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Challenges to Perseverance of the Saints



God's Sovereignty and Man's Salvation - Steve Gregg

In this talk, Steve Gregg addresses challenges to the Calvinist belief in the perseverance of the saints. He argues that in the Calvinist system, those who fall away were never really believers to begin with. However, Gregg acknowledges that there are cases of people who have followed Christ for a time but then depart from the faith. He emphasizes the importance of remaining faithful and trusting in God despite persecution and hardship, and warns against succumbing to sin and the temptations of the world.

Transcript

We come now to lecture number 8, Challenges to the Perseverance of the Saints. And of course, this is the fifth and final of the points of Calvinism for us to re-examine. This is really a point where Calvinists and Arminians largely are similar, although they don't think so.

When you're thinking through it, really, Arminianism and Calvinism pretty much come out in the same place with reference to those who fall away. Both Calvinists and Arminians believe that people who appear to be Christians and people who think they are Christians may fall away. The difference is the Arminian believes that those people who seem to be Christians and think they're Christians and who eventually fall away may actually be Christians.

That they may really not be deceived about that. They may be aware that they truly are Christ's. They really are Christians.

But, through their own exercise of free will, they may fall away. The Calvinist believes that those people who we've just described were not really Christians. But, it makes really no practical difference to them because they thought they were anyway as much as you and I think we are.

So, in other words, a Calvinist would have to say, as would an Arminian, just because they believe that the true elect cannot fall away, that's not saying that you can't fall away. You really can't be sure that you won't fall away unless you have a way of being sure you're elect. But, really, the ultimate test of whether you're elect or not is whether

you fall away or not.

It becomes a little bit circular when you're trying to use this as a means of assurance. Because, perseverance in the final analysis trumps, for the Calvinist, all other evidences that you are elect. Can you know that you're one of the elect? They say, yes, you can.

Many of them say this. They say you can know because of the change that God brings in your life. He sets you free from sin.

You have a heart for God that you wouldn't have if you weren't elect. If you weren't regenerated. You live a godly life.

But, of course, there are people who fit all those descriptions. They've been freed from sin. They have a heart for God.

They live a godly life. But, they eventually fall away and die that way. Now, this is not a theory.

This is something that can be observed. If you live long enough as a Christian, you'll find a number of people you knew who had all the evidences that you or I have of belonging in the fellowship of the saints. For some reason, they end up going another direction and defect and turn from Christ and rebel.

Now, the Calvinist, of course, would say, well, then that person wasn't really elect because they didn't persevere. So, what they're saying is, although there are many reasons that you can know you're elect, none of them count at all if you don't persevere. Therefore, perseverance is, in the final analysis, the only way to know you're elect.

Because, short of that, you may be deceived into thinking you're elect. Even Calvin has said that. Even Calvin himself said that God sometimes effectually calls those who are not elect.

So that they come illuminated. They become believers. And they continue for a while.

And, of course, they're not deceiving themselves because God himself is the one who called them into faith. But they're not really elect, so they fall away. And so, if Calvin is correct, and even if he's not correct, and other Calvinists who have trouble with that statement of his are correct, you know you're elect in the final analysis because you didn't fall away.

Now, since we're not dead yet, and we don't have a time machine or a perfect knowledge of the future, we can't know for sure that we won't fall away. Now, let me put it this way. I can be assured that I won't fall away.

But the reason I can be assured is because I believe that I'm kept by the power of God through faith. And faith simply means I'm trusting God. And I can do that all I want.

I can trust him till the day I die, and I intend to do just that. And as long as I trust him, I'll be kept by the power of God. I couldn't have that same assurance if I was a Calvinist.

Because to the Calvinists, I'm either elect or I'm not. If I am, then I'll persevere, but I don't know if I am. If I'm not, then it's not up to me to just persevere in the faith.

I can't because I'm not elect. If I'm reprobate, I will depart from the faith because I can't persevere unless I'm not elect. You see what I'm saying is that Calvinists say Arminians have no assurance of salvation because we might fall away.

I say Calvinists have no assurance of salvation because they might fall away too. On their theology, they can't if they're elect. But on their theology, they can't know if they're elect until they find out if they fall away or not.

I at least know this. If I did fall away, even if there is the possibility of me falling away, I don't have to wonder whether I'm really saved now. Because whoever believes in him has eternal life.

Now you might say, well then they can't fall away because they have eternal life. But as we said earlier, this life is in the Son. This life is enjoyed and experienced by remaining in him.

It is he who has the eternal life. And we have it in him. And Jesus said, you better abide in me or else you'll be cut off like a branch and wither and be burned.

So I know this. I know where the fountain is where the blessing comes out. I know where the life is to be found.

I know where the springs of living water are. And I actually want to be there. I want to remain there.

And I will. And I can be sure that whatever happens between now and the time I die, I know the Lord now. Because the Bible gives me all reasons to believe I know the Lord.

If something totally unthinkable should happen so that I would fall away and be lost, that wouldn't change the fact that I knew him now. And that I can live as one who is a follower of Christ now without wondering, am I fooling myself? Maybe I'm not really a follower of Christ. Maybe I'm not really elect.

But again, when you find people who have no assurance of salvation, a lot of times people say you should give them assurance of salvation. Calvinists say, again, here Calvinists, like other people, aren't entirely consistent because they a lot of times want their congregants, want their followers who hold their theologies to believe in their own salvation, to be assured of it. Though the theology, if you take it to its logical end, really would deny any rational reason for being assured of salvation.

But they say that if you're elect, you can't fall away and you can know you're elect. So, I mean, they don't apply this principle uniformly to all cases, you see. Because the people in their congregation have been baptized and are followers and congregants who are faithful.

They just tell them, you know, you are secure because you're assuming you're elect. But if any of them fall away, then they say, well, they weren't elect. So, you really can't know.

But they say, if you are not eternally secure, if there isn't this guarantee of perseverance in Christ, then you can never know if you'll be saved because it's up to you. Well, it's not really up to me alone. I certainly have a role to play.

But that's okay, I'm an adult. You know, I wouldn't want to trust a child with decisions about his own destiny. But adults are responsible people.

I don't mind taking that responsibility. I have it anyway. If we defect, we'll be judged.

We're responsible. If we're responsible people, then let's just accept the responsibility. I'm responsible to persevere.

And the Bible continually commands me to fulfill that responsibility and warns me that if I don't, there are consequences. It might be nice for me to say, I made one decision for Christ once, and therein my responsibility ends. Now it's strictly up to God to make sure I don't ever make any other choices of the wrong sort.

No, that's not how human nature is. We make responsible choices every day of our lives. You know, if I have the choice to lie down and sleep on a railroad track just before the train's coming, I can do that.

Or I can say, I don't think I'll do that. But my choice will determine my fate. That's just the way life is.

We are adults with responsibility. And that being so, we are held responsible. And our responsibility is, in some respects, the simplest in this respect.

Because we don't have to come up with the strength to persevere. We only have to trust God. Trust, that's what a child does.

That's resting. On Christ the solid rock I stand. I rest in His covenant, in His blood.

Resting is really pretty easy. It's a lot easier than working. But if I'm resting in Him, that means I'm devoted to Him.

If I'm devoted to Him, I'll follow Him, of course, and obey Him too. But the point here is, God is the one who has to come up with the strength. He said, I don't know if I'll be

strong enough.

What if I'm tortured? This came up for conversation at one of the meals. I've been familiar with the fact that Christians die as martyrs and are tortured. I've been aware of that since I first entered the ministry as a teenager.

I read Richard Wurmbrand's books. He was tortured for Christ for 14 years in communist prisons. I read Cory Ten Boom, who suffered in Nazi concentration camps for years.

I read other writers of the same sort, not as well known. I read Fox's book of martyrs when I was a teenager, which tells stories of lots of early Christian martyrs all the way up into the Reformation time. I entered the ministry knowing very well that martyrdom is a fairly normal phenomenon in Christianity.

I've never met a martyr in America, but that's the anomaly of being a 21st century American Christian. We're the ones in Disneyland. We're the ones in fantasy land.

We're the ones who have the luxury of thinking Christianity is not about being persecuted. We live in a strange bubble of history in a strange part of the world where it just hasn't happened to us here. It's happening to Christians all over the world right now, elsewhere.

