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**Eternal Security:  
1 John 2:15-17, 3:7-10, & 2 John 1:8-9**

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**Introduction**

I number myself among those who believe that the Doctrine of Eternal Security is soundly based in Scripture, but I think the Bible approaches this doctrine from a different angle than is typically presented in many churches and schools. I affirm that a genuinely regenerate individual cannot lose his salvation, the Biblical perspective is this: the true believer will continue to believe. That's how we find out who is and is not truly born again. Some theologians refer to this as "the perseverance of the saints [believers]."

The first and second letters of John are no exception to this perspective. The approach is simple: if one makes a profession and continues on in the faith, that profession evidences itself as genuine. If one turns away from the faith, the problem is not that a genuine faith has been abandoned, but rather that a defective faith has been exposed.

John makes the point that a believer with genuine faith, one who truly belongs to God, will not abandon the Savior. Observe I John 2:19-20: "They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went

out, so that it would be shown that they all are not of us. But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you all know.”

Note the part of the passage that reads, “if they had been of us, they would have remained with us...” It rings of a guarantee, does it not? Those who are of us will indeed remain among us. Those who abandon the faith were never really one of us. That is pretty potent.

But that is not the passage in question. In order to understand the passages enumerated in our title, we must understand the difference between sin (as mentioned in I John) and the sin (or sinning “the” sin). I refer to this as “the sin” of I John (this is not original with me).

John makes it clear that all believers continue to sin, and educates us as to God’s provision for cleansing. This cleansing is mentioned in regards to fellowship with God, not salvation.

I John 1:8-10 reads: “If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us.”

Verse eight reminds us all of an unpleasant reality: we are all still sinners. The verb for “have” in the Greek language is in the present tense, thus implying duration (“if we say that we are not having sin”). So John’s discussion is not whether we have ever sinned, but rather whether we STILL are sinning. John says if we say that we still do not sometimes sin, we are deceiving ourselves.

Those verses address sin in general. But there is “the sin,” namely the sin of turning away from Christ, that is impossible for the genuine (and I want to emphasize the word “genuine”) to commit.

This is the sin John has in mind in I John 3:9-10, “No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.

“By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother.”

The NASB translation “practices sin” (and the NIV “continues to sin”) is an interpretive attempt to express the durative nature of the present tense. Yet the translators did not choose to do this with I John 1:8, yet here they do so. Here in 3:9, the text literally reads, “the one who is born of God is not sinning.”

The idea here is not that the born again believer rarely sins, but that he is not among those sinning in the way John has in mind, the sin fully expressed in 2:19-20, namely leaving the faithful behind and denying Christ (apostatizing). True believers do not and cannot sin “the sin.” Not only does the true believer continue in the faith, he also advocates the truth of the Gospel. In addition, he embraces the Gospel and it shows its impact by his lifestyle. He is drawn to fellow believers and experiences a camaraderie with them that produces love for them.

Those genuinely saved evidence the reality of their conversion by (1) continuing in the truth, (2) evidencing a new life in Christ, and (3) caring about other believers in the congregation.

The fruit of conversion is not what produces conversion. Once justified by faith alone and cleansed by the blood of Christ, the seed has been planted and the tree nurtured. Good trees produce good fruit. The fruit does not determine one’s destiny; it only reveals it.

The fact that John is using a two-track definition of sin (sin in general and THE sin of deserting the faith) is further evidenced in I John 5:16-17. There, “the sin” is labeled as a sin “leading to death.” This distinction between “sin” and “the sin” is not the fabrication of theologians; it is made by John himself. Here are the verses:

“If anyone sees his brother commit a sin that does not lead to death, he should pray and God will give him life. I refer to those whose sin does not lead to death. There is a sin that leads to death. I am not saying that he should pray about that. All wrongdoing is sin, and there is sin that does not lead to death.

“We know that anyone born of God does not continue to sin; the one who was born of God keeps him safe, and the evil one cannot harm him.”

Professed believers in the New Testament were presumed to be brothers in the Lord. But, like Judas Iscariot, tares are planted among the wheat. Since the true Christian cannot sin (in a way that leads to death), such a sin (apostasy) indicates that one is not truly a child. There is no change of status here, only a revelation of status.

