

# Calvinism: Perseverance of the Saints

This is a very long and in-depth look at one of the most prominent Calvinist doctrines: perseverance of the saints. This doctrine is so prevalent in Christianity today that even those who completely oppose Calvinism latch onto this doctrine, believing it to be biblical truth. Taking the teachings of prominent Calvinists, including John Calvin himself, and comparing them against solid, contextual Bible interpretation shows that this doctrine is imposed upon Scripture, not taught by Scripture.

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### **1. What is the doctrine of Perseverance of the Saints?**

The doctrine of the perseverance of the saints (the "P" in "TULIP") is the belief that once a person is "saved" (justified), they will automatically grow and mature in their faith, and in good deeds and service, throughout their life up until their death. If a "Christian" does not do this, if they backslide at various points, or they don't "finish well," this doctrine says that they were not "truly" saved and thus are destined for hell.

*Perseverance of the Saints is what Calvinists say gives them the assurance of eternal security, but in actuality the emphasis is upon the believer's faithfulness in persevering—not upon God's keeping power. Uncertainty as to one's ultimate salvation is, in fact, built into the very fabric of Calvinism itself. [Bob Kirkland, *Calvinism: None Dare Call It Heresy; Spotlight on the Life and Teachings of John Calvin* (Eureka, MT: Lighthouse Trails, 2018), 34.]*

Many people believe that Calvinism's definition of Perseverance of the Saints is eternal security. But that's not true. Many Christians reject Arminianism out of hand, knowing that

a person cannot lose their salvation. So based on that assumption, they call themselves "Calvinist." But there isn't just a binary choice between Calvinism (can't lose salvation) and Arminianism (can lose salvation).

In fact, here's what many Calvinists would say:

*"It must be evident that there are just two theories which can be maintained by evangelical Christians upon this important subject; that all men who have made any study of it, and who have reached any settled conclusions regarding it, must be either Calvinists or Arminians. There is no other position which a 'Christian' can take."*

[Lorraine Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination* (Philipsburg, NH: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1932), 333.]

Perseverance of the Saints is not the same as eternal security. Eternal security is "once saved always saved." Perseverance of the Saints is that you don't know if you possess eternal security or not. If you are one of the "elect" you have eternal security, but until your faith "perseveres" and you die with your faith in "an upward state," you don't know if you were elect or not. So Perseverance of the Saints has nothing to do with eternal security...it has to do with whether you can believe that you're actually one who possesses eternal security. In Calvinism, no one can be sure whether or not they are one of the elect or not until they die. ***There is no assurance of salvation in Calvinism.***

In Calvinism, you don't know if your faith in Christ is authentic (it only is if you're one of the elect), or whether it's a "spurious" faith. The only way you know the difference is if you persevere in your faith to your dying breath. And you don't know that you'll persevere until your dying breath.

*"It should be obvious that the Calvinist doctrine of the perseverance of the saints is not one in the same as 'once saved always saved.'"* [Kenneth G. Talbot and W. Gary Crampton, *Calvinism, Hyper-Calvinism and Arminianism* (Edmonton, AB: Still Waters Revival Books, 1990) 52.]

Clearly the Bible does not teach Calvinism's doctrine of perseverance of the saints. Instead, it teaches the *preservation* of the saints. God preserves believers until their dying breathe...the onus/responsibility is on God, not on us. Peter talks about the preservation of the saints in 1 Peter 1:4-5:

- 4 to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable, undefiled, and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you,
- 5 who are **protected by the power of God** through faith for a salvation [glorification] ready to be revealed in the last time.

This passage alone completely destroys Calvinism's doctrine of perseverance of the saints. Everything Peter says here is done by God, not by us. The eternal security of the believer is "protected by the power of God."

### **1a. Does Calvinism Really Teach This?**

Yes! Below are a couple of writings from the pen of John Calvin himself, along with many prominent Calvinists from the past and the present:

*"Those who do not persevere unto the end belong not to the calling of God. The Fall of Adam was not by accident, nor by chance, but was ordained by the secret counsel of God."* [John Calvin, *Calvin's Calvinism: God's Eternal Predestination and Secret Providence* (Reformed Free Publishing Association, Kindle edition from the 2009 2nd edition), Kindle location 532.]

*"What they (the Christians at Corinth) had attained so far is nothing, unless they keep steadily on; because it is not enough that they once started off on the way of the Lord, if they do not make an effort to reach the goal."* [John Calvin, *The First Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1960

Notice that Calvin puts the responsibility for maintaining salvation on the Corinthians, but Peter puts the responsibility on God (Cf. 1 Peter 1:4-5). Also notice that Calvin does not appeal to Scripture to state his claim.

Late in his life, A.W. Pink bought into the Calvinist doctrine of perseverance of the saints. Pink was great in his early years, but as he got older he came to believe in some very crazy things.

*"Readers, if there is a reserve in your obedience, you are on your way to hell."* [Pink, *Practical Christianity*, p16.]

*"Something more than believing in Christ is necessary to ensure the soul's reaching Heaven."* [Pink, Dec 1947, cited in Iain H. Murray's, *The Life of Arthur W. Pink* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1981 edition), 248-49.]

*"Holiness in this life is such a part of our 'salvation' that it is a necessary means to make us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in heavenly light and glory."* [Pink, *The Doctrine of Sanctification* (Prisbrary Publishing, Kindle edition, Arthur Pink Collection Book 16), Kindle location 374, citing Puritan Walter Marshall, 1692. This book is also available on Amazon in a print edition published by

CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, July 9, 2016, and this quote is found on page 27.]

You can look back on A.W. Pink's life and certainly question whether he persevered to the end. Many would say he did not...he was angry, he lashed out in many of his writings, he did not attend a local church body, and he became a very bitter man. If you measure Pink's life by his requirements for perseverance, it's likely that he fails.

Reformed minister John Otis, founder of Triumphant Publications Ministries, said:

*"...maintaining an unforgiving spirit...will surely destroy our souls in hell."*

So (according to Otis) if you're not following the biblical command to forgive as you have been forgiven, this is evidently evidence that you're not one of the elect, and if you die in that state, you're on your way to hell.

Forgiving others is a command that believers are given in Scripture, and God gives it for our good as well as the good of others. But nowhere is it stated in Scripture that forgiveness a condition for salvation.

Notice that Otis does not provide a Scripture reference. In fact, none of these teachers provide Scripture references for their claims.

John Murray, in his book titled, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* [Grand Rapids, MO: Eerdman's Publishing Co., 2015 edition), p152, 154-55, 165] said:

*"The crucial test of true faith is endurance to the end, abiding in Christ, and continuance in the Word.... He cannot abandon himself to sin; he cannot come under the domination of sin; he cannot be guilty of **certain kinds of unfaithfulness**.... Let us appreciate the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints and recognize that **we may entertain the faith of our security in Christ only as we persevere in faith and holiness to the end**.... The perseverance of the saints reminds us very forcefully that only those who persevere to the end are **truly saints**."*

- "...certain kinds of unfaithfulness" - exactly what "kinds of unfaithfulness" can I not be guilty of in order to prove I'm part of the "elect"? What about profanity? Gambling? Laziness? Anger? What about substance abuse? Certainly adultery and murder would qualify, wouldn't it? If this is a heaven/hell issue, as Calvinism believes, why is there no specific list?
  - If you buy into Calvinism, you have to guess where the line is. What can I do or not do that will prove that I'm not elect and send me to hell? "Certain kinds of unfaithfulness" is never defined, either by adherents to Calvinism or in the Bible.

- "...we may entertain the faith of our security in Christ only as we persevere in faith and holiness to the end" - translation: you have no (zero) assurance of salvation at all. This is the doctrine of perseverance of the saints in a nutshell.
- To Murray, and Calvinism in general, your assurance of salvation and eternity in heaven with Christ resides on you...not on God's promises or His commitment to keep you.
- "...truly saints" - in Calvinism, there are "believers" (general) and there are "true believers" (those who are truly saved because they persevere to the end)
- But Scripture has no notion of someone being "truly saved"...you're either saved because you put your faith in Christ, or you're not. It's a binary choice. The idea that someone is "truly saved" just means they are saved, nothing more.
- Calvinism creates this whole new category of believers...there are people who believe, but are they "true believers"? Calvinism thinks there are two categories of believers...those who believe with their own faith (spurious believers) and those who believe because they received the "gift of faith" (true believers). Nowhere in the Bible is this distinction found.

When you start thinking about people in terms of whether they are just believers (with their own faith) or if they are "true believers" (who received the gift of faith from God), it destroys you individually because you're always thinking of yourself rather than Jesus. What could be more depressing than constant introspection, constantly looking at myself rather than Christ?

Even worse, it gets you looking at other people. "Uh-oh, sister so-and-so skipped choir rehearsal two Wednesdays in a row, and I know she's not sick or out of town. Maybe she's not "quite in" on this Christianity thing...she doesn't seem to be persevering very well." You begin to get a hyper-critical, judgmental attitude toward other Christians who may be going through something you don't know about.

These people will say things like, "There are a lot of people in this church who are not saved. I can't see any evidence of salvation in many of these people's lives." Then they go to Matt 7 and say, "They're going to hear those words, 'Depart from Me, I never knew you.'" This is the result of Calvinism's Perseverance of the Saints...a mean-spirited, judgmental attitude toward other believers. A "fruit inspector" attitude...if I can't see any fruit in your life, you must not be saved.

It's funny that John MacArthur, who had a confused theology—mostly correct in eschatology (pre-Trib Rapture, separation of Israel-Church, premillennial), but Calvinist in his soteriology—wrote a book called "Saved Without A Doubt." This may be the most mis-

named book in the history of Christianity. If you read this book, you will not believe you're 'saved without a doubt'...you'll doubt whether or not you're saved.

**"If a person fails to love and obey the Lord through the trials of life, then there is no evidence that he possesses saving faith. How many people do you know who came to church for a while, had a little trouble in their lives, and left? Although they may have made a profession of faith in Christ, they cannot be identified as those who love Him because their lives are not characterized by enduring obedience."**

[MacArthur, *Saved Without A Doubt*, 177.]

- "If a person fails to love and obey the Lord through the trials of life" - seriously? Every single believer in this history of the world has failed to love and obey the Lord perfectly in at least one trial. If this is the bar to heaven, no one will make it.
  - Failing to love and obey the Lord in a trial is not the thing that keeps me as a child of God...God's grace for me does that.
- "...saving faith" - in Calvinism, you either have "saving faith" (the faith that comes from God) or the faith that doesn't save (the faith that comes from you)

This whole quote is nothing more than recycled Roman Catholicism packaged for a Protestant audience. MacArthur didn't come up with this doctrine from looking at the Bible, he recycled it from John Calvin (500 years ago), who in turn recycled it from Augustine (1200 years before Calvin). Augustine was "the Catholic's Catholic."

This is why MacArthur had so many ex-Catholics in his church. His church, his readers, his listeners, and his followers were majority ex-Catholics. The reason for this is that MacArthur was a master wordsmith in translating people from one form of legalism (Roman Catholicism) to another form of legalism (Calvinism).

Reformed Theology is the mistress of Roman Catholicism.

Calvinist theologian Charles Hodge (1797-1878), in referring to evidence of being elected, said:

**"The only evidence of election is effectual calling, that is, the production of holiness. And the only evidence of the genuineness of this call and the certainty of our perseverance, is a patient continuance in well doing."** [Hodge, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdman's Publishing, 1983 edition), 292.]

- According to Hodge, if you are not "producing holiness" you are not saved, and obviously not one of the "elect"

- "...the only evidence of the genuineness of this call" - more evidence of two faiths...spurious faith (my own faith, meaning I'm not elect, thus not saved), and genuine/true faith (given to me by God)
- "...patient continuance in well doing" - how general and non-specific can you get? More words of non-specificity of what a person needs to do to be "truly" saved.
- Hodge, one of Calvinism's premiere theologians, demonstrates that in Calvinism the authenticity and genuineness of your salvation is found in your personal, subjective life experiences, not on the objective promises of God.
  - The problem with this is that our own personal experiences vacillate from day to day, week to week, but the objective promises of God never change

John Piper has scrubbed the following quote from his website because it was bad marketing and he received significant backlash, but this is nonetheless what he believes and teaches:

*"No Christian can be sure that he is a true believer. Hence, there is an **on-going need** to be **dedicated to the Lord** and to **deny ourselves** so that we **might** make it."* [John Piper and Pastoral Staff, *TULIP: What We Believe about the Five Points of Calvinism: Position Paper of the Pastoral Staff* (Desiring God Ministries, 1997), 25, cited in Dave Hunt, *What Love is This?*, 379.]

- "...on-going need" - perseverance of the saints
- "...dedicated to the Lord" - ok, I'm "dedicated to the Lord" but I'm caught in a cycle of sin. Am I still saved, John?
- "...deny ourselves" - general; in what ways do I need to deny myself? Can I mostly deny myself, but in some areas, maybe that I'm not even aware of, can my pride get in the way? What amount of "myself" must I "deny" in order to "make it"?
- "...might" - notice the lack of assurance of salvation

D.A. Carson said:

*"The evidence that your faith is genuine is in its perseverance."*

According to Carson, if your faith was given to you by God, you WILL persevere. It's only those people who have faith on their own, because God didn't give them faith (because they aren't one of the "elect") who won't persevere.

## 2. The Calvinist Belief in "Final Salvation"

As if it couldn't get any worse, it does. Thomas Shreiner, a Calvinist, has coined the term "final salvation" to confuse things even more. Other prominent Calvinists, including John

Piper and Michael Horton, have begun using this term "final justification" or "final salvation" as well.

*"The New Testament clearly teaches that bare faith cannot save and that works are necessary for final justification or final salvation." [Schreiner, *Faith Alone—The Doctrine of Justification* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 191.]*

- What happened to "faith alone in Christ alone"? Clearly, Calvinism has departed from orthodox Christianity when they say "bare faith (faith alone) cannot save."
  - What about the thief on the cross? He had nothing to offer other than faith in Christ, and yet Jesus told him that "Today, you will be with Me in Paradise."
  - But Schreiner (and Piper) come along and say that's not enough! You have to have some works thrown in there as well. Your works are "necessary" in order for you to be saved.