And throughout history, it's happened to Christians everywhere, even the missionaries who first came here. Many of them were killed by the Native Americans, the Jesuit missionaries were the first ones to come to this country. They were killed by the Native Americans, tortured even.

This has been the norm. Now, I've known that, but I know also something about me as I'm squeamish. I'm not a hero.

I can't watch a movie where somebody gets stabbed, much less if they get sliced up. I've never watched a slasher flick because I just can't endure it. I'm a wimp.

I'm too sheltered, I guess. I've just never really had to suffer anything like that, and I can't imagine it. I remember once years ago going to a movie called *The Radicals*.

It's a movie about some Anabaptists, some of the early Anabaptists, one of whom particularly was martyred. And the martyrdom was, I had read about him, so I knew about this before seeing the movie. But watching the movie made it more graphic.

I won't tell you how they tortured him. It's unpleasant to talk about. But they did almost every painful thing to the man that could be done before they slowly burned him.

I remember I went home from that movie thinking, I've known always that this kind of thing happens to Christians and has happened to Christians. But frankly, I don't think I could endure it. If I was sitting there being tortured like this man was, and they just said,

Deny your faith.

How could I not deny my faith under those circumstances? On the other hand, but how could I deny my faith? I can't deny what's true. I know God. How would I persevere? And I lost some sleep in the early hours of the night after seeing that movie.

And then I just had to, the way I got over it was the way I just reasoned with myself. These martyrs who've died for Christ throughout history, they weren't heroes either. They became heroes by dying as martyrs.

They were ordinary people. They were ordinary tradesmen and farmers. And they weren't soldiers for the most part.

They weren't tough guys. They weren't champions. They were just the meek of the earth who were persecuted and killed and tortured for their faith.

And yet they endured. They testified powerfully and courageously to their death. And I knew, I've always known this.

It's not their strength. It's the grace of God. It's the grace of God that causes the Christian to be able to endure supernaturally things.

But that grace comes through faith. There were some who gave up their faith and did cave in under torture and so forth. But those that retained their faith who just said, you know, I mean, I know this.

If someone was to torture me, I mean, it terrifies me, frankly, to think of being tortured. But I couldn't say, I couldn't deny Christ for the simple reason that I couldn't stop believing. I can't stop believing what I know to be true.

And I wouldn't consider that torture is sufficient reason to change my mind. It's something that I fear. But, you know, to be faithful, that is to trust God unto death, is to guarantee that he will give you the grace.

And we know many stories of martyrs. If you've read martyr stories, they all pretty much are uniform. These people, Fox's Book of Martyrs tells about a woman who had several sons.

They were all Christians. They're all arrested. They're all tortured and killed.

The sons were tortured and killed in front of her eyes. And then she was tortured and killed. And she remained faithful all the time.

And yet the story is told by the early Christians who knew her and said she was a woman known to be a very delicate disposition. She wasn't some tough woman. She was very, you know, vulnerable, just like anybody else.

And yet she watches her sons tortured and killed and herself tortured and killed. And she and her sons are shouting encouragement to each other, you know, remain faithful. Don't cave in.

And, you know, how do people do that? Well, they don't on their own. They do that by the power of God. If you stay faithful to death, you are being kept by the power of God.

That's the grace of God. And God is faithful. He gives grace to those who trust in him.

You are kept by the power of God through faith. That simply means you just keep trusting God. You don't stop trusting God.

If you don't stop trusting God, he won't stop giving you the grace. By grace you've been saved through faith. Paul said in Romans 5 too, by faith we have access to this grace in which we stand.

By faith, by trusting God, we have access to the grace that's needed. And, you know, I had a wife once who was killed in an accident. Actually, shortly after we got married, only six months after we were married, she was hit by a car and killed.

But I remember when I know that if someone had told me the day before that she was going to be killed, I would have freaked out. But when they told me she was dead, and I didn't expect that. Of course, I didn't think she was going to die.

When they said she was dead, I just felt God's grace overwhelm me like a flood. I just felt like here this big wave was coming against me, but I was submerged under the surface. So the wave was going over.

There was turbulence, but there wasn't the full force of what it should be. I just knew the grace of God was sustaining me. And I haven't been tortured.

But, I mean, that's a serious trial too, to lose a loved one. And I know, I know that God who gave me the grace in that situation would give me grace in any situation. And so I believe that we can persevere to the end.

I don't think anything can separate us from the love of God. As long as we're trusting God. Nothing can force us to cave in.

God can give you the power and the grace to endure anything. You just have to make sure that you're determined that you're going to continue to trust Him. He'll give you the grace and the strength for it.

Now, therefore, I believe in perseverance. I believe in the perseverance of those who are trusting God. What I don't believe is that trusting God is inevitable for everybody.

That's a choice. I was teaching at a church where they believed in sort of an

unconditional eternal security doctrine. And the pastor was talking to me after he said, You don't believe in the security of the believer, do you? I said, I absolutely believe in the security of the believer.

I don't believe in the security of the unbeliever, however. And the fact that an unbeliever used to be a believer doesn't change the fact that he's an unbeliever now. If someone departs from the faith, he's not a believer.

Therefore, there's no security for the unbeliever. To the believer, yes. As long as you're believing, you are absolutely secure.

You never have to worry that if you come to Christ, He will cast you out. He said, Those who come to me, I will in no wise cast out. He's not going to cast you out.

If you're trusting Him, you are 100% secure. If you stop trusting Him, that's a game changer. There's no promise of security to the unbeliever.

And when you stop believing, you are by definition an unbeliever. So the question is, can a real believer who's elected stop believing? That's where the Calvinist has their own distinctive view. They believe that no one can believe except the elect.

And when God gives you the gift of faith, He does not retract it. You didn't ask for it in the first place. He gave it to you.

And since He is determined to save you because you're elect, He will help you persevere. Perseverance of the saints is the classic name for this doctrine. But some modern Calvinists call it the preservation of the saints.

They want to emphasize not that the saint is persevering, but God is preserving a saint in faith. That God will make sure you don't give up the faith if you're elect. So if you really are elect, you can't fall away.

You can't become an unbeliever. Now, that means, of course, that those who have fallen away were not ever really believers in the Calvinist system. And they quote a couple of verses about that that seem to say that.

But these verses really are not a problem to an Arminian either. In Matthew 7, 21 through 23, Jesus said, Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father in heaven. Many will say to me that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in your name, cast out demons in your name, undone many wonders in your name? And then I will declare to them, I never knew you.

Depart from me, you who practice lawlessness. Now, the key phrase here is, I never knew you. Not, I've lost you.

I've lost track of you. I used to know you, but you're gone now. I never knew you.

These people, according to Jesus, were never really Christians. Now, they seem to be. They were casting out demons in Jesus' name.

I don't know how you can do that if you're not a Christian. But these people were doing it. They were prophesying in Jesus' name.

They were doing mighty works in Jesus' name. They had power that seemed to confirm that they were real Christians, but they weren't. And therefore, one argues, you see, you can have evidence of being a Christian.

You can seem to be a Christian and not be one. And they never knew him. However, we would have to notice that Jesus is not making a statement about every case of those who fall away.

In fact, there's no mention of these people falling away at all. As far as we know from what he said, they might have been casting out demons in Jesus' name to the last day of their life. There's no mention of defection or falling away.

They clearly were not genuine Christians. But this is not about people falling away and proving they weren't genuine Christians. What proved they weren't genuine Christians is they didn't do the will of the Father.

Verse 21 says, Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father in heaven. Now, apparently, casting out demons and prophesying and doing mighty works in his name is not synonymous with doing the will of his Father. The will of his Father is that you live a holy life, that you love your neighbors, you love yourself.

Apparently, you can have charismatic gifts. You can have all kinds of sensational things going on. But that doesn't prove that you're doing the will of the Father.

This is not a statement about people who have fallen away, have thereby proven that he never knew them, but people who have never done the will of the Father and have had a false assurance based on the wrong kinds of evidences. They're looking at some things going on in their life and saying, I must be a good Christian because of this. But they're neglecting the will of God.

So he's saying, you're going to find out you weren't. We can easily believe that there are people like this. Many, he said, will be like that.

But that's not a statement that's universal, that everyone who falls away was never a Christian. It doesn't make the point. However, 1 John 2.19 might.

1 John 2.19. John says, they went out from us, but they were not of us. For if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out that they might be

made manifest that none of them were of us.

