you have been saved by faith in Jesus Christ, your salvation is eternally guaranteed by God and cannot be lost, regardless of future sins or doubts. Jesus has already met every requirement and fulfilled everything necessary for your salvation. There is no more for us to do except believe. It is not within our power to attain it, maintain it, change it, or undo it.

What are the main objections to eternal security? Normally two things: sin and free will.

The objections are important, but conquering the objections was never my goal. Those fell to the wayside one by one in seeing God's character and the process of coming to faith in Jesus.

Before we dive in, I want to share with you why I am so confident that Father will never ever, for any reason, forsake or abandon any believer. I have not always been so certain. Actually, I was solidly in the camp that is convinced you can lose your salvation.

In about 1978, I sat across the table from two guys who grew up Baptist just like me. The only difference was that they believed what they had been taught, "Once saved, always saved," and I didn't. What I remember so vividly was my zeal to prove them wrong. I felt like I had the Scriptures to support my position, but they didn't.

One of the guys went on to be my roommate in college. The other went on to seminary at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, Southern Baptist in Louisville, got his PhD at Cambridge, and now pastors a Baptist Church in Washington DC. He probably doesn't even remember our conversation.

Have you ever argued a position, felt like you won, but something just didn't feel right? I think that is why I remember it so well. I voiced the same objections that have been made for centuries. So, you might be wondering, what changed my mind?

I'm not fond of things being unsettled, especially when it concerns the most important thing in all of eternity—our relationship with Jesus. The doubts, fears, anxiety, and uncertainty of where I stood with God needed to be resolved for me to move on.

I remember countless nights lying in bed trying desperately to remember every possible sin I committed so I could close my eyes in peace. There was always the lingering thought, "What if I forgot one?" Was I still ok? If so, how is that possible?

The first step for me was understanding how forgiveness works. Jesus became sin on behalf of every person who has ever or will ever live (2Cor. 5:19-21).

*"He made Him who knew no sin to be sin in our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him"* (2Cor. 5:21)

And sin's price is death.

*"For the wages of sin is death, but the gracious gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord"* (Rom. 6:23)

If Jesus became our sin, He had to die as punishment. He willingly bore that penalty so you and I could be set free from its wages.

*"And when you were dead in your wrongdoings* [sin] *and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our wrongdoings* [sin]*, having canceled the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross"* (Col. 2:13-14, NASB 2020).

The mechanism by which He accomplished the cancelation of our debt was the blood He shed on the cross.

*"In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our wrongdoings* [sin], *according to the riches of his grace…"* (Eph. 1:7).

All who put their faith in Jesus and His shed blood have their death penalty stamped "paid in full." Biblical forgiveness doesn't just take care of certain sins, leaving others for us to deal with. No! Jesus dealt with the penalty for all your sin once for all time—past, present, and future (Heb. 10:10 & 14).

The second thing that changed my perspective on eternal security was digging out from Scripture what took place at salvation. Is it simply our name being erased from one book and penciled into another? Can I change my mind about this Jesus guy and get my name moved back to the old book?

Here's what happens when you are born again, so you decide…

When you repent (Greek, G3340, *metanoeo—to think differently or afterwards to reconsider)* of your sin (Acts 17:30, 2Pet. 3:9), confess Jesus as Lord and believe in your heart God raised Him from the dead (Rom. 10:9-10), the Holy Spirit takes the old self you inherited from Adam (Rom. 5:12), which is dead to God (1Cor. 15:22, Eph. 2:1), and crucifies it on the cross (Gal. 2:20, Rom. 6:6) by baptizing you into Christ (Rom. 6:3-4, 1Cor. 12:13), sealing you in Him forever (Eph. 1:13, 4:30).

Having been delivered from the domain of darkness and transferred to the Kingdom of the Son (Col. 1:13-14) and now placed into Christ, the Chosen One (Isa. 42:1), you receive His kind of life—eternal (John 3:16, 5:24). You are predestined in that moment to adoption as a son to receive a redeemed body upon the Lord's return (Eph. 1:5, Rom. 8:23, 29), being given the Holy Spirit as a pledge on His promise (Eph. 1:14); you are called (2Tim. 1:9), given a special gift (1Pet. 4:10), and allotted a measure of faith to operate in that gift (Rom. 12:3).

He simultaneously makes you a new creature (2Cor. 5:17) and raises you up alive to God and dead to sin (Rom. 6:5 & 11) and the Law (Rom. 7:4)—born again (John 3:3); makes you righteous (2Cor. 5:21), holy and blameless (Eph. 1:4), eternally forgiven (Eph. 1:7, Heb.