## **2a. What is "Final Salvation"?**

It means that God is collecting information on you for your entire life in order to determine if the faith that you have is really from God. If your faith truly came from God, it's always going to persevere in the form of good works. So God is collecting data on you for your entire life, then when you die, God looks at the data and makes an arbitrary decision whether you've lived up to the (unknown) standard. If you have, you go to heaven. If not, your faith was "spurious" and you go to hell.

So your justification is not declared at the beginning of your salvation, the moment I put my faith in Christ, like the Bible clearly teaches. Rather, in Calvinism, it's declared at the end of your salvation, after you die. How is this doctrine different than Islam? In Islam, you do good deeds for your entire life and hope that it was good enough that Allah allows you into heaven. This is why people fly planes into buildings or blow themselves up in order to kill others...because these "good deeds" will guarantee entrance for them into heaven.

Biblically speaking, justification is the declaration of innocence from God that a person receives at the point of faith alone in Christ alone. It's God's announcement of my innocence, even though I'm guilty. I thought this happened at the beginning of salvation, when I put my faith in Christ? Calvinism says no, that actually happens at the end, and you better hope and pray you're one of the elect and received the gift of faith from God, otherwise you're out of luck. You may think you're "saved" for your entire life, but you're really not and you're going to spend eternity in hell.

The following quotes about final salvation come from John Piper and the Pastoral Staff at Desiring God Ministries:

*"Essentially to the Christian life and necessary for final salvation is the killing of sin (Rom 8:13) and the pursuit of holiness (Heb 12:14)."*

How do I know when I get to the end of my life, that the data collected on me is sufficient to demonstrate that I'm one of the elect, and I get justified? According to Piper, if I have "killed sin" and "pursued holiness" then I should be good. One of these guys finally gives a couple Scripture references, problem is (surprise!) both verses are taken completely out of context (see below).

*"We must also own up to the fact that our final salvation is made contingent upon the subsequent obedience which comes from faith."*

You don't know if you're really saved unless you've been given the gift of faith, and you don't know if you've been given the gift of faith unless your "subsequent obedience" is good enough.

*"God justifies us on the first genuine act of saving faith, but in doing so He has a view to all subsequent acts of faith contained, as it were, like seed in that first act."*

Translation: the first act needs to be borne out by the subsequent acts, to justify/prove that the first act was genuine.

*"Election is unconditional and glorification is conditional."*

Why does Piper say these things? Not because that's what the Bible says (because it doesn't), but because in Calvinism no one really know if you're one of the elect unless you persevere. Until all the data is collected on you and it can be demonstrated in heaven that you have enough good works, you don't know whether or not you are "truly saved."

*"The New Testament lays before us a vast array of conditions for final salvation. Not only initial repentance and faith, but perseverance in both, demonstrated in love toward God and neighbor, are part of that holiness without which no one will see the Lord (Heb 12:14)." [Michael Horton, *Introducing Covenant Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker 2006), 182.]*

Arminians believe that if you don't persevere in your faith and good works until the very end, you may lose your salvation. Calvinists say that if you don't persevere in your faith and good works until the very end, you were never saved in the first place. Uncertainty of your

ultimate salvation is built into Calvinism...this is where they get the doctrine of "final salvation."

If my entrance into heaven is based on my ability to hang on to a rope, there's going to be a lot of uncertainty in my mind whether or not I am saved.

Once you understand Calvinism's view of perseverance of the saints, you can understand the rise of the "signs & wonders" movement. The "signs & wonders" movement seeks some type of subjective experience (a voice from God, a word from the Lord, a vision, etc.) from God. It's not that these subjective experiences are necessarily bad...the problem comes when people seek after such experiences in order to confirm they are still saved or were saved to begin with. Whatever God chooses to give us in terms of subjective experiences is up to God, but we should not be seeking after these things. Typically when people seek subjective experiences, they don't have assurance of salvation.

## **2b. "Final Salvation" is Clearly Unbiblical**

Justification is the first tense of our salvation, the act that brings about the other tenses of our salvation. There is no such thing as "final salvation"...what there is is "final glorification." Your justification took place (was completed) the moment you placed your faith in Christ. Justification is the heavenly declaration of innocence, which God declares, that a person receives the moment they place their faith in Christ.

Justification, however, does not make us holy. It does not give us the transferred righteousness of Jesus Christ. Justification just "announces" it, but doesn't provide it. What gives us positional righteousness is imputation (Phil 3:9).

When many Christians think about justification, they think "just-as-if-I-never-sinned." But justification is MUCH more than that! That definition of justification wipes out my sin and takes me to zero, but God has done much more than that for me at the moment I put my faith in Christ. His grace takes me to infinity in the other direction. He takes the righteousness of Christ and imputes it to me, to my account, and that imputation has nothing to do if I persevere or don't persevere in good works. Imputation is a truth that comes from God, it is reality, and God cannot lie.

We need to live our lives as if this is true (because it is). Then when we're tempted to sin, to get angry with someone, to cuss, to gossip, etc., when you understand imputation, you will say, Well, that behavior is just not fitting for a person who has been declared righteous and has been imputed with the righteousness of Christ.

Which "John" do you believe more? John Piper, John Calvin, or John the Apostle, who spent 3 years with Christ as His "best friend" and wrote his Gospel under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit?

In John 5:24, John (quoting Jesus) said that the person who heard the gospel and believes in Christ "has [present tense] eternal life.

John 5:24: "Truly, truly, I say to you, the one who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, **has eternal life**, and does not come into judgment, but **has passed** out of death into life.

- "...has" [2x in this verse] - *echō*, a present tense verb; Jesus is saying that once you believe in Him, at the "point of faith," you HAVE/OWN/POSSESS eternal life from that very moment onward...
- If I hear things from John Calvin or John Piper that contradict the words of John the Apostle (and Christ Himself), I will 100% of the time depart from Calvin and Piper and go with what John the Apostle is saying.
- The present tense usage of *echō* here proves two things once you believe in Christ:
  - a. You possess eternal life NOW, not after you die
  - b. You have passed out of death into life NOW, not after you die
- This shows that justification (my declaration of innocence by God) happens at the time that I put my faith in Him (at the beginning), not after I die (at the end).
- "...has passed" - *metabainō*, perfect tense, meaning a one-time event in the past, with on-going results
  - The moment you exercise faith in Christ, you "have passed" from death to life...there's no going back. It was a one-time event (at the time you placed your faith in Christ) with on-going results (I don't have to do it again).

Gen 15:6: Then he believed in the LORD; and He **credited** it to him as righteousness.

- "...credited" - credited, counted, to calculate, make a judgment, as in a past action. The moment Abraham believed, God "credited" him as righteous--at that very moment.

Rom 3:28: For we maintain that a person is **justified by faith** apart from works of the Law.

- "...justified by faith" - no mention of needing to persevere in good works; no mention of needing to "confess my sins" or "repent of my sins" in order to receive justification. Nothing is mentioned except "faith".
  - No mention of needing to wait until the end of your life to see if the data collected on you gets you over the hump and proves you're truly saved.

Rom 5:1: Therefore, having been justified by faith, we **have** peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,

- "...have" - *ēchō*, after we're justified by faith, we have (present tense) peace with God  
NOW...we don't wait until we die to see if we really have peace with God.

In contrast to Calvinism, the Theological Dictionary of the New Testament (TDNT) gets it right. You'd be hard-pressed to find a better original language lexicon than TDNT.

*"In Paul we first find...a legal use. The wicked are justified by faith on the basis of God's gracious action in Christ. This justifying is a saving acquittal which takes place in the present...a present act of grace through Christ.... Once-for-all justification at the cross and personal justification in faith go together. Justification is a finished work of grace...".*

*"Justification is a declarative act. It is something not wrought in man, but something declared of man. It does not make upright or righteous, but declares righteous."*

[Henry Clarence Thiessen, *Lectures in Systematic Theology*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdman's, 1979), 275.]

Henry Clarence Thiessen confirms what was said earlier...justification doesn't make us righteous. Imputation makes us righteous (in God's eyes). Justification just announces that we are righteous (in God's eyes).

*"Justification is a judicial act of God in which He declares, on the basis of the righteousness of Jesus Christ, that all the claims of the law are satisfied with respect to the sinner. It is unique in the application of the work of redemption in that it is a judicial act of God, a declaration respecting the sinner, and not an act or process of renewal, such as regeneration, conversion, and sanctification." [Louis Berkoff, *Systematic Theology: With a Complete Textual Index*, 4th and rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdman's, 1932; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 513.]*

Louis Berkhof is a Calvinist...but he also gets it right here in that justification is "not an act or process of renewal" but it is a declaration of God at a "punctiliar point in time."

*"God declares the one justified forever whom He sees in Christ. It is an equitable decree since the justified one is clothed in the righteousness of God. Justification is not a fiction or a state of feeling; it is rather an immutable reckoning in the mind of God." [Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Major Bible Themes: 52 Vital Doctrines of Scripture Simplified and Explained*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974), 200.]*

### 3. Scriptural Examples of Non-Persevering Saints

When you start teaching what the Bible says about salvation, justification and sanctification, etc., inevitably people will come out of the woodwork to condemn you that

you're making salvation too easy, that you are giving people a license to sin. That is completely not true. The Bible teaches a separation between what is required to be saved/justified, and what is required to grow in Christlikeness/sanctification.

There are numerous examples of people in the Bible who did not persevere until the end of their life, yet there is no doubt they are in heaven today. If the Calvinist doctrine of perseverance of the saints was true, then these people should be in hell today...but they're not.

A good example of the separation of birth (justification) issues and growth (sanctification) issues is the difference between an obstetrician and a pediatrician. An obstetrician helps with the birthing process; a pediatrician helps with the growth process. An obstetrician is never also a pediatrician, or vice-versa. They are two different medical disciplines that have two completely separate and distinct purposes.

Paul is a great example of a person who did persevere until the end, and he needs to be our example of perseverance. But if Paul would've stumbled at the end of his life, it would not have affected his eternal destiny because he was clearly justified/saved. But just as we have Paul's positive example, we have plenty of negative examples of saved people who faltered at the end of their life (did not persevere), yet they were clearly saved.

So one of the easiest ways to refute Calvinism's doctrine of the perseverance of the saints is simply to look at the numerous examples of people in the Bible who were clearly born again/saved, but who didn't persevere in faith and good works to the end of their life. When confronted with these examples, Calvinists either ignore them and change the subject, or they take the "Calvinist copout" and convert all of them to unbelievers (i.e. Saul, Solomon, etc.).

Below are 7 OT examples and 10 NT examples of non-persevering saints. Calvinism, if it remains true to its belief of perseverance of the saints, believes all 17 of these people were never saved and are in hell today:

### 3a. OT Examples of Non-Persevering Saints

#### Noah (Gen 9:20-23; Heb 11:7)

Noah was a righteous man (Gen 6:8-9) for his entire life, until the end when he got drunk and naked in his tent. We don't know the exact circumstances, but it wasn't a good situation.

Gen 9:20-23:

**20** Then Noah began farming and planted a vineyard.

**21** He drank some of the wine and **became drunk**, and **uncovered himself** inside his tent.

22 Ham, the father of Canaan, **saw the nakedness of his father**, and told his two brothers outside.

23 But Shem and Japheth took a garment and laid it on both their shoulders and walked backward and covered the nakedness of their father; and their faces were turned away, so that they did not see their father's nakedness.

Yet Noah is listed in the Hall of Faith in Heb 11:7.

### **Lot (Gen 13:12; 19:8,14,30-38; 2 Peter 2:7-9)**

Lot was neck-deep in the sin of Sodom; he offered his two daughters to the sodomites breaking down the door to his home. When he attempted to get his family to leave Sodom and follow the angel's instruction, they laughed at him and thought he was joking. Then after he was rescued from Sodom, he got drunk with his two daughters and had sex with both of them.

Yet, the NT tells us that Lot was a "righteous" person, not once, not twice, but three times...

2 Peter 2:7-9:

7 and if He rescued **righteous Lot**, who was oppressed by the perverted conduct of unscrupulous people

8 (for by what he saw and heard **that righteous man**, while living among them, felt **his righteous soul** tormented day after day by *their* lawless deeds),

9 then the Lord knows how to rescue **the godly** from a trial, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment,

Nothing about what we know of Lot's life demonstrates that he was a redeemed believer. He clearly had no documented good works and did not persevere until the end of his life, yet Peter called Lot "righteous" 3x in 2 Peter 2. The reason is because Lot was *positionally* righteous because he believed, but his lifestyle never reflected his profession of faith. How does Lot fit into Calvinism's perseverance of the saints doctrine? He doesn't.

### **Moses (Num 20:11-12; Deut 32:5; Matt 17:1-3; Heb 11:23-29; Rev 11:6)**

Moses murdered an Egyptian and was exiled to the desert for 40 years. After he returned, he argued with God to not use him and that he wasn't qualified. Later, as the Israelites were about to enter the Promised Land, he disobeyed God (striking the rock instead of speaking to the rock), disrespecting and misrepresenting the personality of God to the Israelites. As punishment for this sin, he was not permitted to go into the Promised Land.

Num 20:11-12:

- 11 Then Moses raised his hand and struck the rock twice with his staff; and water came out abundantly, and the congregation and their livestock drank.
- 12 But the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, "Since you did not trust in Me, to treat Me as holy in the sight of the sons of Israel, for that reason you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them."

Deut 32:5: "They have acted corruptly against Him, *They are not His children, because of their defect; But are a perverse and crooked generation.*

Ask a Calvinist if Moses was saved. According to Calvinism and the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints, he wasn't because he didn't persevere. But he wrote the first five books of the OT. He was resurrected and appeared with Christ on the Mount of Transfiguration. He will likely be one of the two witnesses during the Tribulation period. How could he not be saved?

### **Exodus Generation (Num 13-14; Heb 11:29)**

This group is estimated to be between 1.5-2 million people. They witnessed the 10 plagues in Egypt. God, through Moses, led them out of Egyptian slavery. They received the Law at Mount Sinai. God did miracle after miracle after miracle to sustain them in the wilderness. Ex 14:30-31 says they all "believed," but they did not finish well.