Now, here's a much better verse for the Calvinist point than the other. Because this really does talk about people not persevering and proving they were not originally of us in the first place. I can accept this thesis.

I can accept that John and the teachers he's talking about is stating the situation as it is. In the context, he's talking about people who denied that Jesus has come in the flesh. They're false teachers.

They were in the church, but they left the church. Because they never were really Christians in the first place. I have no problem believing that that is true of many people.

Many people leave the church because they didn't belong there in the first place. They were never really saved. These were false teachers.

They apparently couldn't ply their wares with the apostles present. They were not able to deceive the church, so they went somewhere else. It's just they never were part of us.

They never really did belong to this body of Christ. They were false from the beginning. And the fact that they left is pretty much one of the confirmations that we can see that that was so.

You can say that about certain people without making a blanket statement that everybody who ever fell away was never really saved. I personally have some friends who have fallen away after a long stint of following Christ, about whom I'm not sure if they were really saved or not. They seemed like it, but since they fell away and I began to see other things they've done since, I think, well, maybe they weren't really Christians after all.

I'm open to that. But at the same time, there are people who I cannot convince myself that they were not really Christians because they had every fruit of the Spirit. They had every evidence of salvation.

And therefore, they would not fall into the class that John's describing here. There's no reason to remove all the nuances of human reality. The fact is some people go bad after being good for all because they never were really that good.

Others go bad after being good for all for different reasons. They were good, but they changed. So these verses don't prove perseverance.

They may be given examples of persons who fell away because they weren't Christians in the first place. But so, a few examples don't establish a universal principle. Now, there are some verses, especially in John's Gospel, there's quite a few that are very similar to each other, that seem to speak of an unconditional security.

This is something that neither, actually neither Calvinists nor Arminians really believe. But people who do believe in an unconditional security are the ones who say, well, if you accepted Jesus when you were a kid and you never serve him, never obey him, never really live like a Christian, you're still saved. Once saved, always saved.

This is that unconditional security. Like I said, Calvinists don't believe that and Arminians don't. But since many of the people who do believe that think of themselves as Calvinists, I'm going to treat these scriptures.

John 3, 16. You know this one? For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life. So whoever believes in him, is that you, me? I believe in him.

Then you'll never perish. Guaranteed, they say. How about John 5, 24? Most assuredly I say to you that he who hears my words and believes in him who sent me has everlasting life and shall not come into judgment.

This means shall not come into condemnation. But has passed from death to life. So, have you heard Jesus and believed him? Well, then you've got a guarantee.

Stamp it on your forehead. Shall not come into condemnation. It sounds unconditional.

You've crossed the threshold by believing into a realm of those who will never be condemned, who will never fall away and never perish. John 6, 35. And Jesus said to them, I'm the bread of life.

He who comes to me shall never hunger and he who believes in me will never thirst. Shall never thirst, never hunger. Why? Because you've come to Christ.

You'll never lack what you gain by coming to Christ. It'll always be there, apparently. Never be hungry again.

John 6, 37. The one who comes to me, I will by no means cast out. Apparently under any conditions.

John 8, 51. Most assuredly I say to you, if anyone keeps my word, he shall never see death. Are you keeping Jesus' word? Then there's your guarantee.

You'll never see death. John 10, 27 through 30. This is the most often quoted of the bunch.

My sheep know my voice and they follow me. And I give them eternal life and they shall never perish. Neither shall anyone snatch them out of my hand.

My Father who has given them to me is greater than all. And no one is able to snatch them out of my Father's hand. I and my Father are one.

Okay, if you're one of his sheep, what's the guarantee? No one will snatch you from him. The guarantee is you will never perish. All it takes is to be a genuine sheep.

If you're a genuine sheep, nothing will ever change that. You'll never perish. You'll never be snatched.

John 11, 26. And whoever lives and believes in me shall never die. Now, you can see something about these verses that are all the same.

It's the grammatical structure. Every one of them says, whoever does this shall never this. Whoever believes, whoever comes to me, whoever is my sheep, whoever lives and believes in me shall never die, hunger, perish, whatever, come into condemnation.

Now, this grammatical structure needs to be understood properly because the first part of those statements is in the present tense. Whoever believes, whoever comes, whoever eats of me shall never hunger. This is present tense.

Every time there's a present tense, it could be translated, whoever is eating, whoever is believing, whoever is coming to me, whoever is doing these things will never have such and such happen to them. The implication is, while they are doing these things, nobody who is eating of me will hunger. Nobody who is believing in me will perish.

Nobody who is one of my sheep, who he defines in the passage in John 10, my sheep know my voice and they follow me, present tense. No one who is knowing my voice and following me will ever be snatched from my hand. You see, these verses sound like there's a punctiliar event.

I believe in him, today. I eat of the bread of life, today. And because of that one event, I've got this guarantee, I'll never hunger again, I'll never perish, nothing will ever happen to me.

I'm secure, unconditionally. But it's not unconditional. There's this present tense.

Whoever is eating of me, whoever is following me, whoever is believing in me will never have this experience. Obviously, the meaning is, while they are believing, while they are eating, while they are following. And if anyone wonders whether that is, in fact, the meaning of these statements, there's another statement in John of the same kind.

In John chapter 3, where this is unambiguous. John 3, 36, last verse in John 3. Jesus said, he who believes in the Son has everlasting life. This sounds like the beginning of some of these other verses, but it goes on.

And he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides in him. Here we have the same structure. Whoever does not believe, present tense, or whoever is not believing, future tense, shall not see life.

Now, let's ask ourselves a question. When John wrote that, were there some people who were not believing at that moment, but who later did see life? No doubt. There's lots of people who don't believe right now.

But someday they will, and they will see life. Yet, he says, whoever doesn't believe shall not see life. Of course, while they're unbelieving, they won't see life.

If they change and they believe, well, that's different. You see, it's the same thing. There's this condition stated, which is an ongoing condition.

Whoever is eating will not get hungry. Whoever is believing will not die. Whoever is not believing will not live.

But, of course, the one who's not believing now might change and believe later, in which case he will live. There's not an unconditionalness. The condition is actually stated in the first part of the sentence.

Whoever is doing this, that's the condition, while doing this will not have this crisis, this disaster happen to them. As you're trusting, following Christ, and so forth, no one will pluck you out of his hand. This is how these verses are responsibly taken.

And especially when you see the same structure in John 3, 36, there's no possibility of seeing it otherwise in this. Certainly, John is not saying, everybody who at this moment I'm writing this letter, everyone who's now not a believer, those people out there who are unsafe, they'll never see life. How do you know that? A lot of them later converted, no doubt.

Certainly, a lot of people have gotten converted since John wrote that. Of course, they won't see it while they're unbelieving. That's the issue.

And you won't perish while you're believing. This is the way these sentences are responsibly understood. The only way they could be responsibly understood.

Now, part of the perseverance doctrine is the emphasis that God, who is sovereign, is also faithful. And we have security because God is faithful. And it may be that we're not faithful, but God is faithful anyway.

That's what comes out in 2 Timothy 2, verses 11 through 13. This is a faithful saying, or a trustworthy saying. For if we died with him, we shall also live with him.

If we endure, we shall also reign with him. If we deny him, he also will deny us. But look at verse 13.

If we are faithless, he remains faithful. He cannot deny himself. Now, verse 13 is often taken by itself.

Say, look what he says. If we deny him, we are faithless. That is, if our faith is weak or even non-existent, that doesn't change the fact that he's faithful.

He can't deny himself. He can't stop being faithful. That's who he is.

He can't change what he is. And if we're faithless, it doesn't change the fact that he's faithful. Now, of course, how this is often used to teach eternal security is God's faithfulness means he will never let us go.

Even if we are faithless, even if we don't persevere in the faith, he will remain faithful to us. Now, it doesn't say he'll remain faithful to us, particularly if we're faithless. It just says he remains faithful.

He remains trustworthy. His words are reliable. What words? Well, among the words Paul has just quoted, if we deny him, he'll deny us.

That doesn't sound hopeful for those who deny him. Now, Paul is writing to Timothy. Timothy's a Christian.

Paul's a Christian. And he says to Timothy, if we Christians, me, Paul, you, Timothy, if we deny Christ, he will deny us. Now, he cannot deny himself, but he can deny us.

If we lose the faith, he remains the same God. He remains the God whose words are faithful and trustworthy. Among them are his threats.