10:12 & 17), justified (Rom. 5:1), complete (Col. 2:10), perfect (Heb. 10:14), and seats you in heavenly places with Him (Eph. 2:6). In that same instant you are reconciled to Him (2Cor. 5:18), He comes to dwell inside of you (Col. 1:27), and it is His life that now sustains you (Rom. 5:10, Col. 3:4).

There are several things that occur on that list that change who you are. They are eternal, with no indication or possibility in Scripture for being undone.

For example, how can the crucifixion of your old self with Christ be reversed (Rom. 6:6, Gal. 2:20)? Nothing comes off the cross alive. Your old self has been eternally eradicated, not put to sleep, not just faking it, but dead and never to be resurrected.

The Holy Spirit replaced your old sinful self with your new righteous self—a new creation, a new creature (2Cor. 5:17). That's a serious transformation—the old self is dead and eradicated, and the new self is alive. I have yet to find any provision in Scripture to indicate the Holy Spirit will crucify the new self and resurrect the old because you sinned too much or decided this Jesus stuff is not for you.

The Holy Spirit removed you from your spiritual location at birth, dead in Adam, to your new eternal location, alive in Christ (Rom. 6:3-4, 1Cor. 12:13). Once in Christ, the Holy Spirit closes the hatch and locks it (Eph. 1:13, 4:30). No one or nothing can remove you from being in Christ.

In fact, in these verses, the Holy Spirit is called *"the Holy Spirit of promise."* Nothing gets past Him. He will uphold His promise. Ephesians 4:30 goes on to say you were *"sealed for the day of redemption."* That is another way of saying nothing can remove you from being in Christ; which includes your free will.

You exercised your free will to believe. If for some reason years later you decide not to believe, you are free to do that. But it doesn't change who you are. Your soul and spirit don't revert to the old self.

It is no different than jumping off a cliff and changing your mind on the way down. Your free will can't change the laws of gravity. Likewise, you are forever sealed in Christ and forever the new self.

Which leads us into the third reason I am convinced believers are eternally secure in Jesus. God is a covenant God. He never goes back on His word, never fails, never lies (Titus 1:2,

Heb. 6:18, Num. 23:19). He can do nothing short of complete fulfillment of every word He has spoken. It is His character.

My favorite example of this comes from the Old Testament where God chooses Israel to be His bride and makes all these covenants with her. She fails miserably at the one she has responsibility to keep and will continue to do so right up until the end. Despite her rebellion, idolatry, and rejection of His Messiah, God will pour out His blessing upon her in the end. It has nothing to do with Israel and everything to do with God keeping His covenants (Jer. 31:31-34, Ezek. 36:22-38).

So, when God makes a promise, it will be done:

*For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day.* (John 6:40)

*My sheep listen to My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give them eternal life, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand.* (John 10:27-29)

*For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.* (Rom. 8:38-39)

*For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will complete it until the day of Christ Jesus.* (Phil. 1:6)

*Therefore He is also able to save forever those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.* (Hebrews 7:25)

*Now to Him who is able to protect you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory, blameless with great joy,* (Jude 24)

The fourth thing that has me convinced of our security in Christ—He has built the perfect temple. This comes from a study of the tabernacle in the wilderness and Solomon's temple.

In building the tabernacle, Moses was instructed to follow the pattern given to him on the mountain of God (Exo. 25:1-27:21, 36:1-40:38, 39:26b & 43). It had to be perfect in every way, completed without flaw and according to the specific pattern. Just to emphasize how important perfection was to the building of the tabernacle, phrases like *"…just as the Lord had commanded Moses"* are found 18 times in Exodus 39 and 40.

We also have similarly elaborate instructions conveyed to Solomon from David who said, *"All this…the Lord made me understand in writing by His hand upon me, all the details of this pattern"* (1Chron. 28:11-19). We know the result was pleasing to the Father based on the outcome (2Chron. 5:11-14). God's presence filled the house just like when Moses completed the tabernacle in the wilderness.

God vacated each of those temples because they became defiled by sin and He could no longer stand it. We see His glory leaving Solomon's temple in Ezekiel 10-11 before it was burned down by Nebuchadnezzar.

The problem was not that the temples weren't beautiful enough or spacious enough. God didn't require much space in any of them. They were constructed as perfect as humanly possible. The problem: human effort has never been and never will be good enough.