At Kadesh-Barnea, on the border of the Promised Land, they saw giants on the land and immediately fell into unbelief. They didn't have faith that the God who did all of the things that He had done for them would not keep His promise to give them the land of Israel. You can't take the "Calvinist copout" route here and say that the Exodus generation was a bunch of unbelievers. That doesn't work because they believed (Ex 4:31; a 14:31), applied the blood to the doorposts (Ex 12:28), and are listed in the Hall of Faith (Heb 11:29). If they weren't saved, what are they doing on the Hall of Faith?

### **Samson (Judges 13-16; Heb 11:32)**

Samson is known as the "He-man" with a "She-problem." He had a problem with women his entire life, and in the end, he committed suicide. Doesn't sound like he passes the perseverance of the saints test of Calvinism. But when you go back to the Hall of Faith, Samson is there (Heb 11:32).

Some Calvinist apologists will say, Well, you can fall into sin, but you have to come back from it. Where in the Bible they find that, I don't know. But Samson never came back, and he was on a downward descent for a long time, yet there is no doubt ever expressed in Scripture about his salvation.

### **Saul (1 Sam 11:6; 28:7,19; 31)**

If you buy into Calvinism's perseverance of the saints doctrine, you have to do something with Saul. He was the first king of Israel, anointed by God, and the Holy Spirit came upon him (1 Sam 11:6). If Saul wasn't saved, how did the Holy Spirit "come upon" Saul? Does the Holy Spirit "come upon" unbelievers? No, never.

In 1 Sam 28:19, which a Calvinist will never handle or quote, Samuel (from the grave) says to Saul, "tomorrow you and your sons will be with me." Where was Samuel? He was obviously in heaven. So Samuel clearly says to Saul, tomorrow you will be with me (in heaven). This verse is clear that Saul was saved.

1 Sam 28:19: Furthermore, the LORD will also hand Israel along with you over to the Philistines; so tomorrow **you** [Saul] and your sons *will be* with **me** [Samuel, in heaven]. Indeed, the LORD will hand the army of Israel over to the Philistines!"

But Saul's life clearly didn't mirror righteousness, and he certainly didn't finish well. In fact, he spent the last decade-plus of his life chasing David, God's chosen king, around the wilderness in order to kill him.

### **Solomon (1 Kings 11:4,9-10)**

1 Kings 11:4,9-10:

4 For when Solomon was old, **his wives turned his heart away to follow other gods**; and **his heart was not wholly devoted to the LORD his God**, as the heart of his father David *had been*.

9 Now the LORD was angry with Solomon because **his heart had turned away from the LORD**, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice,  
10 and had commanded him regarding this thing, that he was not to follow other gods; but **he did not comply with what the LORD had commanded**.

- So Solomon was in direct disobedience to God (multiple wives) and that got him into idolatry
- Solomon's heart was "not wholly devoted to the LORD" so God was clearly not "the Lord of his life"
- In v9, Solomon's heart was worse...now he "had turned away from the Lord"
- He remained in disobedience and idolatry, even after the Lord appeared to him twice

It's almost like Solomon, late in his life, woke up one day and read Deut 17 (the restrictions and rules for kings), and decided to go ahead and do the exact opposite of everything God says in that passage. Solomon did not persevere in good works or behavior, and he also didn't persevere in doctrine. He was basically a polytheist at the end of his life, which is an abomination to God.

But even with all of this, you can't buy into the "Calvinist copout" on Solomon and say that he was not saved. If you believe that, then you believe that three books of the Bible (Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon) were written by an unsaved person. Hogwash! The guy who built God's temple, which God wouldn't let David build, is unsaved? Yeah, I don't think so!

### **3b. NT Examples of Non-Persevering Saints**

#### **Untrustworthy Believers (John 2:23-25)**

John 2:23-25:

**23** Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, **many believed in His name** as they observed His signs which He was doing.

**24** But Jesus, on His part, was **not entrusting Himself to them**, because He knew all people,

**25** and because He did not need anyone to testify about mankind, for He Himself knew what was in mankind.

So what does Calvinism do with these people...they obviously believed (so they were saved), but Jesus did "not entrust Himself to them"? Calvinism will come along and say that these people, even though they believed, fulfilling the sole condition for salvation/justification, they didn't have "the right kind of faith." They had "spurious" faith or a faith that was not "real."

They will also say that these people only believed in Jesus because of His signs and wonders. Ok, so what? Isn't that one of the primary reasons Jesus performed signs and wonders? Isn't the purpose statement of John to document some of these signs and wonders, so that people would believe (John 20:30-31)?

So what does it mean that Jesus did "not entrust Himself to them"? Look at John 15:14. Jesus says, "You are my friends if you do what I command." It doesn't say you're "believers" if you do what I command, He says you are My "friends" if you do what I command. What does it mean to be a "friend" of God? It means to graduate from mere belief and saving faith into discipleship. This graduation happens through a pattern of obedience. And as this happens, God opens up insight to me that I never had before. He doesn't open it up to believers, He opens it up to disciples (friends), who are defined as those who have a pattern of obedience.

The next verse, John 15:15, describes what you get when you graduate from being a mere saved believer with your fire insurance paid up, to a "friend." What you get is the "things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you." This is a promise of insight, of illumination, of disclosure, of revelation. This is not a promise to a mere believer, it's a promise to the disciple/friend, who is in a pattern of obedience of His commands.

So if we interpret John 2:23-25 based on what Jesus says in John 15:14-15, we can see that Jesus not "entrusting Himself to them" means that they are believers, but they have not yet graduated into discipleship. Jesus is not "entrusting" the promises of insight, illumination, or revelation to them quite yet because there is not yet any pattern of obedience in their lives. They had been saved for five minutes, and had not yet had the chance to demonstrate a pattern of obedience yet. That will come as they mature in their faith and begin a pattern of obedience in their lives...then they will become His "friends."

### **Non-Confessing Believers (John 12:42; Cf. 19:38)**

John 12:42: Nevertheless many, even of **the rulers, believed in Him**, but because of the Pharisees **they were not confessing Him**, so that they would not be excommunicated from the synagogue;

These "rulers" were clearly saved because they "believed in Him" (*pisteuō eis*). The "Calvinist copout" will say that these rulers really weren't saved because they didn't confess Christ, then they will inevitably go to James 2:19 and say, "Even the demons believe in Jesus" so you have to have more than just belief in order to be saved. But do you see "Jesus" in James 2? No, His name is never mentioned. It doesn't say that the demons believe in Jesus, which is the requirement/condition for salvation. In context, it says they believe in "God" (more of a generic reference). Secondly, the plan of salvation is not available to demons. For demons to be saved, Jesus would've had to become a demon, which He didn't.

So if you go to James 2 to refute that the sole condition for salvation must be more than simple belief, it clearly demonstrates that the person has never studied the issue, and is twisting the Bible to say what they need it to say in order to support their heretical teaching.

To the consternation of Calvinists, the Bible clearly states that a person can be a believer and immediately go out and tell everyone about Christ, like the woman at the well (John 4). Or, a person can be a believer and not say anything, not confess, and remain quiet about their belief/faith, and still be saved as well.

Another verse that supports this idea that you don't have to "confess" Christ in order to be saved is John 19:38:

John 19:38: Now after these things Joseph of Arimathea, **being a disciple of Jesus, but a secret one for fear of the Jews**, requested of Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus; and Pilate granted permission. So he came and took away His body.

Joseph of Arimathea, who was clearly a disciple of Jesus as stated in the verse, was a "secret disciple" because he feared the Jews. Joseph of Arimathea, the man who took Jesus' dead body and gave Him a respectful burial, was obviously saved, yet he was a

"secret disciple." He didn't confess Christ, at least up until that point in his life, yet he was still saved.

### **Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11)**

Ananias and Sapphira sold some property, then told everyone that they had given their proceeds to the church...but they didn't. They secretly held back some of the proceeds for themselves, while they told people they gave it all.

They were perfectly within their rights to hold back some of the proceeds...the fact that they did so was not their sin. Their sin was that they lied...they said they gave *all* the proceeds to the church, but they only gave *some* of the proceeds to the church. Peter confronted both Ananias and Sapphira separately, and both were struck dead by God (an example of "maximum divine discipline").

If you ask a Calvinist if Ananias and Sapphira were saved, they will say no. They would argue that both didn't have genuine faith, but they had "spurious" faith. They didn't have the faith that was sufficient to save them.

However, this argument falls completely apart when you realize that both Ananias and Sapphira were in the church. During this time, the church was under persecution. If they weren't believers, there's no reason for them to be part of the church in order to invite persecution if they didn't believe what the church believed. Secondly, the entire church was terrified after both were struck dead. Why were they terrified? Not because they were unbelievers, as that would be easy to excuse as God's judgment on unbelievers. They were terrified because they were believers who suddenly died when confronted about their sin (lying). So Ananias and Sapphira here are clearly saved.

### **Simon the Sorcerer (Acts 8:13)**

Acts 8:13: Now even **Simon himself believed**; and **after being baptized**, he continued on with Philip, and as he observed signs and great miracles taking place, he was *repeatedly* amazed.

When you read this entire passage, it's clear from v13 that Simon was saved, then water baptized. However a few verses later, he becomes enthralled and wants to purchase the power of the Holy Spirit that was displayed by Peter and the disciples. Peter tells Simon that he is mistaken about this "power" and warns him that if he continues down this road of pursuing power and notoriety and grabbing power, he will fall under divine discipline (Cf. Diotrephes, 3 John 9-10).

There are a lot of Christians who do the same thing Simon did...they pursue Christian service because they think it will make them important, they are seeking after fame and recognition. But Peter says to Simon that if he keeps moving in this direction, he will encounter divine discipline.

Calvinism denies that Simon was ever saved. They completely ignore the statement in 8:13 that Simon believed and was baptized. They argue that his faith was "spurious" and that he didn't persevere in his faith, thus he was never saved. His "salvation" was fake, not genuine. Then they will likely invoke James 2:19 saying that the demons also believe, but they don't have any works to back up their faith so the demons aren't saved. This interpretation completely destroys the context of James 2. Simon, they say, is in the same boat.

But what do you do with the "belief" of the Samaritans in Acts 8:12? Are they saved? Luke uses the exact same word in v12 speaking of the Samaritans that he uses in v13 speaking of Simon. So if those in v12 are saved, why isn't Simon also saved? If your method of interpretation can say those in v12 are saved, but Simon in v13 is not, you have a poor method of Bible interpretation. What you're doing, obviously, is making the Bible fit your preconceived theology and distorting the Word of God rather than letting the Bible shape your theology. If you have to internally contradict yourself to get God's Word to fit your theology, your theology is not biblical.

### **Immature Believers at Corinth (1 Cor 3:1-3)**

1 Cor 3:1-3:

- 1 And I, brothers *and sisters*, could not speak to you as spiritual people, but *only* as fleshly, as to infants in Christ.
- 2 I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able *to consume it*. But **even now you are not yet able**,
  - "...even now you are not yet able" - the Corinthians had been in a carnal state for some time. You can't be in a carnal state as an unbeliever.
  - 3 for you are still fleshly. For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like *ordinary* people?

Paul Washer, a noted Calvinist teacher popular on YouTube, said: "*The doctrine of the carnal Christian has destroyed more lives and sent more people to hell than you can imagine!*"

- Washer is saying that there is no such thing as a "carnal Christian," and what people who deny the doctrine of perseverance of the saints are doing is teaching people that if you can live in carnality, you are not one of the elect.
- Contrary to what Washer says, there is no "doctrine of the carnal Christian" found in the Bible. It's just simple reading comprehension and logical hermeneutics.

- What the Bible teaches is that carnal Christianity is an unfortunate possibility. It warns us over and over again to not go there because there are consequences (that have nothing to do with your salvation), but many saved people still do because of lack of knowledge of God's resources or their own willingness and desires.

If you believe what Paul Washer, and Calvinism in general, teaches about carnal Christianity (which they don't believe is possible), the devil has you right where he wants you. You are ripe for deception because in that state, you can't be warned against carnal Christianity. If you don't believe it's possible for you to be a carnal Christian, you begin to not worry about or deal with the possibility that you may be one yourself.

Calvin wrote, regarding the Corinthians: "*What they [the Christians at Corinth] had attained so far is nothing, unless they keep steadily on; because it is not enough that they once started off on the way of the Lord, if they do not make an effort to reach the goal.*"

- This is Calvin clearly teaching that salvation is by works. The belief of the Corinthians means nothing in Calvinism...it is the works that they do that proves they are saved. Without the works, in Calvinism, they are not saved.
- The Corinthians were clearly messed up in multiple areas...in their theology and in their walk of (un)holiness, but they were also clearly saved. Paul writes two letters to them, and spent a year-and-a-half in Corinth trying to correct the imbalances and issues in this church.
- But Paul never, ever questions their salvation. He never says that if their bad deeds and bad theology continued, they would demonstrate that they were not saved (like Calvin does).

The Corinthians' Assumed Believing Status

- 1 Cor 1:2; 3:1,5; 6:11,19-20
- 2 Cor 1:1,21-22,24; 3:2-3; 6:14-16; 8:9; 10:15

### Unrewarded Believers at Corinth (1 Cor 3:15)

1 Cor 3:15: If anyone's work is burned up, he will **suffer loss**; but **he himself will be saved**, yet **only so as through fire**.

- In v10, Paul says that he laid the foundation (Christ, v11), "but each person must be careful how he builds on it."
  - We need to be careful how we build upon the foundation of Christ because how we do it is going to come to light one day at the Bema Seat judgment

- By breaching this subject, Paul is opening the door to the possibility of a non-abiding/persevering believer. He's not approving of it, he's saying it's an unfortunate possibility.
- By the very fact that Paul is warning about this shows that it is possible. There's no sense in warning about something that isn't a realistic possibility.
- This is not a heaven/hell issue, but rather a reward/non-reward issue
- "...suffer loss" - we can identify what suffering loss feels like...the loss of a friend, a relationship, a financial loss, etc. Paul here is saying that non-persevering believers have these same feelings/emotions when their works are burned up and they are unrewarded.
  - When Paul uses the term "loss" in describing a person who is "saved" he is describing a non-persevering believer
  - The loss here is the loss of something that was available to them (rewards) but that they didn't earn. The loss is regret for missed opportunities that they didn't take advantage of throughout their life.
- "...he himself" - in context, a carnal Christian; a believer with little to no good works to show for in their life or remaining after going through the fire
- "...will be saved" - *sōzō*, future tense, referring to our glorification

Calvinism does not distinguish between the various judgments in the Bible. They don't see the Judgment of the Jews in Ezek 20 or the Bema Seat judgment in this passage. They only see the Great White Throne judgment (Rev 20:11-15) as the one single judgment of all mankind, and believe that the Sheep & Goat judgment (Matt 25:31-46) describes the same judgment.