You don't believe that denying him will cause him to deny you? Well, you'll be surprised because he's still faithful. Even if you don't believe his threats, they're still true. Even if you don't believe his promises, they're still true.

Even if you don't believe God, he's still true and reliable and faithful. He's what he is. He'll never change that.

And because of that, if you endure, he'll let you reign with him. If you deny him, he'll deny you. This is not some kind of a promise that you can lose the faith and still God will keep you safe.

He doesn't say, if we are faithless, God is faithful to keep us, you know, secure. It just means God is not untrustworthy just because we are. God doesn't change who he is just because we change who we are.

We might say, well, God loves me while I love him. And when I don't love him, he's got to still love me. No, but he said he'll deny you if you deny him.

Well, I don't believe that. Well, then you don't believe he's faithful to his word because his word is true and it's faithful. Paul is not arguing here that a person can depart from Christ and depart from faith and still be secure.

Far from it. God is faithful, but are we? That's the issue. Are we faithful not to deny him? That's the issue.

And so, Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1, 8 and 9, Paul says that God will also confirm you to the end that you may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful by whom you were called into the fellowship of his son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Now, of course, Paul says God is faithful who will confirm you to the end.

That doesn't mean this is unconditional. When people get married, they make all kinds of promises. They state no conditions.

I will be faithful to you, through no fault of their own. Their spouse leaves them. Their spouse cheats on them.

Their spouse divorces them. The marriage is broken up, but not by them. Of course, when you say to your spouse, I'm going to be faithful to you till death, it is not stated, but there's an implication you're making the same promise, right? This is not a one-way promise here.

Both of us are, you're saying the same thing to me, and I'm saying this to you. I'm counting on your intentions being the same. I don't have to say so.

That should be obvious. This is a covenant. We're entering it into a mutual agreement.

I will be faithful to you. Now, the question of whether you'll be faithful to me or not is what you will decide, and my promises of faithfulness to you are contingent on the assumption that you're going to be faithful to me too. If you divorce me and go off and marry someone else, you know, the conditions that were implied are no longer there.

Many times there are conditions implied and not stated. In fact, not only many times, always. God said that in Jeremiah 18.

We saw this the other day in a different connection, but this is important. There are no unconditional promises, and although sometimes promises are made in settings where the conditions are not mentioned, they are made to people who are supposed to know what the conditions are. Just like when you make wedding vows, you don't state the conditions.

I'm going to stay faithful to you unless you cheat on me. Ever heard anyone say that at a wedding when they're taking vows? I'll be faithful unless you commit adultery, unless you run off with another man. That would be distasteful to bring that up, but everyone knows that those things are assumed.

You're promising to be faithful to me too, so my promise is certainly good under the conditions we're understanding here. What conditions? This is what we saw yesterday in

some connection. Jeremiah 18, 7-10.

God says, Now this is even true when he has not stated any conditions. He did not state any conditions when Jonah said, in 40 days Nineveh will perish. He didn't say, unless you repent, but it was implicit.

God says, whenever I make a threat like this, if they repent, I'll change. And sure enough, although Jonah didn't say it, the king of Nineveh hoped that that might be so. He says, though in making the threat, he didn't mention the contingency.

He didn't need to. It's all common sense. There's always these conditions.

Whenever I make such a threat, he says, if they repent, I will not carry out my threat. And he goes on to say in verse 9, That is to bless it. Like he said to Israel.

He's going to build and plant Israel. This is what he's referring to of course. In fact, he never made such promises to any other nation.

So he's obviously referring to Israel. He said, if that nation does evil in my sight, so that it does not obey my voice, then I will relent concerning the good with which I said I would benefit them. So if I make promises to you, I don't have to state the conditions.

I'm telling you right now, there are conditions. Whenever I make such statements, this is true. I'm telling you now, every time I make a promise, I don't have to state the conditions again.

Every time I make a threat, I don't have to state the conditions. This is my policy all the time. It's never unconditional.

If I'm wanting to judge you, and you repent, I won't judge you. If I'm saying I'll bless you and save you, and you turn against me, I won't bless you and save you. I'll just let you know right now, up front, this is how I roll.

God says, so God has Himself declared there are no unconditional threats or unconditional promises. Which means that when you read promises where conditions are not stated, He expects you to understand they're implied. When Paul says that God will confirm you to the end that you may be blameless in the devil, or Jesus Christ, it's implied if you keep believing in Him.

If you don't, well then this doesn't apply. The assumption is that the vast majority of Christians are going to continue being Christians. Now if there's a few who don't, then, you know, strike this from the record as far as you're concerned.

This is not a promise to those of you who are going to fall away. He's given them the benefit of the doubt. Philippians 1, 6, the same thing.

Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ. I certainly believe that, but I don't believe it's unconditional. God will complete the work that He's done in us if we stay with Him.

If we don't, this promise does not apply. There are unstated conditions, but always God told us there are, and we should not take it for granted. Romans 8, 35 through 39, this is very similar.

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Yet in all these things we're more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I'm persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Now Calvinists often say, you see, nothing can separate us from God.

Nothing can make us lose our salvation. And Paul lists just about everything he could think of. Yeah, everything he could think of that seems that can't separate you from God is external.

Now the Calvinist says, well, no, he says, or any created thing. You're a created thing, so he includes you in there. Well, Paul might have intended it that way, but a decision to defect is not a thing.

It's not a created thing. It's a decision. It's an action.

There are certain actions that can make a person no longer be in the love of God. And if it were impossible, would Jude say, in Jude verse 20, keep yourselves in the love of God. I remember I was debating on eternal security with a Baptist pastor once in Oregon.

And he said, the Bible nowhere says to keep yourself. The Bible says God will keep you. I thought, well, you haven't.

That's a statement made in passion, not in cool reflection. Sure, the Bible says to keep yourself. Jude says, in 1 John 5, keep yourselves from idols.

There are commands to keep ourselves, among them, to keep ourselves in the love of God. Why that if there's nothing we could do to separate ourselves? What Paul is saying is, so long as you are trusting God, there is nothing external to yourself, demonic, angelic, armies, governments. There's nothing more powerful than God.

He said, no one can pluck you out of my hand. But Jesus said, that's true. If you're my sheep, and my sheep are following me.

If you're following me, you're safe. The conditions are not stated here, but they're

implied. After all, Paul had earlier, in the same book, I'm sorry, not earlier, but later in the same book, in chapter 11 of Romans, Paul said, of those who fell, severity, on you, goodness.

If you continue in his goodness, otherwise you also will be cut off. That's talking to the same people. There's a certain understanding that the early Christians had, and they had it until Augustine, that you don't have to tell us there's conditions.

It's obvious. We have a relationship with God, and like all relationships, both parties have to participate. You can't have a relationship with someone that doesn't want to be with you, who turns their back on you, who avoids you.

To have a relationship, there have to be two participants. To have a relationship with God, you have to participate too. Many times God is simply telling us what he will do in the relationship.

It is implied you know what you must do. I don't have to tell you that, although sometimes he does. He doesn't always.

There are conditions here. The assumption is you are staying with God, and God will stay with you. And if the conditions are not stated in a certain passage, they are stated as general policies in another, like Jeremiah 18.

There's a statement in 2 Samuel. That's not in your notes. 2 Samuel 2, verse 30.

A prophecy made to Eli, a corrupt priest and his corrupt sons. And the prophet says to him, God says, I surely did say that you and your sons would walk before me, which is a way of saying be priests, forever. But now, be it far from me.

For those who honor me, I will honor. And those who despise me should be lightly esteemed. Now notice what he says.

You remember I made a promise to you and your family that you'd be priests forever? I didn't state any conditions. But let me clarify that. Far be it from me that they're not faithful to me.

Those who honor me, I will honor. Those who hate me, it's a game changer. You're not going to be.

This promise I made you, I didn't state any conditions, but you should have known. I honor those who honor me. And so it's a very foolish thing to take certain verses that make these promises from God and pretend like there's no conditions for them.

Many times conditions are not stated, but you're supposed to be smart enough to know because they are stated elsewhere. Ephesians 4.30 Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Now this is an important, different

kind of statement because it says that God has sealed us by the Holy Spirit of God.

Now, what does sealed mean? In the minds of many, it simply means, well, we use the word sealed to if you're canning fruit, you seal the jar shut. If you're an auto mechanic, you got to put a grease seal to keep the grease from coming out. A seal keeps stuff from going in and going out.