In the case of typical sins, God’s discipline (which may even result in premature death, as evidenced in I Corinthians 11:30) can be averted through prayer and repentance. In the case of the sin of apostasy, John tells us not to even bother praying. This is the sin of

Hebrews 6 for which there is no repentance. This is the sin not of physical death but spiritual hopelessness. This rejection of Christ after professing Christ evidences that one is not on the path to life, but to death. Paths have not changes, matters have only become transparent.

The true believer need not fear such a bleak destiny. John knew what many today deny: no one born of God can commit that sin. God keeps Him safe. I John 5:17 is obvious in meaning once we make a distinction between sin and “the sin.”

**A. 1 John 2:15-17**

“Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world--the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does--comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.”

**Expanded, Interpreted, Amplified, and Paraphrased**

Society and the philosophy of man-centered society should not be our first love. Since the will of God and popular or traditional trends may be at odds, your love for the Father must be greater than your desire to fit in or your lust for illegitimate pleasure and stimulation.

The things that make sin attractive—your own sinful nature, the beautiful things that are appealing to the eye, or the things that make you feel good and produce arrogance, these are not going to make you what God wants you to be.

Society and sinful temptations are temporary, but the one who genuinely knows Christ will evidence it by continuing on in the faith, staying true to God and ordering his life with Christ as Lord. This person will enjoy God’s presence forever.

**B. 1 John 3:7-10**

“Dear children, do not let anyone lead you astray. He who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous. He who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work. No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God. This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what

is right is not a child of God; nor is anyone who does not love his brother.”

**Expanded, Interpreted, Amplified, and Paraphrased**

Brothers, do not be lead astray. Anyone who does what is righteous by staying true to the faith, living a life that is consistent with God’s standards, and caring about fellow believers, this person has the righteousness that comes from faith in Jesus Christ.

Others who are not meeting these standards evidence that they belong to the enemy’s camp. Though they are in the church, they are planted among us by Satan himself. The devil has a track record of falling away from the truth of God since the beginning. After all, remember that one of the reasons Christ came was to destroy the devil’s work, so we should not sympathize with those who are trying to lead others into error regarding salvation or the nature of Christ. It would be inconsistent for us to help the devil’s work when we believe Christ came to destroy that work.

The genuine believer is born of God and is a new creation; it is impossible for the man or woman who is a child of God to desert the faith. His spiritual genes come from God, so his soul is safe from the type of sin that denies the God who gave him life.

This is how we can sort out the wheat from the tares, the true believer from those planted in our midst by Satan. If we hold fast to the faith and if we are drawn to fellow believers like siblings are drawn together, it is because we are of the same family, God’s family.

Those who are lead away from the true teaching about Christ, after having once understood it and professing it, are evidencing their kinship to another family, the devil’s family.

**C. 2 John 1:8-9**

These verses cannot be fully understood unless approached in context. I will quote 2 John 1-11: “Watch out that you do not lose what you have worked for, but that you may be rewarded fully. Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God; whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take him into your house or welcome him. Anyone who welcomes him shares in his wicked work.”

**Expanded, Interpreted, Amplified, and Paraphrased**

Watch out and do not lose some or all of your rewards by aiding and abetting false teachers. Enjoying heaven is wonderful, but you want the joy that comes from having a full reward (crowns and treasures in heaven). You can lose those rewards if you are naïve and not alert to false teachers. So here is one basic criteria: those who continue in the teaching of Christ – not just those who made a start and then deserted or altered what we apostles taught – are true, but false teachers who deny the Son don't have the Father. They may talk about God, but if they deny that the Son is God then they have no true relationship to the true God.

If you receive, encourage, and help these false teachers to propagate their errors, then you are partly responsible for what they are doing. If you do so, you will lose your rewards in heaven and be one 'saved so as by fire.'"

### **Conclusion**

John boldly asserts that the true believer, the true seed, does preserve. The genuine believer has been born of God and he cannot sin that "sin unto death." Rather than teaching us that believers can lose their salvation and should live life in fear of doing so, the Apostle offers us a template to interpret the reason for defections within the Kingdom. The: tares have been sown among the wheat. Paul had felt this pain when two friends, Hymaneus and Philetus, defected, "...The Lord knows those who are his..." (2 Timothy 2:19) Paul concluded. If Paul was surprised to see this happens, we should not delude ourselves into thinking that Satan has run out of tares.

But the Lord does know them that are His. It's not that they shift back and forth. Those who belong to God belong to God. Those who do belong not do not belong. Those of us who are wheat need to bless His Name all the more!