Scripture's Four Judgments				
Name	Sheep and Goat	Judgment of the Jews	<a href="#">Bema Seat</a>	Great White Throne
Scripture	Matt 25:31-46	Ezek 20:33-44	<a href="#">1 Cor 3:10-15</a>	Rev 20:11-15
Place	Earth, Jerusalem	Earth, wilderness	<a href="#">Heaven</a>	Earth
Audience	Gentile Tribulation survivors	Jewish Tribulation survivors	<a href="#">Church Age believers</a>	All unsaved
When	After Tribulation	After Tribulation	<a href="#">After rapture</a>	After Millennium
Purpose	Saved Gentiles enter kingdom	Saved Jews enter kingdom	<a href="#">Reward believers</a>	Degree of punishment in hell
Evaluation	Treatment of Christ's brethren	Passing under shepherd's rod	<a href="#">Works taken through fire</a>	Not in the book; judged by books

Since Calvinism does not view this passage in 1 Corinthians as referring to a judgment of a believer's works, ask a Calvinist what does the person's work who is burned up lose? Or, what does Paul mean when he says the person whose works are burned up is "saved"? They won't have a valid answer because they ignore this passage.

*"Most new Calvinists do not believe that Christ will return and reign on this earth for one thousand years, nor do they understand that those of the church age will return to rule with Him following a review time before His judgment seat or Bema Seat, when our roles and responsibilities will be determined. Most Calvinists believe the Great White Throne judgment is for everyone of all ages and it will determine whether one is truly saved or not." [Robert R. Congdon, *How Calvinism Serves Satan's Purposes* (Greer, SC: Congdon Ministries International, 2014), 29.]*

### Disciplined Believers at Corinth (1 Cor 11:27-32)

1 Cor 11:27-32:

**27** Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy **way**, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord.

- This passage is often misunderstood as saying that before you take communion, you need to confess all of your sins, otherwise you may come under judgment
- "...way" - *anaxiōs*, manner; an adverb (modifies a verb), describing how they were partaking communion at that point in time

- They had turned it into a common meal and a pay-to-play situation, which excluded the poor and created an artificial barrier within the body of Christ. They were also taking communion while in an inebriated state (drunk).
- They had taken something sacred and turned it into something profane.

28 But a person must examine himself, and in so doing he is to eat of the bread and drink of the cup.

29 For the one who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself if he does not *properly* recognize the body.

30 **For this reason** many among you are weak and sick, and a number are **asleep**.

- "For this reason" - see v27; it was for these reasons that Jesus had moved into the Corinthian church with maximum divine discipline and brought some of these believers to the point of death
  - God had the same problem with Belshazzar in Dan 5, who used the holy vessels from the temple in Jerusalem in a profane manner
- "...asleep" - physical death; the fact that some believers in the Corinthian church died because they took communion in a profane manner demonstrates that not all believers finish their lives on a high note
  - These believers received maximum divine discipline from God, but Paul never says they either lost their salvation or were never really saved because God unleashed maximum divine discipline upon them. These believers are in heaven today.
- How can Calvinism's doctrine of perseverance of the saints explain this passage? These are clearly believers, who were under God's maximum divine discipline because they were taking communion in a profane manner. They didn't "finish well" or "persevere" in good works, yet Paul never says they weren't truly saved or lost their salvation.
  - Paul here is admonishing them against this behavior and warning them about the temporal consequences of their actions, but yet he never says they weren't truly saved or lost their salvation.

31 But if we judged ourselves rightly, we would not be judged.

32 But when we are judged, we are disciplined by the Lord so that we will not be condemned along with the world.

### **Demas (2 Tim 4:10; Col 4:14)**

2 Tim 4:10: for Demas, having loved this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica; Crescens *has gone* to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia.

- Demas was with Paul for awhile, associated with his ministry, but at some point he was sucked away from the ministry because he "loved the world"

- Demas is a good example of the seed falling among the thorns in the parable of the sower
- He was born again spiritually, but the crop was choked by the "worries of the world" and the "deceitfulness of wealth" which "choked the word" and it became unfruitful
- Demas is a good example of someone who was saved, but the lust of the world, lust of the flesh, and the pride of life choked out his motivation and priority, and he began living a carnal life
- Calvinism converts Demas to an unbeliever in order to justify their doctrine of perseverance of the saints. They believe he wasn't truly saved, but rather had "spurious" faith because if he was one of the "elect" he would've automatically persevered in good works until the end of his life.
  - However, the problem with simply proclaiming Demas as unsaved is that Paul put him into his ministry (Cf. Col 4:14; Philemon 24)
  - Do you think Paul would put someone in his ministry if their salvation/justification was in doubt?

Col 4:14: Luke, the beloved physician, sends you his greetings, and **Demas** does also.

Philemon 24: as do Mark, Aristarchus, **Demas**, and Luke, my fellow workers.

### Immature Believers in Hebrews (Heb 5:11-14)

Heb 5:11-14:

**11** Concerning **him** we have much to say, and *it is* difficult to explain, since you have become poor listeners.

- "...him" - Melchizedek (Cf. v10); the author wants to teach his Hebrew readers some difficult to understand doctrine about Melchizedek and his priestly ministry, and how that ministry foreshadowed the high priestly ministry of Christ

**12** For though **by this time** you ought to be teachers, you have need **again** for **someone to teach you** the elementary principles of the actual words of God, and **you have come to need milk** and not solid food.

- "...by this time" - a significant amount of time had passed since the readers of Hebrews had been saved; the author is telling them that they've been in a state of spiritual infancy for way too long.
- "...again" - it wasn't that they weren't taught the "elementary principles" already, it's that they were so immature that they needed it taught to them a second (or third?) time. What they had been taught before didn't "stick."
- "...someone to teach you" - the author of Hebrews is saying that his readers needed to go back to kindergarten and learn the basics of the Christian faith

- At this point in their maturity process, they should've been teaching people the basic principles, but instead they were so elementary in their knowledge that they needed a review lesson of things they should have mastered a long time ago
- "...you have come to need milk" - because they didn't understand the "elementary principles" they did not have the capacity to digest the heavier teaching that the writer of Hebrews wanted to give to them

13 For everyone who partakes *only* of milk is unacquainted with the word of righteousness, for he is an infant.

- This passage speaks to a group of people who were not persevering in good works. They didn't understand basic theological principles, and therefore could not digest the heavier theological issues that the author felt necessary to teach them.

14 But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to distinguish between good and evil.

- Calvinism deals with this passage in the same way they deal with other passages that refute their doctrine of perseverance of the saints...make them unbelievers.
- But this interpretation is completely refuted by v12 when the author says that at this point in their Christian life, they ought to be teachers. There's no way the author says this to an unsaved audience.
- If these people were unsaved, what were they to be teachers of? And why would the writer say that they should be teaching anyone else the elementary principles of the Christian faith?
- It's obvious to anyone who reads this passage that the audience here is saved, but they aren't persevering or growing in their faith. The issue is not birth, the issue is growth.

### Seven Churches in Asia Minor (Rev 3:19)

Rev 3:19: **Those whom I love, I rebuke and discipline; therefore be zealous and repent.**

- Five of the seven churches in Revelation are in a state of carnality. The only two churches that are not given a recommendation for restoration by Jesus Himself are Smyrna and Philadelphia. What did these two churches have in common? They were under persecution by the "synagogue of Satan" (unbelieving Jews).
- It's interesting how persecution moves believers (and churches) out of a state of carnality.
- So five out of seven churches are in a state of carnality, so Jesus gives each of them specific recommendations for restoration and growth.

- Only the church of Laodicea is not given some type of commendation. Six of the seven churches are at least doing something right, according to Jesus, but He can't find a single thing to commend in the church of Laodicea...everything is negative.
- So what do Calvinists and others do with Laodicea? Same thing they do with every other passage that refutes their doctrine of perseverance of the saints...make them unbelievers.
- *Laos* = people; *dicea* = rule, so Laodicea means 'the rule of the people' or democracy. What was ruling the church of Laodicea was the mandates of the people, not the dictates of God. This mentality was prevalent in the city of Laodicea and that mentality eventually drifted into the church.
  - Rather than the church turning the world upside down (Cf. Acts), the world is turning the church upside down
  - Where is Jesus in this church? He's outside, knocking on a closed door. He is outside the church, but it never says that He never knew them. Presumably He was once inside the church, but as time went on the church apostatized and He was kicked out. It's not that they weren't saved, it that they were out of fellowship with Him.
  - Jesus says in His letter that He desires to "dine" (fellowship) with them, which He was not doing at that time. To "dine" doesn't mean salvation, it means fellowship.
  - They were having church without Christ because the people ruled the church instead of Christ
- We also know this church was saved because of v19 (which no one who thinks they are unsaved will ever quote or reference)...Jesus doesn't discipline those who are not His already. He doesn't discipline unbelievers. You don't discipline the neighbor's kids, you discipline your own kids. The fact that they were under discipline indicates that they belonged to Him, and He is disciplining them out of love, to get them back into a right relationship with Him.
- When you study the seven churches in Revelation, Laodicea is clearly the worst. Yet it is evident that they are saved, thus it's clear that the other six churches were saved as well.

#### **4. Proof-Texts Used by Calvinism To Support Perseverance of the Saints**

Since the Bible nowhere supports the doctrine of perseverance of the saints, Calvinism must wrench verses out of their context in order to support this unbiblical doctrine. They must do to Scripture what Satan did to Scripture when he tempted Christ (Cf. Luke 4:9-12). Many Christians are impressed with the proof-texts given by Calvinism, and without understanding the context for each, are duped into believing something that is not biblical.

Below are seven verses that are used over and over and over again by Calvinism to argue for this doctrine, but NONE of them have anything to do with perseverance of the saints.

#### **4a. Matt 24:13:**

13 **But the one who endures to the end is the one who will be saved.**

- This is the "go-to" verse for Calvinism to argue in favor of perseverance of the saints.
  - How do you have assurance of salvation? According to the Calvinist interpretation of this verse, you have to "endure until the end."
  - They interpret "saved" as salvation/justification, so if a person does not "endure" to the end of their life in good works and faithfulness, they aren't truly saved

*"...who chose Augustine as a case in point...Specifically, his reinterpretation of Matt 24:13 ('he who endures to the end will be saved') as a spiritual salvation instead of a physical salvation (to enter and populate the millennial kingdom) caused drastic changes in his soteriology. Perseverance of the saints (faithfulness to the end of one's physical life) became the sin qua non of his soteriology. One could believe in Christ, have the fruit of the elect, but prove he was not elect if he should not persevere in faithfulness until the end of his physical life." [David R. Anderson, *The Soteriological Impact of Augustine's Change from Premillennialism to Amillennialism: Part One*, Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society, Volume 15, no. 28 (2002): 25.]*

In John MacArthur's commentary on Matthew 24-25, he gets almost all of it correct and in context. He rightly interprets the timing of these prophecies as the future Tribulation. He links the tribulations that Jesus outlines to Rev 6 (the six Seal judgments), and all is good until he gets to v13. At that point, he forgets all about the context and thinks this verse describes the salvation of Church Age believers, and that if they don't endure to the end in good works, they aren't saved. After this, he goes back to a Tribulation/end times context for the rest of the Olivet Discourse.

You wonder why he completely leaves the context for one verse, but he interprets the verses before and after v13 in the proper context. The reason is that he has to do this because he's a Calvinist and believes in the doctrine of perseverance of the saints.

*"But the one who endures to the end, he shall be saved...his endurance will be a Spirit-empowered product and proof of the reality that he is saved. Neither the high cost of discipleship nor the deception of false prophets nor the enticement of sin will cause true believers to renounce Christ, because He Himself will protect them from defection. Endurance is always a mark of salvation.... The perseverance of the saints in faith is a very basic element of salvation teaching in the New Testament. It states that*

*people who are genuinely saved do not depart from the faith (see John 8:31; 1 Cor 15:1-2; Col 1:21-23; Heb 2:1-3; 3:14; 4:14; 6:11-12; 10:39; 12:14; James 1:2-4).... Endurance...does give evidence of the spiritual life that resides in the believer...".*  
[John MacArthur, *Matthew 24-25, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 1989), 28.]

So if what MacArthur says about Matt 24:13 is out of context, what exactly is Jesus actually saying in Matt 24:13?

- Perseverance of the saints, and salvation/justification in general, is not the topic of Jesus' teaching in Matt 24-25. To inject salvation/justification into the passage to justify the doctrine of perseverance of the saints is to completely misinterpret the passage and pull a single verse out of its context to prove a doctrine.
- The context of Matt 24, and specifically v13, is specifically about the future seven-year Tribulation period. Verse 15 describes the abomination of desolation, which was prophesied by Daniel, which is a future event that will occur at the midpoint of the Tribulation.
- In this passage, Jesus is telling a small group of His disciples, in answering their questions, what will happen to Israel in the future, specifically during the Tribulation. The generation of Jews who see the events Jesus describes, who are not part of the 2/3rds who are killed, if you endure (without dying) to the end of the Tribulation, they will be saved (rescued/delivered).

Matt 24:13: **But the one who endures to the end is the one who will be saved.**

- "...the one" - the Jew
- "...endures" - stays alive; makes it to the end of the Tribulation
- "...the end" - Calvinism infers the end of one's life, or time of death, but that's not what Jesus is referring to here. He's referring to "the end" of the Tribulation period, which He is describing here, in answer to the disciples' question (v3).
  - The disciples asked Him specifically, "What will be the sign of your return, and "the end" of the age?" Jesus' use of "the end" in v13 is the same as the disciples' question about "the end" in v3.
  - Jesus also refers to "the end" in v6, clearly referring to the end of the age
- "...saved" - physically protected from the Antichrist

#### **4b. John 15:5-6,8:**

5 I am the vine, you are the branches; the one who remains in Me, and I in him bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.