And many people, when they talk about being sealed by the Holy Spirit, they think it's talking about somehow God has locked us in. We're locked in the jar and he sealed the jar shut. Sometimes people think that's what it meant when Jesus was buried, they put a stone and they sealed the stone.

It doesn't mean they went and put mortar around it and made it so it couldn't be moved. They put a seal on it. A seal is a wax blob that has something imprinted in it.

That's a seal. It's not hard to break a wax seal, but you better not do it if you're not authorized because the seal has the authority of the person who has the ring. If that is Pilate, then you can't break that seal without facing consequences from Pilate.

It's not impossible. Anyone can break a wax seal. Remember in Revelation, there's a book sealed with seven seals and they're calling it who is worthy to open the book and loose the seals and no one will sound worthy.

Well, what's so hard? Lots of people can break wax seals, but it's not who's strong enough. It's who's qualified, but it's not easy to do this. Not everyone is authorized to break a seal, but it's not a hard thing to do.

It's just a violation of law to break a royal seal. The seal is simply the evidence that that thing has a royal or an authoritative power behind it. It is very common, even into relatively modern history, for people to seal their letters, even a nobleman or anyone, they'd write a letter to someone and they'd put a blob of wax in, they'd stick their ring in it, and this was the way to prove that it was really from them.

No one else had that ring. That signet was only theirs. The seal on the document proved it was genuinely from the person who allegedly sent it.

No one else could have made that seal there. You see, again, the word seal in the Bible doesn't refer to sealing something shut. We have hardly any other use of the word seal in modern times than to seal something shut.

Many people read, we were sealed by the Holy Spirit. That means he brought us into Christ and sealed the gate shut. He sealed the lid on.

We can't get out. That's not what it said. The Holy Spirit in us is God's seal of ownership.

It's like he has put his wax on our forehead and put his ring in it, which means we really

are real Christians. We really do belong to him. We're Christians.

The seal that proves that we're Christians is that we possess the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit in us is therefore the seal of God, which means the mark of the genuineness of our true sonship and that we belong to God. We're really God's servants.

You know, in Revelation 7, before the judgments fall, an angel cries out, don't hurt the trees or the sea and don't disturb anything because I've sealed the servants of God on their forehead. And the 144,000 get the seal of God on their forehead. The seal didn't say anything about whether they're going to fall away or not.

That's not what's implied. What's implied is these are God's people. They've been marked as God's people.

When the judgments come, they're not supposed to come on those who have the seal on their head because you can tell who God's people are by God's seal is upon them, just like you can tell by the Holy Spirit. That's the proof that we are really Christians. That's what he's saying.

We have been sealed. We've been marked with God's unmistakable brand like cattle to show that we really belong to him. And that mark is we have the spirit of Christ.

We are walking in another spirit in another mind than the world. His spirit in us proves we are really his. That's all that Ephesians 4:30 is saying We've been sealed in the Holy Spirit.

It's not a reference to anything about eternal security that you'd have to look elsewhere for that. First Peter one five. I've already told you we are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time.

Calvinists say, well, we're kept by the power of God. Then we can't fall away. No, we're kept by the power of God through faith.

The real question is not is God weak, but are we trusting? If I'm trusting him, then my faith secures me. And as I continue to trust him, it continues to secure me. Faith is eating.

As long as I'm eating of Christ, I'll never hunger. If I stop eating, I'll get hungry again. I'm not allowed to stop eating of Christ.

I'm not allowed to stop believing. If I'm eating, I won't hunger. If I'm drinking, I won't thirst.

But if I'm not, I will hunger and I will thirst. If I, if I'm believing, I won't die. But if I do stop believing, I will die.

This I believe is even to be understood in the garden of Eden. When God said to Adam and Eve, the day you eat of the fruit, you'll surely die. So they ate and they didn't die.

Actually in the Hebrew, God's threat was this. If you, it was used a Hebrew idiom, but it said in the Hebrew, in the day you eat of it, dying, you shall die. It doesn't say you will surely die.

That's not in the Hebrew. In the Hebrew it says in the day you eat of it, dying, you will die. Now here's what I'm going to suggest to you.

They were susceptible to dying from day one. I don't think God made them immortal, but he made them potentially immortal. There was a tree they were allowed to eat of called the tree of life.

And if they would eat of it, they'd live forever. That was okay. That's what God wanted.

He wanted them to live forever. It was contingent on eating of the tree of life. The day they sinned, they were banned from the tree of life, which meant they couldn't keep eating from it and they would eventually die.

Dying became their immediate experience. And you shall die was their ultimate experience. And the tree of life, of course, is a picture of Christ himself.

We are not immortal, but contingently. We don't have eternal life unless we believe in Jesus. Whoever believes him will not what? Perish, but have eternal life.

What if we don't believe in him? We will perish just like Adam and Eve. If they eat of the tree of life, they will not perish. They'll have everlasting life, but they'd have to keep eating it.

Now, why would I say that? Why not just eat at one time and they'll live forever? Well, because we see the tree of life also in the book of Revelation, Revelation 22, in the new heavens, the new earth, in the new Jerusalem. And it says there that the tree of life bears its fruit 12 times a year. Well, why would it have to bear its fruit more than once if people only need to eat it once and live forever? Why have it keep producing more fruit month by month, year by year into eternity? Why? Apparently, you have to eat of that tree forever.

And if you do, you'll live forever. The tree sustains you just like food now sustains you. If you're starving to death and you eat, you won't die.

Not that day anyway. You could still die later, but if you keep eating, you won't. Eating one time doesn't secure your nourishment for the rest of your life.

Eating is part of sustaining your life. Eating of Christ is part of sustaining you eternally. If you continually eat of Christ, if you continue to believe in him, you'll never die.

If Adam and Eve had continued to eat of the tree of life, they would never die. But they sinned and they were blocked from the tree of life so that they would dying, they would eventually die. They began dying right then because they couldn't eat of that tree of life anymore.

Now, you might say, well, did they do it before? I don't know, but they could have. The point is, it was there for them to continually eat of, to continually live. And if they had done so, they would have lived forever as they kept eating of it.

This is the picture that God gave in the Garden of Eden of Christ. As we continue to eat of him, we never get hungry. OK, now, the contrary witness of scripture.

We're doing OK, I think, on time. First of all, and I've made this point earlier, but I'll point it out from scripture in Barth. Salvation is in Christ.

Salvation is not in me, it is in Christ. Eternal life is not so much in me, except maybe by in a derived sort of way. Eternal life is in Christ.

It might be in me if I'm in him. But the point is, it's he that is the one where God has put eternal life. First John 5, 11 and 12.

And this is the testimony that God has given us eternal life. And this life is in his son. That is the life, the eternal life is in Jesus.

He who has the son has the life. He who does not have the son does not have the life. You have eternal life, it's only because you're in Christ.

Someday in the future, you're not in Christ, you won't have eternal life. Then wasn't it? It wasn't eternal then. Sure it was.

It still is. You're just not participating in it. It's in him.

You experience it as you abide in him. You stop abiding in him, you're cast forth as a branch and shrivel. Why does the branch shrivel? The life of the vine is not in it anymore, but the vine is still growing.

The vine still has eternal life in it. That branch doesn't, though. It did when it was attached, that life that's in the branch is eternal.

Conditional upon staying attached. So I can have eternal life today and theoretically tomorrow not have eternal life. The life is still eternal.

It's just I'm not tapping into it. I'm not attached to it anymore. He that has the son has the life.

He that doesn't have the son does not have life. Now, is it possible for someone who has

Christ today to not have him tomorrow and not have eternal life? Look at Galatians 5.4. Paul wrote this to the Galatians, a church that he had evangelized and that he was very concerned about because they were listening to teachers of another gospel and buying into it. And he said, you have become estranged from Christ.

You will, you who attempt to be justified by the law, you have fallen from grace. Now, these are, you can't fall from grace if you're never in grace. You can't be estranged from a husband that you've never been married to.

They have been Christians, but they don't seem to be now. They are estranged from Christ. They've fallen from grace.

Now, you can't very well claim you're saved by grace if the, if the apostles, you're fallen from grace. How can you be saved by grace if you've fallen from it? You're not in it anymore. How can you be in Christ if you've been estranged from him? Now, if he that has the son has life, he that does not have the son doesn't have life.

