

## Neo-Calvinism vs. the Bible 044

2 Corinthians 13:5

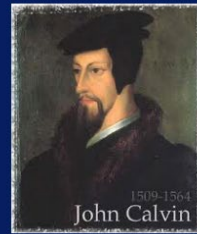
September 28, 2025

Dr. Andy Woods

Let's take our Bibles and open them to 2 Corinthians (which is right after 1 Corinthians, by the way). Right before you hit Galatians, you will hit 2 Corinthians 13:5.

### Neo-Calvinism vs. The Bible

- I. Calvinism's Mixed Blessing
- II. Why Critique Calvinism?
- III. The Source of Calvin's Theology
- IV. Calvin's Manner of Life
- V. **TULIP Through the Grid of Scripture**
- VI. Conclusion



Let's get serious here as we talk through our series "Neo-Calvinism vs. the Bible." We are in a section where we are dealing with the Calvinistic doctrine of Perseverance of the Saints.

### V. Running **TULIP** Through the Grid of Scripture

- A. **T**otal Depravity
- B. **U**nconditional Election
- C. **L**imited Atonement
- D. **I**rrresistible Grace
- E. **P**erseverance of the Saints



Calvinists have an actual definition of the Perseverance of the Saints. It is not what we teach here, which is the "preservation of the saints"—God preserves us (we see that in 2 Peter 1:5).

By Perseverance of the Saints, what the Calvinists typically mean, at least with the very aggressive Neo-Calvinist movement today, is that

"the emphasis is upon the believer's faithfulness in persevering—not upon God's keeping power..."<sup>1</sup>

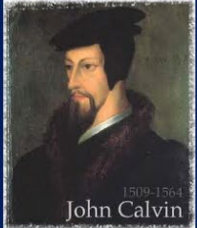
And of course, as I will hopefully show you today,

"...uncertainty as to one's ultimate salvation is, in fact, built into the very fabric of Calvinism itself."<sup>2</sup>

So how do you know if you are persevering enough? You never really know. So you are always questioning—"Maybe I am not one of the elect." That is the aspect of it that we are critiquing.

**E. Perseverance of the Saints**

1. Calvinistic definition
2. Examples
3. **Problems with the Calvinistic understanding**



1509-1564  
John Calvin

I gave you a ton of quotes from Calvinists where they do teach this. John Calvin himself says,

"[T]hose who do not persevere unto the end belong not to the calling of God."<sup>3</sup>

So what we are working through is problems with that belief system. Under subletter "a" we talked about how the terminology that they are using, "final salvation," is unbiblical.

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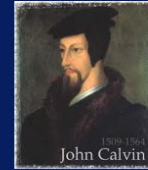
<sup>1</sup> Bob Kirkland, *Calvinism: None Dare Call It Heresy; Spotlight on the Life and Teachings of John Calvin* (Eureka, MT: Lighthouse Trails, 2018), 34.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> 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.

### 3. Problems with the Calvinistic Perseverance Definition

- a) Final salvation is unbiblical
- b) Scriptural examples of non-persevering saints
- c) **Support only found in out of context verses (Luke 4:9-12)**
- d) Subtle form of works salvation
- e) Preferability of immediate death following conversion?
- f) Lessens the importance of practical sanctification
- g) Lessens the importance of the Bema Seat warnings
- h) Destroys the assurance of salvation



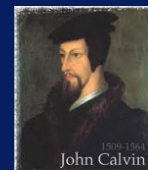
We looked at a bunch of examples in the Bible of people that were clearly saved, but did not persevere in good works (subletter "b"). We encourage people, obviously, to persevere in good works.

But you have examples in the Bible of people who went off the beaten trail, and yet we can clearly demonstrate that they were saved. Perseverance of the Saints teaching says they could not be saved. But the Bible says that there are examples of people who were saved.

And then what we are working through recently is subletter "c": Scriptural verses that are taken out of context to support the Perseverance of the Saints teaching. I have in parentheses there Luke 4:9-12, where Satan quoted the Bible.

### 3. Problems with the Calvinistic Perseverance Definition

- a) Final salvation is unbiblical
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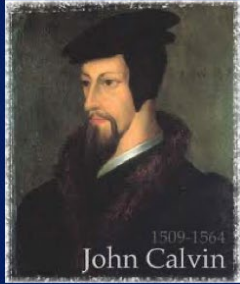
Jesus quoted the Book of Deuteronomy. Satan quoted the Psalms. So just because someone quotes the Bible does not mean you should be impressed with that. The issue is, "Is the Bible being used in context?"