6 If anyone does not remain in Me, he is thrown away like a branch and dries up; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned.

## 8 My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples.

### Calvinist Interpretation of John 15:6

- Branch = professing believer, but without genuine faith ("spurious" faith)
- Since the branch is not bearing fruit, it is disconnected from the vine, thus it was never a believing branch (because truly "elect" believers can never be carnal)
- Because the branch was never bearing fruit, it represents a person who was never truly saved, never had genuine faith
- Since the branch is not connected to the vine, God will throw that branch into the fire (hell) at the final judgment

### Proper Interpretation of John 15:6

#### 1. Context

- Jesus said this during His Upper Room Discourse, to 11 believing disciples (Judas, an unbeliever, had left the room), the night before Jesus was crucified
- The purpose of the discourse (John 13-17) was to prepare the disciples for ministry during the initial years of the Church Age, after His resurrection and ascension back to heaven
- One of the primary themes of this discourse is the coming of the Holy Spirit, who would begin to indwell and empower believers after His departure
- In John 15, Jesus is not dealing with the issue of being a believer, He's dealing with the issue of being a disciple. Every person in the room who Jesus was talking to was saved; Jesus was addressing the second tense of their salvation (sanctification), giving them insight into how the vinedresser (the Father) prunes and corrects believers so they will bear more fruit.
- It is in this context that Jesus gives them the teaching of John 15:1-8

#### 2. Saved audience (11 disciples, not Judas Iscariot)

- "in Me (v2; Cf. 14:11) - whether or not the branch is bearing fruit or not bearing fruit, Jesus' use of "in Me" in v2 covers both, demonstrating that Jesus is talking to saved people. Those who bear fruit are saved, and those who are not bearing fruit are saved.
  - Jesus uses the same prepositional phrase "in Me" in 14:11 to describe His relationship with/to the Father. Do you think there is any insecurity in the relationship between Jesus and the Father?

- Based on Jesus' use of "in Me" to describe the relationship between Him and the Father in 14:11, as well as the sentence structure of 15:2 (both fruit bearing and non-fruit bearing branches are described as "in Me"), it's impossible to develop a theology where the non-fruit-bearing branches are not believers.
- Just because a branch is not bearing fruit doesn't mean their salvation is insecure any more than the relationship between the Father and Son is insecure. Just like you can't drive a wedge in the Trinity, you can't drive a wedge between Christ and a non-fruit bearing branch.
- "clean" (v3; Cf. 13:10-11) - refers to believers; Jesus had just used this same metaphor in 13:10-11, which clearly meant salvation/justification. Here He uses it again to reassure the disciples that there was zero chance of any insecurity for the non-fruit bearing branches.
- Judas Iscariot, the only unbeliever among the disciples, had left the building (John 13:29-31). This left only 11 saved disciples.
  - If Jesus was really saying in this passage that you better begin bearing fruit, otherwise you're not one of the "elect," why would He say it after Judas left? Wouldn't He instead want to say that while Judas was still in the room?

3. "Abiding/remaining" [*menō*] (v4,5,7) and "fruit bearing" (v2,4,5,8,16)

- John knows how to use the word "believe" [*pisteuō*] since he uses it 99x in his Gospel. However, he never uses that word in this passage because His audience had already believed.
- Instead, over and over again John uses the term *menō*, which refers to fellowship. If you abide in Me, now you're a disciple (not just a believer), and you're qualified to bear fruit that will last because you are connected to the eternal source.
- The reason we need to stay connected to the vine (abide/remain in Christ, *menō*) is so that we "bear much fruit" and so "prove to be My disciples." Bearing fruit does not prove a person to be a believer, it proves them to be a disciple.

4. Men (not God) cast the branches into the fire (v6) - the common Calvinist interpretation of this passage is that the non-fruit bearing branches are not truly saved and eventually they are thrown into the fire (which they label as hell").

- "they" in v6 does not refer to God, but to men. So Calvinism inserts "God" into this passage as throwing these "spurious" believers into hell, but that's not what the passage says.

5. "Fire" does not always equal hell (1 Cor 3:15; Heb 6:8; 1 Peter 1:6-7)

- There are definitely passages in the NT that equate "fire" with hell, most notably Matt 25:41. However, "fire" does not always refer to hell:
  - 1 Cor 3:15: If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, **yet only so as through fire.**
    - This verse refers to our works going through fire in order to separate good works from fleshly works; it's a judgment of works, not for salvation, and those whose works are completely burned up do not go to hell.
  - Heb 6:8: but if it yields thorns and thistles, it is worthless and close to being cursed, and **it ends up being burned.**
    - Farmers do not burn a field in order to destroy the field, but to make the field more productive
    - So "fire" in John 15:6 can easily refer to God putting you through some type of trial, maybe a harsher one than usual, in order to not destroy you, but to make you more productive.
  - 1 Peter 1:6-7:
    - 6 In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been **distressed by various trials,**
    - 7 so that the proof of your faith, *being* more precious than gold which perishes though **tested by fire**, may be found to result in praise, glory, and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ;
    - "Fire" in this passage does not refer to hell, but rather to trials (v6) and testing (v7)

## 6. Pruning to bear more fruit (v2; Heb 12:5-11)

- The point of the pruning performed by the vinedresser is so that the branches will bear more fruit
  - The entire passage describes the means that God uses toward every believer, fruit bearing or non-fruit bearing, to prompt them into bearing more fruit
  - Sometimes God may need to use discipline for persistently non-fruit bearing branches, in order to get them to begin bearing fruit. And sometimes, that discipline may be painful, but to whom God loves, He disciplines (Heb 12:5-11).

## 4c. 2 Cor 13:5:

5 Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize *this about* yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you—unless indeed you fail the test?

- This is a verse used primarily by aggressive Calvinists to scare the living daylights out of many Christians. Of course this single verse is always plucked out of its context, then used to berate believers into doubting their salvation/justification.
- It causes Christians to be introspective on whether or not they are saved, rather than to look to the finished work of Christ for our assurance of salvation.

Here is what typical Calvinism teaches about this verse:

*"Doubts about one's salvation are not wrong...Scripture encourages self-examination...In 2 Cor 13:5, Paul wrote, 'Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you—unless indeed you fail the test?' That admonition is largely ignored—and often explained away—in the contemporary church." [John MacArthur, *The Gospel According to Jesus: What Does Jesus Mean When He Says, "Follow Me"?*? (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), 190.]*

R.C. Sproul, who brought back the Geneva Study Bible and put his own spin on it, says this in his note on 2 Cor 12:5:

*"Paul's words help clarify the doctrine of assurance of faith. Paul asks the Corinthians to examine their own lives for evidence of salvation. Such evidence would include trust in Christ (Heb 3:6), obedience to God (Matt 7:21), growth in holiness (Heb 12:14; 1 John 3:3), the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-23), love for other Christians (1 John 3:14), positive influence on others (Matt 5:16), adhering to apostolic teaching (1 John 4:2), and the testimony of the Holy Spirit within them (Rom 8:15-16)."*

Do you pass all of these tests every day? No, you don't and neither do I. No one does. And neither did John MacArthur or R.C. Sproul during their lives. In fact, no believer can say that they passed these "tests" that Sproul lays out here throughout their life. So does that mean we should all question our salvation? No!

Sproul and MacArthur completely misinterpret this verse because they have a predisposition to the doctrine of perseverance of the saints, which they twist this verse into supporting. However when you read the verse in context, and cross-reference it with other verses on assurance of salvation, you learn that we are never commanded to question our salvation/justification, nor to look to ourselves for our assurance.

Here are some more quotes from noted scholars on this verse:

*"But my point is that so long as a professing Christian is in the state of carnality, no pastor, no Christian friend, has the slightest ground for holding that this carnal person has ever been regenerated...it is a pastor's duty to counsel such a person. "You do not*

give evidence of being in a regenerate state. You must remember Paul's warning, 'Examine yourselves whether you are in the faith; prove yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you? You are not reprobate, are you?' (2 Cor 13:5)." [James Oliver Buswell, Jr., *A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion*, 2 Volumes, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1962), 147.]

Even superstars like Warren Wiersbe get this verse wrong...

*"Paul told the Corinthians that they should examine their hearts to see if they were really born again and members of the family of God. Do you have the witness of the Holy Spirit in your heart (Rom 8:9,16)? Do you love the brethren (1 John 3:14)? Do you practice righteousness (1 John 2:29; 3:9)? Have you overcome the world so that you are living a life of godly separation (1 John 5:4)? These are just a few of the tests we can apply to our own lives to be certain that we are children of God.*

*"In one of the churches I pastored, we had a teenager who was the center of every problem in the youth group. One summer when he went off to our church youth camp...At one of the meetings, he got up and announced that he had been saved that week! His Christian profession up to that time had been counterfeit. He experienced a dramatic change in his life, and today he is serving the Lord faithfully. **No doubt many of the problems in the church at Corinth were caused by people who professed to be saved, but who had never repented and trusted Jesus Christ.** Our churches are filled with such people today. Paul called such people reprobate, which means 'counterfeit, discredited after a test.'" [The Wiersbe Study Bible (Colorado Springs, CO: David Cook, 2007), 542.]*

- "...No doubt many of the problems in the church at Corinth were caused by people who professed to be saved, but who had never repented and trusted in Jesus Christ." - this is demonstrably false. Paul repeats over and over again, throughout both Corinthian letters, that his audience was saved. And no matter how bad their behavior or beliefs were, he never questions their salvation/justification. He simply corrects them and exhorts them toward good works, through the power of the Holy Spirit.
  - You can't find one verse, or even an implication, in either of Paul's extensive letters to the Corinthian church that Paul ever thought that the Corinthian church was not saved.
  - You also cannot find one verse, anywhere in either epistle, where Paul questions their salvation or warns them that if they do not start living more righteously that it will prove that they weren't "truly" saved.

Joseph Dillow, in his book *Final Destiny: The Future Reign of the Servant Kings*, gets it correct:

*"Nowhere in the Bible is a Christian asked to examine either his faith or his life to find out if he is a Christian. He is told only to look outside of himself to Christ alone for his assurance that he is a Christian. The Christian is, however, often told to examine his walk of faith and life to see if he is walking in fellowship and in conformity to God's commands."*

As does Zane C. Hodges:

*"Regrettably...these forceful words have been sadly misconstrued. They have been read by some interpreters as though they were a challenge to the Corinthians to find out whether they were really saved or not! This is unthinkable. After twelve chapters in which Paul takes their Christianity for granted, can he only now be asking them to make sure they are born again? Let the readers of this book examine 2 Corinthians on their own. They will see clearly how often the apostle affirms in one way or another his conviction that his readers are genuinely Christian." [Hodges, *Absolutely Free! A Biblical Reply to Lordship Salvation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989), 200.]*

2 Cor 13:5: Test yourselves to see if you are **in the faith; examine** yourselves! Or do you not recognize *this about* yourselves, that Jesus **Christ is in you**—unless indeed you **fail the test?**

Below are nine arguments in favor of the view that Paul is instructing his Corinthian readers to test or examine their walk of faith (progressive sanctification), not to test/examine their justification (saved status):

1. The Corinthians' assumed believing status (Cf. 1 Cor 1:2; 2 Cor 1:1, plus 1 Cor 3:1,5; 6:11,19-20; 2 Cor 1:21-22,24; 3:2-3; 6:14-16; 8:9; 10:15)
  - What would be Paul's point at the end of 2 Corinthians to ask the Corinthian church to "examine" their lives to see if they are truly saved after both of his letters to them assumed throughout that they were already saved?
  - You can't interpret 2 Cor 13:5 in a way that you wouldn't interpret it in the rest of Paul's writings to the Corinthians
2. Proving (examining) oneself can apply to a believer whose salvation is not in doubt
  - "...examine" - *dokimazō*, verb, meaning to prove, discern, or scrutinize (to see whether something is genuine or not)

- The same word is used as an adjective in 2 Tim 2:15: Be diligent to present yourself **approved** [*dokimos*] to God as a worker who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth.
  - When Paul says "prove yourself" or "show yourself approved" [*dokimos*] in 2 Tim 2:15, he's talking to someone whose salvation is not in doubt. The issue in this verse is not justification, it's whether or not Timothy was handling the Word of God correctly. Paul was not questioning Timothy's salvation.
  - So when you see the same root word used in 2 Cor 13:5, you see that it can be used of a person whose salvation is not in doubt either. Just because you see the phrase "examine yourself" doesn't necessarily mean that it's speaking to someone whose salvation/justification is in doubt because it clearly doesn't mean that in 2 Tim 2:15.

3. Disqualification (failure) can apply to a saved person whose salvation is not in doubt

- "...fail the test" - *adokimos*, not standing the test; not approved; that which does not prove itself as it ought to
  - The same word [*adokimos*] used for "fail" in 2 Cor 13:5 is used by Paul to describe himself in 1 Cor 9:27: but I strictly discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be **disqualified** [*adokimos*].
  - So if you're going to say that "fail the test" in 2 Cor 13:5 means you may not be saved, then Paul may not have been saved based on his usage of the same word in 1 Cor 9:27.
  - In 1 Cor 9:27, is Paul saying that he may not be a Christian? Of course not, that would be preposterous. What Paul is saying, if you understand the context of 1 Cor 9, is that he didn't want to be a hypocrite...he didn't want to preach one thing, then live the opposite. He wanted his lifestyle to match his preaching, otherwise he would be "disqualified" for a reward over and above salvation.
  - If Paul didn't "discipline his body," "make it his slave," and "preach to others," would he be disqualified from salvation? Of course not, that's clearly not what he is saying in that verse.
  - This whole misinterpretation goes away when you realize that Paul was not worried about his salvation/justification, but rather his progressive sanctification, and the ever-present possibility that if he didn't "discipline his body" and "make it his slave" he would be hypocritical, his preaching would lose its power, and he would forfeit rewards at the Bema Seat judgment of Christ.
  - The NT holds out the possibility that a believer will be judged and not rewarded because they do not have any good works that make it through the fire (2 John 8; Rev 3:11).