Do these people have the son? They're estranged from him. When a husband and wife become estranged and they're living separately, do they have each other? Not really. What he's saying is it is possible to have the son, but then to become estranged from him, to fall from grace.

In 1 John 2, 24, it says, therefore, let that abide in you. The word abide means remain. Let that remain in you, which you've heard from the beginning.

If what you heard from the beginning remains or abides in you, you will remain in the son and in the father. Sounds conditional. You want to remain in Jesus and therefore in eternal life where it's in him.

You've got to be in him to get it. You need to remain in him. How do you do that? Well, you remain in what you've been taught about him.

You keep the faith. In other words, you don't give up faith in the true gospel that you've been taught. And he says, so let that remain in you.

But isn't that inevitable? If it's in me now, am I not elect? If I'm elect, how could it not remain in me? Why tell me to let it remain when I have no choice in the matter anyway? This is my responsibility. My responsibility is to hold fast to the gospel and therefore to remain in Christ. Salvation is in Christ.

If I don't remain in him, I'm not saved. John 15, 6, if anyone does not abide in me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered, and they gather them and throw them into the fire and they're burned. Now, Calvinists, I mentioned this on the air once a long time ago, and a Calvinist called in upset with me, said, I can't believe that you'd use that as a proof that you can lose your salvation.

This vine and the branches is not a story about salvation. It's about fruitfulness. Because Jesus said, he that abides in me produces much fruit.

So this is not talking about losing salvation. This is talking about losing fruitfulness. Well, why? Because you say so? Look at it.

What he's describing is branches that are alive because they're attached to a vine. Sure, they bear fruit. That's the normal thing for living branches do.

If you're a Christian and if you're saved, there'll be the fruit of salvation in your life. Yeah, he does mention that there is fruit. But when he talks about the branch that doesn't abide, he doesn't say, and it does not bring forth fruit anymore.

It says they wither up. Why? There's no life in them anymore. A branch that's cut off from life, it's dead.

And what happens? They're burned. This is not just about bearing fruit. This is about your fate.

This is about your ultimate fate and whether you have life or not. If you have life, you'll be fruitful. If you don't, you won't.

That's a corollary. But the point here is about having or not having life by abiding in Christ. Romans 11, 22, another branch passage.

This is about the olive tree branches. Therefore, consider the goodness and severity of God, Paul says, on those who fell severity toward you. Goodness, you Christians, God has been good to you.

If you continue in his goodness, otherwise you also will be cut off. Now, that verse raises the point that continuing in the faith is not inevitable. There's an if.

If you continue. And if you don't, you'll be cut off, he said. Just like what? Just like the branch is already cut off.

Who are they? The Jews who didn't believe in Christ. You mean like the Pharisees? Where are they? Jesus said they're going to Gehenna. That's a word that's usually translated hell in the Bible.

But the Jews who didn't believe in Christ were cut off means they weren't saved. They're cut off from the life of the tree. Just like a branch cut off from the branch of the vine.

These are different images that are the same kind of idea. If you don't continue, you'll be cut off, too. Not much hope for you then, except that you might come back to faith.

There is that possibility. Now, if continuing in the faith is not inevitable, then salvation is

not inevitable. That is, you can give up the faith.

And if you give up the faith, you give up Christ. You give up salvation. You give up eternal life.

In 2 Timothy 3, 14, we read that you must continue in the things which you've learned and been assured of. By the way, this is just after him saying, if we deny him, he will deny us. And now he says, but you must continue.

In the things which you have learned and been assured of, Acts 11, 23, when Paul came, I'm sorry. Yeah, when he when he came and saw the grace of God, this is actually Peter. He was glad and encouraged them all with purpose of heart that they should continue in the Lord.

Now, these are people who have the grace of God. They're saved. And he encouraged them to continue with the Lord.

Why waste his breath? Why not teach them something practical? It's inevitable they're going to continue, according to Calvinism. Why urge them to do so? Now, by the way, I'll get to this point later. I'm not going to anticipate it.

Acts 13, 43, many of the Jews and devout proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God. Again, this is something that Paul and Peter apparently felt they had to urge people to do. Continue.

Don't stop. Don't give it up. Don't fall away.

Continue in the grace of God. Acts 14, 21 through 22, Paul and Barnabas returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples and exhorting them to continue in the faith. What a lot of wasted energy there's going on by the apostles, if people are inevitably going to continue in the faith if they're elect, and they're not going to anyway if they're not.

Why waste so much breath? Why have this as the main theme of your sermons? That's what Acts is telling us, that when Peter visited churches, when Paul visited churches, the main message he's had, stay saved, continue in the faith, continue in the grace of God. Don't give this up. Why waste your breath if you don't have to say those kinds of things? Colossians, Paul is writing to the Colossians in verse 21 and 23, chapter 1. He says, and you who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now he has reconciled.

If indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard, which was preached to every creature under heaven, of which I, Paul, became a minister. Notice, you are reconciled to God if indeed you continue and don't get moved away from the faith. Why would anyone use

this kind of language if inevitable perseverance was their doctrine? Hebrews 3.6 and Hebrews 3.14, but Christ as a son over his own house, whose house we are if we hold fast, the confidence and rejoicing of the hope from to the end.

For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end. It seems like many writers of scripture are careful to make promises and then state the conditions. If, if, if.

Sure we saw some that didn't state the conditions, but we don't assume that if the conditions are unstated, that the stated conditions in other passages don't apply. We're talking about the same subject in all these cases, salvation. And there are conditions, one of which is to continue.

The Bible says it's possible to believe for a while and then fall away. This would suggest, of course, that it is not inevitable that you'll continue the faith. Luke 8.13, Jesus is explaining the parable of the sower, and he said in Luke 8.13, But the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy.

And these have no root, who believe for a while, and in time of temptation fall away. They believe for a while. They weren't unbelievers, they were believers for a while, but they do fall away.

1 Timothy 4.1 Now the Spirit expressly says that in the latter times, some will depart from the faith. Giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons. You can't depart from a location you've never been in.

You are in the faith before you depart from the faith, inevitably. These are people who were in the faith, but they depart from the faith. Because they heed doctrines of demons and let themselves stop believing in Christ.

Hebrews 6.4-6, this is classic. Hebrews 6.4-6, For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and have been partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted of the good word of God, and of the powers of the age to come, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance. That sentence began with, it's impossible to renew them again to repentance.

Since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame. Alright, well, what do Calvinists do with this? They know it's there. They've been confronted with it many, many times.

It's not a comfortable verse, so they have a couple of different ways that they've tried to fix it for them. One is, they say, this is hypothetical. Why? Because, it says, if they fall away, they are subjecting Christ to a second crucifixion.

They're crucifying to themselves Christ afresh. They say, of course, the writer of Hebrews

makes it very clear elsewhere, Christ can't be crucified again. He suffered once for all.

There's no repetition of His crucifixion. Therefore, the writer is saying, of course, that which is impossible. It's impossible to crucify Christ again.

But, if these people would fall away, they would indeed be doing that. So, that must be impossible. That this is actually one of the strong arguments for perseverance of the saints.

Not against it. Because, if they fell away, they'd be doing that which is clearly impossible to do. Which means, of course, we should never consider that this can be done.

Now, this is one argument. It's not the most common argument among Calvinists, but this is one you hear. It's problematic, though, for the simple reason that the verse doesn't have any if in it.

Now, I know it does in the King James and in the New King James. In the Greek, there is no if. There's no condition.

What it actually says in the Greek, as some modern, more accurate translations have said, it's impossible for those who have been enlightened and had all these experiences and have fallen away. There's no if they fall away. In the Greek, it says, and have fallen away.

Those who have. This is not hypothetical. This is addressing actual cases.

So, the hypothetical explanation doesn't work when you actually look at the text in the original language. Or, for that matter, in many of the modern translations, which follow the original language better than this does. There's no if involved.

These people he's speaking of have, in fact, fallen away. What was their experience before they fell away? He says they were enlightened. They tasted the heavenly gift.

They become partakers of the Holy Spirit. They've tasted the word of God and the powers of the age to come. Now, the other Calvinist explanation, since they can't really reasonably say this is hypothetical.

And, by the way, you might say, well, how come it isn't? How could they crucify Christ afresh if he can't be crucified again? Hebrews tells us that as far as God is concerned, Christ only had to die one time. It was adequate. No further sacrifices are necessary.