*"However, the Most High does not dwell in houses made by human hands; as the prophet says:"* (Acts 7:48)

*"The God who made the world and everything that is in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made by hands;"* (Acts 17:24)

When we put our faith in Jesus, the Holy Spirit inhabits our soul and spirit. WE become the temple of the Holy Spirit. For that to happen, He must make us more perfect and holy than is humanly possible. Otherwise, it would be a repeat of what happened to Adam and Eve every time you mess up!

Your identity is integral to your position as His dwelling place—a holy, perfect, blameless, sanctified saint of God. It was His hand that transformed you into His tabernacle—a place He is please to dwell forever!

You have been transformed into a temple that can't been defiled by sin. However, don't hear me encouraging you to try breaking a world record for sin. If you are truly born again, that is the last thing you want to do. When we sin as new creations, we are miserable

because it is not who we are. We are no longer designed for the old lifestyle. Those old behaviors break our heart.

Even though we are already forgiven for all sin for all time, we still take our wrong choices to the throne of grace in confession. The response is not one of disappointment or punishment, but restoration, acceptance, and love.

**Let's look at some of the Scriptures used to reject our eternal security.**

Matt. 7:21-23, The Lord said, "I never knew you." These were not believers.

Matt. 24:13, This Scripture is specifically talking about the end times and Israel, not the end of your life. It concerns the Jews who are being destroyed by the antichrist during tribulation, not believers.

John 15:6, The problem here is that most people interpret the word "abide" or "remain" as some kind of extra level of Christianity. The Greek word "men-o'" means to dwell. It simply refers to those who are in Christ. Those who are not in Christ can expect to be cast into the fire and burned.

Rom. 11:20-22, This passage refers to Gentiles as a whole and not to individuals.

1Cor. 9:27, Paul was not concerned about losing his salvation (2Tim. 1:12, 2Tim. 4:8), but about losing his ministry effectiveness and witness because of moral failure.

Gal. 5:4, This is not about losing salvation, but about trying to be justified by the Law. Some of the Galatians were being convinced by the Judaizers that they needed to be circumcised to be saved.

Gal. 5:19-21, These verses deal with inheritance, not salvation. One can lose his reward at the judgment seat of Christ (Rom. 14:10-12, 2Cor. 5:10-11) for not walking in the Spirit. His works are burned up, but he is still saved (1Cor. 3:15).

Ezek. 18:24, This was before the cross. This person's righteousness was his own. We trust in the righteousness of Jesus.

Mark 3:28-30, Blasphemy of the Holy Spirit could only be committed by the generation living when Jesus was on the earth. It was the rejection of Jesus as the Messiah; in essence the sin of unbelief. Unbelief is the "unforgiveable" sin.

2Pet. 2:1, 20-22, Nothing in these verses say they lose their salvation. These individuals have again been entangled in the defilements of the world. It was worse for them because their hearts became hardened by the deceitfulness of sin (Heb. 3:13). Those individuals are much harder to reach than a person who has not known "the way of truth."

Heb. 6:4-6, Without understanding the context of Hebrews, these verses will easily cause doubt about your security in Christ. The book of Hebrews was written specifically to Jews in Jerusalem who were under great persecution for Christ. They were considering going back under the Law for a season until things calmed down. The author is trying to convince them to leave Jerusalem and not deny their Christianity. This is why the book shows how much greater the priesthood and sacrifice of Jesus was than what was available under the Law.

The book of Hebrews was written around 64-66 AD, only a few years before the Romans overran Jerusalem and slaughtered a million Jews in the process (70 AD). As far as we know and history tells us, no Christians lost their lives. They heeded the warning in the book and fled instead of rejecting their Christianity for a season to avoid persecution.

These verses (6:4-6) present a hypothetical situation—if a believer were able to reject his salvation, there is no more sacrifice to redeem them. Jesus is not doing it again. He did it once for all time (Heb. 7:27, 8:12, 10:10, 12, 14), never to be repeated.

Heb. 10:26, Just like the example in chapter six, we read something into these Scriptures that is not there. The sin he is speaking of is to persist in unbelief after hearing the gospel, not just any sin. When we look at Scripture with the wrong lense we jump to wrong conclusions.

The writer of Hebrews was not schizophrenic. Why would he write some of the most profound statements about our eternal security in Christ and then destroy them in the same book?

Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12 & 21, The problem here is that you have already overcome (1John 4:4, 5:4). These Scriptures are easy to view thru the lense of works and behavior—trying to make it until the end and be named an overcomer. Those who were believers were

already overcomers.  They were being encouraged to live like who they were in the midst of a wicked and perverse society.