- So in 2 Cor 13:5, the "failure" is not entrance into heaven, but rather rewards at the Bema Seat judgment of Christ

*"If adokimos or disqualified here means that the apostle Paul was not certain that he would go to heaven...one wonders...how any Christian in the history of the church could ever know for certain that God was his Father! [Dillow]*

4. The phrase "in the faith" refers to experience rather than position

- In the Calvinist interpretation, "in the faith" refers to salvation/justification, and "failing the test" means that a person is never saved (either lost salvation [Arminianism] or never really had it [Calvinism]).
- However, "in the faith" can apply to a believer...a believer can either be "in the faith" or not "in the faith." It doesn't exclusively pertain to unbelievers.
- In 1 Cor 16:13 Paul says: "Be on the alert, stand firm **in the faith**, act like men, be strong." And in v15, Paul calls them "brethren" showing that they were believers.
- In 1 Peter 5:9, Peter says: "So resist him, firm **in your faith**, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brothers and sisters who are in the world."
  - In both verses above, "in the faith" can refer to a believer. And that believer can either "stand firm" in their faith or not stand firm. But either way, they are still believers.
  - So you don't have to automatically assume "in the faith" in 2 Cor 13:5 refers to unregenerate people

5. The phrase "Christ is in you" relates to progressive sanctification

- The common Calvinistic interpretation is that if you "fail the test" that Christ is not "in you," and if Christ is not "in you" then you must not be a true believer
- But the phrase "Christ is in you" is not only related to justification, but also related to sanctification

6. The Reformed view destroys the symmetry of the passage

- The Corinthians were challenging Paul's apostleship. They were not challenging whether or not Paul was saved, they just doubted he was a genuine apostle since he was not one of the original 12. If Paul was indeed an apostle (which he was), then the Corinthians would have to submit to his authority (which they didn't want to).
- The surrounding verses demonstrate that this is the context:

- 2 Cor 13:3: since you are seeking **proof** of the Christ who speaks **in me**, who is not weak toward you, but mighty in you.
- 2 Cor 13:6-7:
  - 6 But I expect that you will realize that we ourselves **do not fail the test**.
  - 7 Now we pray to God that you do nothing wrong; not so that we ourselves may appear approved, but that you may do what is right, though we may appear **unapproved**.
- In 13:5, Paul takes the Corinthians' argument against his apostleship and turns it around on them. He takes the same terminology that they were using against him and he uses it against them. His question is essentially, "Are you even mature enough as a Christian to make a judgment on whether or not I am an apostle?"
- He says, if you want to test me (regarding apostleship), instead why don't you test yourselves (regarding spiritual maturity)

#### 7. Only believers experience discipline

- In 13:1, Paul is talking about church discipline...he says "This is the third time I'm coming to you." Paul had addressed the question of his apostolic credentials on two previous occasions, this being the third time.
- He's following Matt 18:15-17, and even quotes the same OT passage quoted in that passage in v1 (Deut 19:15)
- Paul is referring to church discipline here and church discipline is reserved only for the saved (you don't initiate church discipline on an unbeliever). This demonstrates that Paul is not talking about a salvation/justification issue, but a growth/sanctification issue.

#### 8. Scripture nowhere tells believers to test the authenticity of their faith

Many will point to Matt 7:16-22 to counter this fact, but they forget to back up to 7:15, which applies the passage to false teachers. So examining one's fruit applies not to examining your own fruit, but the fruit (words) of false teachers because that's how you identify that they are indeed false teachers.

In Rev 2:2 Jesus commands the church at Ephesus for applying tests to false teachers. Jesus doesn't commend them for testing themselves, but instead "those who call themselves apostles, and they are not."

#### 9. The Reformed view damages the assurance of salvation

- If you buy into the Reformed/Calvinist view of this verse, then you will spend your entire Christian life neutralized and introspective of your own works rather than resting on the completed work of Jesus Christ.

- There is a big difference between eternal security and assurance of salvation. Calvinism believes in eternal security, but you spend your whole life wondering if you have it or not. Assurance of salvation, on the other hand, means that you can actually know, without a shadow of doubt, that you possess eternal life right now, and never worry about it again.

#### 4d. Eph 2:10:

10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that **we would walk** in them.

- "...we would walk" - *peripateō*, subjunctive mood, meaning the mood of possibility. One may walk in them, or they may not, it's up to them. This is not a command or a statement of fact.

#### 4e. Heb 12:14:

14 Pursue peace with all people, and the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.

- Calvinists use this verse to teach that if you're not pursuing peace and holiness, then you're not going to see the Lord (make it to heaven). Meaning, if your good doesn't outweigh your bad, you're going to get to heaven and hear the words, "Depart from me, I never knew you."
- And because you didn't persevere in pursuing peace and holiness, when the data on you is reviewed in heaven, you will come up short. And because you didn't persevere, you never really had authentic faith to begin with, meaning you were never really saved.
- How do you handle this verse? Like every other verse, in its context.

#### The Context of Heb 12:14

1. Calvinistic interpretation: Holy life + faith = heaven. The Bible says: Faith + nothing = heaven.
  - a. Michael Horton (quoted earlier) said: "*The NT lays before us a vast array of conditions for final salvation. Not only initial repentance and faith, but perseverance in both, demonstrated in love toward God and neighbor, are part of that holiness without which no one will see the Lord (Heb 12:14).*"
  - i. So Michael Horton, a noted Calvinist, here gives us the conditions for salvation: 1- initial repentance + 2- faith + 3- perseverance in both repentance and faith + 4- love toward God + 5- love toward neighbor + 6- holiness. And if you don't have all six, from the time of your salvation to the time you die, then you will not see the Lord.

- b. John Piper says: "*Essential to the Christian life and necessary for final salvation is the killing of sin (Rom 8:13) and the pursuit of holiness (Heb 12:14).*"
- i. So Piper is giving us his conditions for "final salvation": 1- killing of sin (whatever that means) + 2- holiness = heaven.
- 2. What is Heb 12:14 saying? Does it say that there needs to be repentance + faith + love of God + love of man + killing of sin + pursuit of holiness = final salvation? No!
- a. What Heb 12:14 is talking about is other people "seeing the Lord" through the believer's life and witness. It's not talking about you seeing God one day in heaven. That is not the "seeing of God" the author of Hebrews is talking about here. It's talking about other people seeing the veracity and truth of your Christian witness through your life, through your pursuit of peace with all men, and holiness.
- 3. It's talking about our horizontal witness to others, not our vertical relationship with God. But what if someone says, "I don't want to pursue peace with others because I'm really upset at them, and I don't want to pursue holiness because I like my sin." Ok, but then people cannot see Christ through you. When they look at your life, you look like everyone else and you don't shine the light of Christ toward them. Unbelievers will not see the reality of Christianity through you.
- 4. Context = personal relationships with others (Heb 12:14a,15b). Look at 12:14-15 together:

14 Pursue peace with **all people**, and the holiness without which **no one** will see the Lord.

15 See to it that **no one** comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it **many** become defiled;

- "...all people" - one to another; a horizontal, not vertical, relationship
- "...no one" - does not refer to the person who doesn't pursue peace with all people, or holiness, but rather to other people who are looking at your life
  - These people, believers and unbelievers, will not see the Lord in your life if you are not pursuing peace and demonstrating holiness
- "...many" - refers to the people who aren't seeing the authentic work of God in your life because you aren't pursuing peace and holiness

#### 4f. Rev 13:10:

10 If anyone is *destined* for captivity, to captivity he goes; if anyone kills with the sword, with the sword he must be killed. Here is the **perseverance** and the faith of the **saints**.

- Calvinism uses this verse to argue that a believer must persevere in their faith and good works, otherwise they were not truly saved
- But this verse is referring to the generation of believers who are laboring under the tyranny of the Antichrist

- This verse is not saying that these Tribulation Saints must endure in good works until the end of their life or they are not saved and not going to heaven. That is the furthest thing from what this passage means.
- This passage is an exhortation to these Tribulation Saints to endure, because they are going to need all the help they can get. Rev 7:9-17 tells us that most of these believers will be martyred for their faith. They are martyred because they are saved, and this exhortation/prayer is given because of the oppression they will be under.
- "...perseverance" - *hypomonē*, steadfastness, endurance
- This verse has nothing to do with the Calvinist doctrine of perseverance of the saints. The context here are saints during the Tribulation period being physically preserved from martyrdom, with the hopes of being protected physically by Jesus Christ.
- This verse is not saying that these Tribulation Saints must endure in good works until the end of their life or they are not saved and not going to heaven. That is the furthest thing from what this passage means.
- This verse is an exhortation to these Tribulation Saints to endure, because they are going to need all the help they can get. Rev 7:9-17 tells us that most of these believers will be martyred for their faith. They are martyred because they are saved, and this exhortation/prayer is given because of the oppression they will be under.
- "...saints" - when some see this word, they immediately think Christians today (Church Age saints). but the word "saints" in Scripture is used to describe three different "categories" of believers:
  - Used of OT believers; we see this many times in the Psalms
  - Used of Church Age believers throughout the NT epistles
  - Used of believers during the Tribulation period, likely evangelized by the 144,000 Jewish evangelists (Rev 7), the Two Witnesses (Rev 11), and the evangelizing angel (Rev 14).

#### **4g. Rev 14:12:**

12 Here is the perseverance of the saints who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus.

- Here is another exhortation for Tribulation Saints to persevere in the faith while enduring the tyranny of the Antichrist (Cf. 13:10). This verse has absolutely nothing to do with Church Age saints or anyone's salvation/justification.
- The verses immediately prior to v12 talk about a person who accepts the mark of the beast. That person will be damned to hell for eternity, so instead put up with the economic depravation and tyranny and persevere through it. Don't take the easy way out.

- The context is speaking to Tribulation Saints who will need encouragement to endure constant persecution and possible martyrdom that will be prevalent during the Tribulation, especially the second half

#### **4h. Rev 22:14-15:**

**14** Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they will have the right to the tree of life, and may enter the city by the gates.

**15** Outside are the dogs, the sorcerers, the sexually immoral persons, the murderers, the idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices lying.

- This is one of four "vice lists" given in the NT (Cf. 1 Cor 6:9-11; Gal 5:19-21; Eph 5:5; Rev 22:14-15). A "vice list" is a statement that at first glance appears to refer to Christians/believers. It lists a bunch of "vices" (sins) that characterize unbelievers, and it urges believers to not practice those same sins.
- This vice list is a list of character traits of unbelievers, similar to the list in 21:8. That verse states that these people will be in the Lake of Fire and experience the second death, thus they are unbelievers.
- This list doesn't describe the works of believers, and doesn't state that if a believer is sexually immoral (or practices one of the other vices), that person was never truly saved and is destined for hell.

#### **5. Perseverance of the Saints is a Subtle Form of "Works Salvation"**

The Calvinist doctrine of Perseverance of the Saints is actually a subtle form of salvation by works. There are two types of false soteriology out there today: those who "front load" the gospel, which is to insert conditions (works) as requirements to be justified before God, in addition to belief.

Usually this can be summarized by COPS: commitment, obedience, perseverance, and service. They'll say, Yes, you're saved by faith alone in Christ alone, but you must also demonstrate COPS in order to be saved. They are placing additional requirements on salvation/justification over and above what Jesus Himself puts on it, which is faith alone in Christ alone. If you add anything besides belief to justification, you're front-loading the gospel.

Then you'll get those who say, No way, you shouldn't front load the gospel...you're saved only by faith alone in Christ alone. But then what they'll move in to is back loading the gospel by saying that we need to see COPS after you're saved (by faith alone in Christ alone) in order to prove that you really ("truly") saved. This is the Calvinistic view: if you don't demonstrate COPS in your life, then you aren't "truly" saved...you have a "spurious" faith.

Interestingly, it's always some type of human analysis of whether you've reached the COPS bar or not. It's very subjective. In fact, some of the biggest preachers in the largest churches boldly preach that if "we" don't see COPS in your life, you are not saved. You are a *professor* of Christ, but not a *possessor* of Christ.

One of the biggest preachers of back-loading the gospel is John Piper. He is quoted as saying the following:

*"No Christian can be sure that he is a true believer. Hence, there is an ongoing need to be dedicated to the Lord and to deny ourselves so that we might make it."* [John Piper and Pastoral Staff, *TULIP: What We Believe about the Five Points of Calvinism: Position Paper of the Pastoral Staff* (Desiring God Ministries, 1997), 25, cited in Dave Hunt, *What Love Is This?*, 379.]

This is classic back-loading the gospel...you're not saved by faith alone in Christ alone...you're only saved by that plus COPS (and Piper adds "dedicated" and "deny ourselves" to it). Here's another example:

*"The New Testament lays before us a vast array of conditions for final salvation. Not only initial **repentance and faith**, but perseverance in both, demonstrated in love toward God and neighbor, are part of that holiness without which no one will see the Lord (Heb 12:14)."* [Michael Horton, *Introducing Covenant Theology*, Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006, 182]

- "...repentance and faith" - to Horton, these are two different ideas but in reality "repentance" and "faith" in a salvation context are two sides of the same coin. Repentance means "to change your mind" and in a salvation context it means to take your faith out of what you currently have it in to save you and place it instead in Jesus Christ.

Here's another doozy from John Piper:

*Saving faith is no simple thing. It has many dimensions. 'Believe on the Lord Jesus' is a massive command. It contains a hundred other things. Unless we see this, the array of conditions for salvation in the New Testament will be utterly perplexing.* [John Piper, *Desiring God* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 1986), 65.] This quote also appeared verbatim in the 1996 reprinting of *Desiring God*, but was rephrased in the 2003 and 2011 editions due to significant criticism.

- What, pray tell John, are the "hundred other things" encompassed by "believing on the Lord Jesus"? And where are those "hundred other things" found in Scripture? Chapters and verses would be appreciated! Notice that he can't be bothered to provide any (not a single) scriptural reference to even one of the "massive commands."
- Piper just took something that God Himself designed as simple and easy to understand, and turned it into an insane maze of phariseism that no Christian could understand, keep track of, or actually do, including John Piper.

So do we believe in John Piper or John the Apostle because John the Apostle (quoting Jesus) says:

John 5:24: **"Truly, truly, I say to you, the one who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life.**

- Notice that Jesus doesn't list even one of the "massive" number of commands that Piper says are included in "believe." There are no COPS defined here, which Piper believes are required in order to obtain eternal life.

Titus 2:14: who gave Himself for us to **redeem** us from **every** lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, eager for good deeds.