But, when the writer says you're crucifying Christ to yourself afresh, he's not objectively being crucified. It's like you're entering back into the guilt of his crucifixion. You're entering back into the mindset of those who crucify him.

You might as well kill him again. He's not saying that you literally are putting Jesus to

death because that can't be done. But, to yourself you are.

With reference to your relationship with him, you're killing him again. It's like he might as well not have died for you and you're subjecting him to the same shame and pain and so forth as if you're one of his crucifiers again. It's a strange statement to make, but it's not hypothetical.

It's not about something that has been done. You backslide, you bring reproach on Christ, you might as well crucify him again. But, the most common Calvinist argument I find is they say these people indeed did fall away, but they weren't really saved.

They say it is possible to taste of the heavenly gift, to taste of the good word of God, to be exposed to Christianity, to sample it, so to speak. To taste it and say, no, I don't think so, I'm not going to go there. In other words, to say, I'm looking into it, I taste at it, I sample it, but I think, I decide not to eat it.

I decide not to swallow it. I decide not to, I'm not all in. And so, this is what is very commonly said.

The people being described here are not all in. They get close, they consider it, but then they back away and they fall away from that. And therefore, their falling away is not a disproof of perseverance because they never were the elect.

They never were really saved. Now, in answer to this, I think there's some serious objections that could be made. One of which is that the writer certainly is not giving the impression that he's writing about unsaved people.

All the language he uses is stuff that's used to describe Christians elsewhere. They've been illuminated, they've tasted of the heavenly gift, that would be salvation, presumably, or else Christ himself. They become partakers of the Holy Spirit.

Partakers of the Holy Spirit. Who receives the Spirit if not Christians? That's what happens when you're born again. When you're born again, the Holy Spirit comes to live in you.

No one else has that. They've tasted of the good word of God and the powers of the age to come. Now, the only thing they've got going for them is the word tasted.

And the suggestion that tasting is not the same thing as participating fully. It's just sampling. It's just licking at the salt lick, but not eating it.

However, we should pay attention to how the writer of Hebrews uses the word taste elsewhere. If you look, Hebrews 2.9, same author, a few chapters earlier, four chapters earlier. Hebrews 2.9, but we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor that he, by the grace of God, might

taste death for everyone.

So, Jesus tasted death. Is that like not a full participation in death? Did he not fully die? Did he just kind of sample it to a degree that he could back away from it again? He tasted death means he experienced death. The Bible says, oh, taste and see that the Lord is good.

It means experience him. Taste doesn't mean just nibble. It means enter into the experience.

Jesus tasted death. He went all the way in to death. To taste the heavenly gift, to taste the word of God in the writers of Hebrews vocabulary means that you're all in.

You participate. You experience it. It's just a manner of speaking.

He wasn't trying to indicate that there wasn't a full participation here. So, he's describing people who have the Holy Spirit, who have salvation, who have the power of God in their life and they fall away. If these are not the elect, then who could possibly be sure that they are? It's more reasonable to suggest these people fell away because they can and they were Christians but Christians can and he's worried about them.

The writer of Hebrews has actually given a great number of warnings in the book of Hebrews about falling away and one has to ask why are these warnings given if you can't? We're going to treat that as our final point but not yet. There's a couple more scriptures we need to look at. 1 Corinthians 9, 26 and 27.

1 Corinthians 9, 26 and 27. Therefore Paul says, I run thus, not with uncertainty. Thus I fight, not as one who beats the air.

Notice the battle I'm fighting is not a sham battle. I'm just not fighting in shadows and air. There's a real enemy.

There's a real danger. I discipline my body and bring it into subjection so that this doesn't happen lest when I have preached to others I myself should become disqualified. Now the word disqualified here is translated variously in different passages and in different translations but the Greek word here is the same word that is translated reprobate in Romans.

God gave them over to a reprobate mind or in 2 Corinthians where Paul said Do you not know that Christ dwells in you unless you are reprobate? That's where Paul says examine yourselves and see if you're in the faith. Do you not know that Christ is in you unless you're reprobate? The word reprobate in the Greek is the same word here disqualified. Though I have preached to others I myself could become a reprobate so I make sure that doesn't happen.

I'm not fighting a sham battle. This is a real battle. I'm battling against real powers of darkness that would like to destroy me and remove me from Christ.

I'm not open to that. I fight. I discipline my body.

I do what I must do to make sure that I don't defect. Why try so hard Paul? Don't you know you're secure? You should. Hebrews 10 26-29 For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries.

Anyone who rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. Of how much worse punishment do you suppose? He shall be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, a common thing and insulted the Spirit of Grace. There was a death penalty for violating law of Moses.

What do you think is the worst punishment for those who violate Christ? Trample him underfoot. Insult his spirit. Now, of course, accountants say, well, if you're really saved, you won't do that.

The writer of Hebrews says, the blood that they've counted nothing is the blood by which they were sanctified. Sounds like they were Christians. They were sanctified by the blood of Jesus.

Now it says, it begins, if we sin willfully after we've received the knowledge of the truth. Now, we're saved through the knowledge of the truth. And these people have received the knowledge of the truth.

Received the gospel. But they sin willfully. What does sin willfully mean? This scares almost every Christian.

Because everyone can say, well, you know, I think I've sinned willfully since I became a Christian. What sin isn't willful? I guess there's some accidental sins, but I've sinned a lot of times knowing that it was wrong. How could I be not in this category? Well, this way.

Sinning willfully is assuming that you are willfully wanting to live in sin. Christians don't want to live in sin. In fact, sometimes they say, if we go on sinning willfully.

It's not just a single act of sin he's talking about. If we choose sin as our life after we've known better, that's our willful choice. You know what? I have sometimes sinned where a part of me wanted to sin, but the part of me that wanted to wasn't really who I am.

Since I've come to Christ, I've wanted to live a holy life. It's my will to live a holy life. Have I sinned? Sometimes I have, like Paul said, to will to do good is present with me,

but I find there's another law in my members that brings me into bondage to the law of sin and death.

He said, I do the things I hate. I don't do the things I want to. He said, but if I hate it, then it's not me.

It's sin that dwells in me. If it was me, I wouldn't hate it. I like me.

I mean, my nature is amenable to things that are agreeable with me, but I hate these things. Therefore, it's not me. It's sin that dwells in me.

In other words, who I am is not the sinner. Who I am is a follower of Christ, but I'm still struggling against sin, and when I do, I hate it. That's not willful.

I do not choose to live in sin. On occasions, there's a part of me that may succumb to the desire to sin, but because I don't want to live in sin, I repent. My very repentance proves that it's not my will to live in sin.

To go back to willfully living in sin is to reject Christianity. What he says is, those who do that, after they've been Christians, if they reject Christianity and go back to their sinful life willingly, there doesn't remain any sacrifice for sin. This is not stating anything about Christ's sacrifice necessarily.

It's not saying Christ's sacrifice is vaporized and no longer exists. What it means is these people were Jews going back to Judaism, if you know the context of Hebrews. They were Jewish Christians persecuted by their Jewish friends, so they're going back to Judaism to get out of the persecution, to get the heat off them.

They're going to go back to the temple and offer the animal sacrifices instead of trusting Christ. You do that, there's no other sacrifices there. A few verses earlier, in verse 18, he said, where there's the remission of sins under the new covenant, there remains no more offering of sin.

Meaning, there's no more need for sacrifices in the temple because Christ has remitted sins once and for all. The sacrificial system doesn't exist anymore as far as God's concerned. If you're planning to go back to that, you Jews, you're going to defect from Christ, back to a life of disobedience and just count on those animal sacrifices to save you, you've got a false hope.

There's no sacrifice there. There doesn't remain any. That sacrificial system is over.

He's not saying anything about the Christ's sacrifice not being any good anymore because it's still good. You can come back. You can still be saved again on the basis of Christ's sacrifice.

That hasn't disappeared. But if you're thinking of leaving Christ to go back to the

sacrificial system, that isn't there as far as God is concerned. There doesn't remain any valid sacrifice in that system.

That's what he's warning them about there. Now, there is a warfare we have to fight. I won't go over these verses in detail because we've run out of time.

But Peter says we need to resist the devil. In 1 Peter 5, 8 and 9, be soberly, be vigilant because your adversary, the devil, walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Now, if you can't be devoured because you're a believer, why warn you about it? Why be vigilant? Why be sober? Why say there's a devil out there roaming around trying to devour you like a lion if this doesn't affect you? You're not going to be devoured.