- "...redeem" - to purchase from bondage; once you fulfill the single condition given to receive this, belief, then you receive this redemption from the bondage of sin and every single lawless deed you ever committed or ever will commit.
- "...every" - every single one of our lawless deeds have been redeemed once we place our faith in Christ. But does this include someone who stops believing? Yes! (Cf. 2 Tim 2:13)

## 6. Miscellaneous Arguments Against Perseverance of the Saints

### 6a. If Calvinism's Perseverance of the Saints is True, Wouldn't It Be Preferable to Die Immediately After Conversion?

If you talk to a Calvinist who believes in perseverance of the saints and you tell them well, Abraham messed things up. David committed horrible sins. Solomon sinned consistently, 700 wives, 300 concubines, worshipped idols, etc. and the Bible is clear that all three were saved (otherwise we'd have a number of books of the Bible written by an unsaved person, which isn't possible).

The Calvinist would respond, Yes, but they all came back (at least a little bit). Abraham demonstrated his faith by sacrificing Isaac, David repented and asked for forgiveness, and

Solomon came back toward God a little bit (there is one verse where Solomon acknowledges that he messed things up) at the very end of his life.

So the Calvinist view is that you can't die in the state the Abraham was in in Gen 16, or the state David was in before he repented, or the state Solomon was in for most of his life before he "came back" a little bit.

So here's a hypothetical:

- If a person comes to church, hears the gospel, believes it and puts their faith in Christ, then dies in a car accident on the way home. Are they saved? The Calvinist would say Yes.
- What if a person comes out of a life of alcoholism, sexual immorality, cussing, etc., they come to church, they hear the gospel, they place their faith in Christ and go back home excited about their new life in Christ....then 6-12 months, 5 years, 10 years later, they are living exactly like how they lived before they came to Christ, and they die in that state. Is that person saved? The Calvinist would say, Absolutely not!
- So what this means, if what the Calvinist believes is true (which it's not), wouldn't it be best to pray for people to die immediately after receiving Christ? If you understand the length of eternity and the horrific nature of hell, then it would be best for that person if you shot them dead the moment after they accepted Christ if you believe the Calvinist view is correct. It would be much better for someone to die an early death than to regress in their walk of life to the point of not being saved and spend eternity in hell.
- The Calvinist view is very Roman Catholic. In Roman Catholicism, there is a difference between venial (Latin = "lesser") sins and mortal (serious) sins. Of course various sins bring various consequences, but every sin, even stealing a paper clip from work, is a sin that separates us from God.

### **6b. The Doctrine of Perseverance of the Saints Lessens the Importance of Practical Sanctification**

If the doctrine of perseverance of the saints is true, all of the "elect" will ultimately persevere in good works and doctrine. That's what they believe. So as a pastor, if you believe this, you don't need to teach most of the NT anymore, which deals with the believer yielding to the Holy Spirit, because you believe that this will happen automatically for the "elect." You don't need to teach about progressive sanctification because you believe it will occur automatically in the life of every "true" believer.

This is a subtle form of pride, and a serious misinterpretation of God's Word. If a pastor decided this, which is plausible considering the Calvinist belief system, that pastor is deciding which parts of God's Word are relevant for his congregation and which parts are not. That is not the pastor's job.

### **6c. The Doctrine of Perseverance of the Saints Lessens the Importance of the Bema Seat Warnings**

If every "elect" believer will persevere automatically, which Calvinism believes, then what importance is the Bema Seat judgment of believers? That event, to a Calvinist, is just a "participation trophy" for the believer, not a time of judgment of one's works since becoming a believer for the purpose of issuing rewards. To a Calvinist, if you're a loser at the Bema Seat judgment, you weren't saved to begin with so it doesn't matter. To a Calvinist, there is no judgment of rewards for believers because all believers will automatically persevere in good works throughout their life and die in that state.

1 Cor 4:5: Therefore do not go on passing judgment before *the time, but wait* until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of *human* hearts; and then praise will come to each person from God.

- I don't need to worry about anyone but myself when it comes to the Bema Seat judgment. This verse says that "the Lord" is equipped to bring this judgment, and reveal the motives of men's hearts.

### **7. The Doctrine of Perseverance of the Saints Destroys Assurance of Salvation**

The Biblical view of assurance of salvation is that at the point of faith/belief, I possess salvation and eternal life. I don't have to wait until I die, I own it now.

John 5:24: **"Truly, truly, I say to you, the one who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life.**

1 John 5:13: These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.

Luke 23:42-43:

42 And he was saying, "Jesus, remember me when You come into Your kingdom!"  
43 And He said to him, **"Truly I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise."**  
• Jesus gave the thief on the cross, who was not a good guy (he committed a capital crime), both eternal security and assurance of salvation

*It is every person's privilege, who by the Spirit through faith are born again in Christ, to be assured of their eternal salvation from the very moment they take Him to be their Savior. This assurance is not based on any fancied discovery of their own worthiness or fitness, but wholly and completely upon the testimony of God in His written Word.*

You can learn all you want about the Bible, be a theologian, get all the doctorates and so forth, but the two most important things you need to understand when you first become a Christian are the doctrine of eternal security and the doctrine of assurance of salvation. If you don't have these two things rock solid in your mind, Satan is going to have a field day with you. He's going to go back to you every single day and accuse you of sin, and place doubts in your mind whether or not you're saved. These doctrines need to be rock solid in your mind and non-negotiable.

If you don't have these two doctrines under your belt, you'll be constantly looking at yourself and your works, focused solely on you and what you've done (or not done), and lose focus on the Lord and what He did. We're not saved by what we've done, we're saved by what He did.

You'll also be chasing after experiences, the latest word of wisdom, the next open door. If you haven't had an "experience" with the Lord in the past couple of weeks, then you start to doubt whether or not you're saved.

We don't get our assurance of salvation from our experiences, we get it from the rock solid promises from God in His Word.

*"There is a normal Christian experience. There are new and blessed emotions and desires. Old things do pass away; and behold all things do become new; but all such experiences are but secondary evidences, as to the fact of salvation, in that they grow out of that positive repose of faith, which is the primary evidence."* [Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Salvation: A Clear Doctrinal Analysis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977), 60.]

### **7a. Examples of How Perseverance of the Saints Destroys the Assurance of Salvation**

Regarding how the Calvinist doctrine of perseverance of the saints destroys a believer's assurance of salvation, Bob Kirkland says:

*"Once fully indoctrinated into Calvinism, the Calvinist is left wondering for the rest of his life if he is one of the elect. This is not a walk of faith, but of doubt, and it is totally unscriptural. Scripture says that we can walk in assurance of eternal life."* [Kirkland, *Calvinism: None Dare Call It Heresy; Spotlight on the Life and Teachings of John Calvin* (Eureka, MT: Lighthouse Trails, 2018), 102.]

*"Therefore, I am elect, is first perceived from sanctification begun in me, that is, by my hating of sin and my loving of righteousness."* [Theodore Beza (1519-1605), *A Little Book of Christian Questions and Responses*, p96-97.]

*"Genuine assurance comes from seeing the Holy Spirit's transforming work in one's life."* [MacArthur, *The Gospel According to Jesus*, p23.]

Notice that MacArthur never defines how much transforming work the Holy Spirit must do in one's life in order for them to know they are saved (or one of the "elect"). Instead, MacArthur takes his readers to secondary evidences of salvation (looking at ourselves and the work of the Holy Spirit in us) rather than to the primary evidence, which are the promises to and for us in God's Word.

*"This infallible assurance doth not so belong to the **essence of faith**, but that a true believer will wait long, and conflict with many difficulties before he be a partaker of it."* [Westminster Confession, Chapter XVII, Article III]

- "...essence of faith" - basically it's saying that you can't know you have eternal security/assurance of salvation simply because of your faith in Christ

According to the Westminster Confession, a believer has to go through a "long" time and experience "many difficulties" before he can ever have the assurance of salvation. If this isn't the complete opposite of what Jesus says in John 5:24, I don't know what is. This statement is completely unscriptural.

*"Even John Calvin himself did not possess assurance of salvation. Writing in his will shortly before his death in 1564, he declared: 'I testify also and profess that I humbly seek from God, that He may so will me to be washed and purified by the great Redeemer's blood, shed for the sins of the human race, that it may be permitted me to stand before His tribunal under the covert of the Redeemer Himself.'" [Norman F. Douty, *The Death of Christ* (Irving, TX: Williams & Watrous Pub. Co., Revised and Enlarged Edition, 1978), p176, citing John Calvin from F.F. Bruce's *Answers and Questions*, Question 1331, in The Harvester (Exeter) January 1966.]*

Based on this quote, John Calvin himself did not know if he was actually saved. He had no assurance of salvation at all. This is what the doctrine of perseverance of the saints breeds: no assurance that a person is saved and going to heaven one day. This is further confirmed by the top Calvinist preachers and pastors today:

*"What causes me to be anxious is the possibility that I may not be a Christian—that I might be fake—that everything I've ever done might be a farce—those are horrible, horrible thoughts, right?" [John Piper's interview on Family Life Radio, April 14, 2020]*

*"A while back I had one of those moments...and suddenly the question hit me: 'R.C. what if you are not one of the redeemed? What if your destiny is not heaven after all, but hell?' Let me tell you that I was flooded in my body with the chill that went from my head to the bottom of my spine. I was terrified.*

*I tried to grab hold of myself. I thought, 'Well, it's a good sign that I'm worried about this. Only true Christians really care about salvation.' But then I began to take stock of my life, and I looked at my performance. My sins came pouring into my mind and the more I looked at myself the worst I felt. I thought, 'maybe it's really true. Maybe I'm not saved after all.'"*

*I went to my room and began to read the Bible. On my knees I said, "Well, here I am. I can't point to my obedience. There's nothing I can offer.... I knew that some people only flee to the Cross to escape hell.... I could not be sure about my own heart and motivation. Then I remembered John 6:68. Jesus had been giving out hard teaching, and many of His former followers had left Him. When He asked Peter if he was also going to leave, Peter said, 'where else can we go? Only You have the words of eternal life.' In other words, Peter was also uncomfortable, but he realized that being uncomfortable with Jesus was better than any other option." [Assurance of Salvation, Tabletalk, Ligonier Ministries, 1989, pg 20]*

*"Church teaching is that I don't know, at any given moment, what my eternal future will be...I can hope, pray, do my very best—but I still don't know. Pope John II doesn't absolutely know that he will go to heaven, nor does Mother Theresa of Calcutta, unless either has had a special divine revelation." [Cardinal John O'Connor of New York, quoted in Samuel Howe Verhovek, *Cardinal Defends a Jailed Bishop Who Warned Cuomo on Abortion*, New York Times, February 1, 1990.]*

These quotes from prominent Calvinist pastors clearly demonstrate the fact that in Calvinism, there is no assurance of salvation. The last quote, from Cardinal O'Connor, shows how the Calvinist belief system mirrors that of Roman Catholicism when it comes to perseverance of the saints.

### **7b. Calvinism's "Two Kinds of Faith" Doctrine Damages Assurance of Salvation**

The root of Calvinism's doctrine of perseverance of the saints is the belief that there are two kinds of faith: a faith that saves, given to us by God, and a faith that does not save, that is our own. A faith that is accompanied by sorrow and contrition, and a faith that isn't.

According to Calvinism, "true" faith will always manifest itself in sorrow over sin and good works, plus a million other things. But "spurious" faith will backslide, not perform, struggle with sin. So the million dollar question is...what kind of faith do you have? The Calvinist

answer to this is, "Only time will tell." Only God knows if you have "true" faith because you're one of the "elect" and God infused into you the gift of faith. If He didn't give you faith, then you are not saved according to Calvinism.

*"Many trusted in His name; i.e., because of the manner in which His power was displayed they accepted Him as a great Prophet and perhaps even as the Messiah. This, however, is not the same as saying that they surrendered their hearts to Him. Not all faith is saving faith...".* [William Hendrikson, *A Commentary on the Gospel of John*, 3rd ed (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1964), 127.]

This doctrine of "two faiths" is routinely taught in Calvinism. And if you believe this, you will spend your entire life wondering if you have the right kind of faith. And if you're always worried whether you have the right kind of faith, you'll spend your whole life in worry rather than in building.

*"As a divine gift, faith is neither transient nor impotent. It has an abiding quality that guarantees its endurance to the end."* [MacArthur, *The Gospel According to Jesus*, 173.]

MacArthur is confused about what the "gift" is...it's not faith, it's salvation. Faith is the means by which the gift is acquired. Faith how the gift of salvation is transferred to my account. But forgetting about this, he goes on to say that if you have really received the gift of faith, then it will endure because God can't give something that is unstable. That is correct...God can't give something that is unstable...the problem is that MacArthur is wrong about what God gives. He gives salvation, not faith. So according to MacArthur, if you have doubts about your salvation, maybe you don't have the right kind of faith. Maybe God didn't give you the gift of faith because you are not one of the "elect."

*"...The faith God gives can never evaporate."* [MacArthur, *The Gospel According to Jesus*, 173.]

*"If a person fails to love and obey the Lord through the trials of life, then there is no evidence that he possesses saving faith. How many people do you know who came to church for awhile, had a little trouble in their lives, and left? Although they may have made a profession of faith in Christ, they cannot be identified as those who love Him because their lives are not characterized by enduring obedience."* [MacArthur, *Saved Without A Doubt*, 177.]

*"Why do some stumble and fall while others persevere? Is it that some are better, stronger than others? No. The reason lies in the difference between having saving faith and a faith that is not divine in origin or nature. Many are those who make professions not based upon regeneration, and the 'faith' that is theirs will not last.... These are those who have false, human faith that does not last. But those with true faith produce fruit and remain." [James R. White, *The Potter's Freedom* (Amityville, NY: Calvary Press Publishing, 2000), 293.]*

What do the three quotes above have in common? None of them provide a single Scripture reference to back up their belief. Not one. The reason is because Scripture does not back up this belief.

What happens when one of the progenitors of Calvinism, and the doctrine of perseverance of the saints, is found to have fallen into sin and not persevered? How does this unscriptural doctrine get interpreted when they are the ones who are deemed unregenerate by their own doctrine?