He can't do anything to you. James 4, 7 says, therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he'll flee from you.

You've got to fight this battle. Resist him. Ephesians 6, 13, therefore take up the whole armor of God that you may be able to withstand the devil in the evil day and having done all to stand.

That is when the dust settles and the battle's over, you're still on your feet instead of fallen. This is a fierce battle. You better make sure your armor is on because you're going to fight and you're going to be attacked.

And you want to make sure that when the day has passed, you're still standing. Having done all, you're still standing. There is another possibility.

If you don't wear the armor of God, if you don't fight the battle, if you don't resist the devil, the day may end and find you not standing anymore. This is a warfare. Standing requires determination.

It requires resisting temptation, resisting the devil's effort to make you defect from Christ. Peter says in 2 Peter 2, 20 through 22, if after they've escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, if they are again entangled in them and overcome by the world, that is, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning. For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness than to have known it and to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them.

But it has happened to them according to the true proverb, a dog returns to his own vomit and a sow having been washed to her wallowing in the mire. So it's better not to have known the truth in the first place than to know and turn and be entangled in the world. The world and the flesh and the devil, this is what you're fighting against.

They want to entangle you. Don't let those tendrils of the world come and wrap themselves around you and pull you back in because it'll be worse for you than before. 2

Timothy 4.10 Before what, by the way? Than before you were saved.

The person who has been saved and fallen away has become jaded. Before they were saved, they weren't jaded in the same way. They haven't sinned against light before they knew the light.

But when they've known the light and defect, they're sinning against light. They're hardening their heart against what they know to be true. That's a worse state of heart than before they were saved in the first place.

C.S. Lewis said it's like the difference between a virgin and a divorced thing. The person who's never been saved is like a virgin, somewhat innocent. A person who's been married and then no longer is married is like a divorcee.

They're not the same as a virgin. They're jaded. They're going to be more cynical, especially if they initiated the divorce.

Then they have rejected something sacred and they're in a more hard-hearted state than before. That's what he says apart from Christ. We already read 1 Corinthians 9.26-27 where Paul said he fights and he disciplines his body so that he doesn't succumb.

Revelation 3.5 says, he who overcomes that means wins in a battle, whoever is victorious, shall be clothed with white garments and I will not blot his name out of the book of life. Wait a minute. Your name's in the book of life and there's a promise.

If you overcome it won't be blotted out. Doesn't that imply something? If you don't win in the battle, you will be blotted out? The ones who don't lose the battle will not be blotted out. Now, you can't lose if you're trusting God.

You stop trusting God, you lose big. The battle does not belong to you. It belongs to the Lord, but you have to show up.

It's God's battle. Like when God said to Jehoshaphat, you're surrounded by armies. Send the singers out ahead of the armies and have them sing and worship God and send the armies behind them.

The battle is not yours, it's the Lord's. When the singers did this, the enemies started killing each other because God made the enemy kill each other. God won the war, but Israel had to show up because that's what God wants them to do, to fight and basically retain your faith and God will do the rest.

Keep trusting God and you won't worry about being too weak to win the war. Greater is He that is in you than He that is in the world. You're kept by the power of God through faith.

The only obligation we have is to continue trusting God. That's overcoming. You see,

what we're overcoming is the devil's desire to get us to give up the faith, to give up on trusting God.

That's where we have to be stubborn. I will believe God. Job was being tested that way, a big way, and he finally said, even if God slays me, I'll trust Him.

I'm not going to give this up. I'm not going to give up my faith and my integrity to God, period. I don't care how much He takes from me.

I don't care how many diseases are breaking out. I don't care how many of my loved ones are killed. I will not betray God.

I'm going to trust Him even if He slays me. That's hanging in there. That's fighting the battle.

The devil was attacking Job and Job won. He overcame. Not by being a perfect man.

He had a bad attitude some of the time. He complained a bit, whined. He wasn't perfect, but he didn't let go of his faith.

That's the victory. Faith is the victory that overcomes the world. Who is he that overcomes the world but he that believe it? That Jesus is the Son of God, John said in 1 John 5. I'm going to close with this quotation.

We've covered a lot of scripture. This is from Robert Shank, an Arminian, who got kicked out of his Baptist denomination because he stopped being a Calvinist. He wrote a book called Life in the Son.

I think he made a good point. He says, The essence of the arguments of many Calvinists is as follows. This is answering the question, Why are these warnings in the Bible if it's impossible for believers to fall away? He says, The essence of the arguments of many Calvinists is as follows.

The mere fact that travelers are warned that there is a ditch alongside the road does not mean that they will fall into it. The warnings must not lead us to suppose that they will or can. God warns believers simply because as a rational being they are so constituted as to require motivation.

He therefore appeals to their fears to keep them on the path but the warnings are God's means of ensuring that they shall not fall. This is exactly what Calvinists say. They say, Why are all these warnings there about defection? He says, The elect will heed them.

These are the ways that God keeps the elect on the path by warning them that there is this danger. Of course, there isn't really a danger to them but making them think there is is the best way to guarantee that they will persevere and in fact they will. God uses these warnings as part of his sovereign working to make sure they don't fall away.

Notice, however, the first part of this paragraph I just read. The mere fact that travelers are warned that there's a ditch alongside the road doesn't mean that they will fall into it but it means they can or else there wouldn't be warnings there. It's true.

Warnings don't mean you're going to fall. No one is suggesting that. In fact, the warnings are there to persuade you not to fall and you may not fall.

You can choose not to but they are there because there is a danger. You don't give warnings where no dangers are. There is a real possibility of falling.

Now look at this second paragraph. One will not read long from the advocates of the doctrine of unconditional security before encountering this explanation of the presence of so many urgent warnings against apostasy so obviously addressed to believers. The folly of their contention is seen in the fact that the moment a man becomes persuaded that their doctrine of unconditional security is correct, the warning passages immediately lose the very purpose and value which they claim for them.

Strong who is a Calvinist quotes Dr. A.C. Kendrick on Hebrews 6 4-6. The text he says, describes a condition subjectively possible and therefore needing to be held up in earnest warning to the believer while objectively and in the absolute purpose of God it never occurs. But, Shank says, but how can there be any earnest warning to the believer who is sufficiently instructed to understand that the warning is directed against an impossibility? How can something be subjectively possible for the person who knows it to be objectively impossible? The only possible circumstances under which the warning passages could serve the purpose and function which they claim for them would be the total rejection of the doctrine of unconditional security and inevitable perseverance.

Now you see what he's saying. Calvinists say God's going to use those warnings to motivate them. But as soon as the person comes to believe in eternal security, there's no more motivation.

You don't worry about warnings that you know can't happen. It's as if God has to keep them ignorant of the doctrine of perseverance so that the warnings will really motivate them to persevere. And as soon as they learn the Calvinistic doctrine, those warnings have no value after all.

And in other words, it's nonsense in a way. It's kind of a nonsense explanation. There's plenty of indication that Christians are in danger of succumbing because there's a devil out to devour them.

There's a world out to entangle them. There's rivals out to woo you away from Christ. And there's many warnings.

Discipline yourself. Stay in the faith. Persevere.

Resist the devil. These are the things that are no doubt said because they're necessary to be said. And if perseverance of the saints as Calvinists understand it were true, there'd be no necessity of it.

You know, I've often heard Calvinists say this very thing that the what they say is that these warnings are given not to the elect alone but to the church as a whole. Because the author, like everyone else, doesn't know who in the church is elect and who's not. So they give the warnings to the whole church because some of the people in the church are not elect and are in danger.

But they're not thinking very well. It is true, in the church no doubt some people are elect and some are not. But the ones who are elect don't need the warnings and the ones who are not elect can't heed them.

And if people are not elect, you don't want them to persevere in a state of self-deception. Why would you warn non-elect people to persevere when they're doing so, if possible, would only wrongly convince them that they're saved, give them false assurance? Isn't the church better off if those who can fall away or who inevitably must be lost if they're having to be sent to the Bible in the church? Isn't it better for them to leave so the church can be made up of the real church? Why warn the non-elect to try to pretend to be Christians? There's just no way to make sense of this. It's a mystery, really.

And that's basically what you're going to hear. It's a mystery. Who are you to answer against God? That's the main Calvinist answer about all this stuff.