Steven Lawson was handpicked to replace John MacArthur upon his death, but unfortunately Lawson had a serious moral failure which scuttled those plans. On March 12, 2025 he wrote the following after being caught in an adulterous relationship:

It is with a shattered heart that I write this letter. I have sinned grievously against the Lord, against my wife, my family, and against countless numbers of you by having a sinful relationship with a woman not my wife. I am deeply broken that I have betrayed and deceived my wife, devastated my children, brought shame to the name of Christ, reproach upon His church, and harm to many ministries.

My sin carries enormous consequences, and I will be living with those for the rest of my life.

I am grateful for the unmerited grace of God in the gospel to extend His full forgiveness to me. Again, I ask for your forgiveness as well.

Lawson is a staunch Calvinist, so here are a couple questions to ponder based on his staunch belief in the doctrine of perseverance of the saints:

- Lawson did not disclose his adulterous relationship of his own volition, he was caught in his sin. He only came to repentance after he was caught in and confronted with his sin.
- Steven, are you an unbeliever and your faith "spurious" because you were caught in an adulterous relationship? You are clearly not persevering in your faith.

- Based on your Calvinistic theology, sounds like you're not one of the "elect" because you're clearly not persevering in your faith. Do you acknowledge this, and confess that you will likely spend eternity in hell because you did not persevere?

Of course, the Bible clearly teaches that Steven Lawson is a believer, and according to the promises of Scripture, will be in heaven one day. The fact that he broke one of the commandments and cheated on his wife does not mean that he will go to hell one day. God's abundant grace can certainly forgive and restore Lawson because the sacrifice of Christ covers and atones for all of our sin, past, present and future. But it's interesting to see the tables turned on these Calvinist teachers when they don't live up to their own belief system.

Lawson has been silent since the announcement of his adultery and subsequent stepping down from ministry positions.

## 8. Passages Conditioning Salvation/Justification on Faith Alone (*Sola Fide*)

Gen 15:6: Then he **believed in the LORD**; and He credited it to him as righteousness.

John 3:14-15 (Cf. Num 21:8-9):

14 **And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up,**

15 **so that everyone who believes will have eternal life in Him.**

- Jesus uses this OT story (Num 21:4-9) to demonstrate to Nicodemus, the teacher of Israel, about the simplicity of salvation
  - All the Israelites had to do to be "saved" from the bite of the serpent (analogized to Satan/sin) is "look" at the serpent on the pole and they would be healed
  - "...believes" - then Jesus, for those who may be slower on the uptake, defines what "looking at the serpent on the pole" means: belief
  - How many times did the people have to look at the serpent to be healed? Just once. One look, prompted by faith, was enough. So it is with salvation: you must look at Christ in belief, by faith, one time in order to be saved. The faith that heals or saves is an act, a completed event, not an attitude.

Even though Jesus teaches the simplicity of salvation, there are always some that have to make it more complicated. Here's what John MacArthur says about Numbers 21:

*A more careful study of Numbers 21 reveals that Jesus was not painting a picture of easy faith.... In order to look at the bronze snake on the pole, **they had to drag themselves to where they could see it.** They were in no position to **glance flippantly at the pole and then proceed with lives of rebellion.** [MacArthur, The*

*Gospel According to Jesus: What Does Jesus Mean When He Says, "Follow Me"?*  
(Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), 46.]

There are so many things wrong with this quote from MacArthur it's hard to fathom:

- "...more careful study" - so if you read Num 21 then read John 3:14-15, and understand it for what it says, you have not done a "careful study." But then MacArthur goes on, in his "careful study," to find things that the Scripture passages say nothing about. He is adding things to the Word of God that the Word of God never says.
- "...easy faith" - a favorite derogatory term used by Calvinists about what the Bible actually says. The Bible nowhere talks about "easy faith" or "easy beliefism." You either believe or you don't believe. It's a binary choice and there is no middle ground.
- "... they had to drag themselves to where they could see it" - read Num 21 again...it doesn't say a word about the people having to "drag themselves" to where they could see it. The point of the serpent on the pole being "lifted up" was to make it easier for more people to see. They didn't have to "drag themselves" anywhere. Logistically, did they maybe have to walk 10-20 feet to see it, sure. But the "more careful study" MacArthur says he has done on this passage is adding conditions or circumstances that are not found in the text.
  - And since when did "walking" turn into "dragging themselves"? Only when what the Bible teaches (the simplicity of salvation) gets in the way of your preconceived doctrine of Calvinist soteriology.
- "...glance flippantly" - another derogatory phrase used by MacArthur. Nowhere did Jesus state that the people had to "glance flippantly" at the pole. This is another example of how his "more careful study" has rendered a conclusion that is foreign to what the text says.
- "...proceed with lives of rebellion" - the Israelites rebelled against God all the time, both before and after they were healed by looking at the serpent on the pole.

John 5:24: **"Truly, truly, I say to you, the one who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, **has** eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but **has passed out** of death into life.**

- "...has" [2x] - *echō*, present tense; eternal life and passing out of death into life are things that God gives to us the moment we place our faith in Christ. They are both a present possession of every believer.

- "...passed out" - *metabainō*, perfect tense, meaning a one-time event that happened in the past, with lasting results to the present. When a person believes, they pass from one realm (under death, judgment) to another (eternal life). For a believer, this "passing out" is a past event, something that has already happened.

Just a handful of the 99 examples in John's Gospel that belief is the sole condition of salvation:

John 6:28-29:

28 Therefore they said to Him, "What are we to do, so that we may accomplish the works of God?"

29 Jesus answered and said to them, **"This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent."**

John 6:47: **Truly, truly, I say to you, the one who believes has eternal life.**

John 16:8-9:

8 **And He, when He comes, will convict the world regarding sin, and righteousness, and judgment:**

9 **regarding sin, because they do not believe in Me;**

John 20:30-31:

30 So then, many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book;

31 but these have been written so that you may **believe** that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that **by believing** you may have life in His name.

## 9. The Present Tense of "Believing" and the Calvinist Interpretation of John 20:30-31

Calvinists point to the present tense "believing" [*ho pisteuōn*] in John 20:30-31, and also in John 3:16,18; 5:24, and argue that the present tense is used in these passages "most likely" because the NT writers "by and large" saw continual belief as a necessary condition for salvation.

Dan Wallace, a Greek scholar, even buys into this abuse of the present tense:

"The aspectual force of the present *ho pisteuōn* seems to be in contrast with *ho pisteusas*.... The present was the tense of choice **most likely** because the NT writers **by and large** saw continual belief as a necessary condition for salvation. Along these lines, it seems significant that the promise of salvation is almost always given to *ho pisteuōn*, almost never to *ho pisteusas*...". [Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond*

*the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament with Scripture, Subject, and Greek Word Indices* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 621.]

The problem is that what Wallace is doing with the present tense of "believing" in John 20:30-31 he would never do anywhere else in the Bible. The use of a present tense participle does not always mean forever and does not always require continual behavior. There are numerous examples of this throughout the NT (see John 4:13; 4:26; 4:36; 5:3; 5:24; 6:14; 11:26-27; Mark 6:14; 14:20; Luke 16:18; Gal 3:13).

John 4:13: Jesus answered and said to her, **"Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again;**

- "...drinks" - *pinō*, an articular present tense participle (a participle that is present tense, with a definite article in front of it), in the exact form as "believing" in John 20:31
  - No one drinks from a well forever. Jesus didn't expect the woman to sit at the well the rest of her life and drink from the well continuously. If that is the case, why would you apply the same rule to John 20:31 requiring constant, life-long belief in order to be saved?

John 4:26: Jesus \*said to her, **"I am He, the One speaking to you."**

- "...speaking" - *laleō*, did Jesus continue speaking to the woman at the well for eternity? At some point their conversation ended. Thus, the present tense does not mean "continual".

John 4:36: **Already the one who reaps is receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that the one who sows and the one who reaps may rejoice together.**

- "...sows" - *speirō*, does this sowing go on forever?

John 5:3: In these *porticoes* lay a multitude of those who were **sick**, blind, limping, or paralyzed.

- "...sick" - *astheneō*, refers to all those who were laying in these porticos, but not all of them would remain sick because Jesus is about to heal one of them. So that person whom He healed did not remain sick forever...there was a termination of his sickness.

John 5:24: **"Truly, truly, I say to you, the one who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life.**

- "...hears" - *akouō*, you only need to hear the gospel once in order to be saved; a person does not have to hear the gospel continually, throughout their entire life, in order to be saved.

John 6:14: Therefore when the people saw the sign which He had performed, they said, "This is truly the Prophet who is to **come** into the world."

- "...come" - *erchomai*, Jesus came into the world once, but He didn't continuously come; it was a one-time event

Mark 14:20: But He said to them, "*It is one of the twelve, the one who dips bread with Me in the bowl.*

- "...dips" - *embaptō*, articular present tense participle: Judas didn't "dip" forever; it was a one-time action, not continuous.

Luke 16:18: "*Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and he who marries one who is divorced from a husband commits adultery.*

- "...divorces" - *apolyō*, articular present tense participle: if you get a divorce, it's a one-time event, not an on-going action for the rest of your life.

Gal 3:13: Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us—for it is written: "CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO **HANGS** ON A TREE"—

- "...HANGS" - *kremannymi*, articular present tense participle: did Jesus "hang" on a tree forever? No one who is crucified hung there forever, they removed them from the cross once they died.

Mark 6:14: And King Herod heard *about it*, for His name had become well known; and *people* were saying, "*John the Baptist* has risen from the dead, and that is why these miraculous powers are at work in Him."

- "...the Baptist" - articular present tense participle: did John the Baptizer's baptism activity ever stop? Of course it did because at this point in time, John the Baptist was dead.
  - This articular present tense participle could not be describing John the Baptist's continual baptizing because he was dead at this time. It was just describing him.

How many times do you have to kill someone before you are a murderer? Once! You would never not call someone a murderer if they killed just one person. Same with fisherman and believer.

The Bible obviously does not preclude on-going faith in the life of the believer (in fact, it commands it), but it does not *require* it either to gain or maintain a person's salvation/justification.

On-going faith is never required by God to be saved/justified. There is not one verse in the NT that requires a person who has put his faith/trust in Christ to continue in that sense for their entire life.

God, who authored salvation (without consulting with John Calvin, John Piper, or any other man), authored it in such a way that is almost too simple. All a person had to do is "look" at the snake on the pole and they were healed.

God's sole condition for our salvation/justification is belief/trust/reliance solely on what Jesus Christ accomplished on the cross for our eternal salvation from the penalty of sin.

Other verb forms are also used to describe belief (Cf. John 8:30-31). If the present tense form of the verb "believing" was so critical, why does the Bible use so many other verb forms for believing to describe faith in Christ?

John 8:30-31:

30 As He said these things, many came to **believe** in Him.

- "...believe" - aorist active indicative

31 So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had **believed** Him, "**If you continue in My word, then you are truly My disciples;**

- "...believed" - perfect active participle
- Notice that Jesus says "continuing" in His word doesn't mean a person is saved, but rather that they are a disciple.

It is possible for a Christian to struggle with faith? According to the Bible, Yes. You didn't become a Christian because of your lack of ability to struggle. What made you a Christian was a singular look of faith, by His grace.

2 Tim 2:13: If **we are faithless**, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself.

- "...we are faithless" - *apisteō*, unbelieving; so is Paul telling Timothy that he, and/or Paul himself, could at some point in their life stop believing in Christ and still be saved? Yes, that is what Paul is saying.

- This verse is not saying that you are lacking in faith...*apisteō* is an *alpha privative* meaning "without faith" (no faith). The problem is not needing a little more faith, it means to have no faith at all.
- One of the hardest things to get into our minds as Christians is the grace of God. We redefine grace to mean kindness, or something else, but grace is God's "undeserved favor" toward us. He gives us favor when we don't deserve it.

- If we stop believing, we no longer "deserve" God's favor. We left Him, He didn't leave us. Yet this verse describes the grace of God in that even if we do leave Him, He will never leave us.
- "we" - first person plural, meaning Paul included himself in this statement

James 1:5-8:

5 But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him.

6 But he must ask in faith without any **doubting**, for the one who **doubts** is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind.

7 For that person **ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord**,

8 *being a double-minded man, unstable* in all his ways.

- If James believed that a Christian could not have any doubts (be "faithless"), then why does he tell us that we should not doubt? Only because James knew that Christians could struggle in their faith, that doubt could seep in.
- If doubting is not even possible, as Calvinism and Arminianism both say, then why does James even warn us about it?

Luke 22:31-32:

31 "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded to sift you *men like wheat*;

32 **but I have prayed for you, that your faith will not fail; and you, when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers."**

- "...I have prayed for you" - amazing! Jesus prayed for Peter.
- "...your faith" - whose faith? Jesus said it was Peter's faith that He prayed for, not the faith that God gave to Him, that "supposedly" can never fail.
- If Jesus needed to pray for Peter's faith to not fail, doesn't that imply that Peter's faith could fail?

## 10. Conclusion

In conclusion, based on the teaching of prominent Calvinists in history and today, we can understand the full scope of their perseverance of the saints doctrine. I have addressed many of their quotes directly, as well as addressed in detail each of the primary proof-texts they use to argue in favor of this belief. And in each case, it has conclusively been shown that this doctrine is not biblical. The proof-texts used to argue in favor are, in every case, taken out of their context. These passages are not saying what Calvinists think they are saying when interpreted in the context in which they were written.

It's critical to heed Paul's warning in Col 2:8: See to it that there is no one who takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception in accordance with human tradition, in accordance with the elementary principles of the world, rather than in accordance with Christ.

Unfortunately, Calvinism is a man-made philosophy that is imposed on Scripture, not derived from Scripture. Bob Kirkland, in his book *Calvinism: None Dare Call It Heresy; Spotlight on the Life and Teachings of John Calvin*, said the following:

*"John Calvin...latched onto little more than a single word (predestinate) and ran with it. Then, rather than carefully looking to the whole of Scripture to verify his precepts and conclusions, he looked to the writings of Augustine to verify his thinking. The result is that, as with Catholicism, we now have 'another gospel' that is not solely based on Scripture but on the confused thinking and misconstrued assumptions of a mere man. With Calvin, rather than changing his views to fit Scripture, he changed the meaning of words in Scripture to fit his now distorted view of God and salvation."*