There are several verses that are used to support this Perseverance of the Saints idea. One is Matthew 24:13. We took a look at it a couple of weeks ago.

*"But the one who endures to the end, he will be saved" (Matthew 24:13).*

**Out of Context Verses Used to Support  
the Perseverance of the Saints**

1. Matthew 24:13
2. John 15:5-6, 8
3. **2 Corinthians 13:5**
4. Ephesians 2:10
5. Hebrews 12:14
6. Revelation 13:10
7. Revelation 14:12



A portrait of John Calvin, a French theologian, reformer, and pastor. He is depicted from the chest up, wearing a dark cap and a dark robe with a white collar. The portrait is set against a dark background. Below the portrait, the text "1509-1564" and "John Calvin" is visible.

We looked at the proper context of Matthew 24:13. Then we looked at the branch that does not bear fruit and is thrown into the fire, John 15:5-6, 8. We looked at that one last time.

And I want to show you today, Lord willing (I am not sure if we could even finish it today), a huge one that is used to argue for the Perseverance of the Saints: 2 Corinthians 13:5. When you are listening to a Calvinist, inevitably they are going to bring this verse up.

Here is what 2 Corinthians 13:5 says. It says,

*"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?" (2 Corinthians 13:5).*

So that is like most of these verses. That single verse is just plucked out of almost nowhere and is used to get Christians to always be wondering, "Am I doing enough? Am I persevering enough? Am I holy enough in my daily life and conduct? Because if not, maybe I failed the test and Christ is not in me."

So this is a verse that is used to just terrify the body of Christ into this perpetual introspection, which I do not think is a very good place to be.

I do not want to spend my life looking at myself, because it is a depressing subject, and I find that the more that I look at myself, the more worried I become about everything, including my salvation.

I do not want to be looking at myself. I want to be looking at the promises of Jesus and Peter, who has promised that God is going to preserve us until the day when we receive our redemption (1 Peter 1:4-5).

So let me give you some examples of Calvinists who use this verse (2 Corinthians 13:5) to teach this Perseverance of the Saints doctrine. Again, some of the names are going to appear—I am not trying to sabotage your favorite Bible teacher. I am just trying to show you how pervasive the misunderstanding of this verse is.

So John MacArthur, in his book "The Gospel According to to Jesus," says,

"Doubts about one's salvation are not wrong...Scripture encourages self-examination..."<sup>4</sup>

And I think the Scripture does encourage self-examination, but not for what MacArthur is arguing. And then MacArthur quotes the verse we just read.

"In 2 Corinthians 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?'"<sup>5</sup>

You look at how MacArthur is using the verse, and it seems to fit until, like with all of these verses, you put it back in its context.

"That admonition is largely ignored—and often explained away—in the contemporary church."<sup>6</sup>

Here is a quote from "The New Geneva Study Bible." This is the study Bible created by R.C. Sproul. And I guess when they call it the New Geneva Study Bible, it is supposed to be the latest rendition of the original Geneva Study Bible, which I happen to own a copy of, believe it or not.

And it is kind of funny. People say that it is the Scofield Bible that brought all the notes into the Bible. And I am thinking, "Have you read the Geneva Study Bible?" There are more notes in that thing than actual text of the Bible. The Geneva Study Bible was created in the Reformation era. It is written in rather old English. So R.C. Sproul and his crowd is bringing it back to life, and he has all kinds of notes in there.

But here is what "The New Geneva Study Bible" says about 2 Corinthians 13:5. It says,

"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 [now here come all of these subjective categories]

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<sup>4</sup> John F. MacArthur, *The Gospel According to Jesus: What Does Jesus Mean When He Says, "Follow Me"?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), 190.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

trust in Christ (Heb. 3:6), obedience to God (Matt. 7:21), growth in holiness (Heb. 12:14; 1 John 3:3)..."<sup>7</sup>

See how they are quoting the Bible here? They have Scripture verses in parentheses. So this must be spiritual, right?

"...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 the apostolic teaching (1 John 4:2), and the testimony of the Holy Spirit within them (Rom. 8:15, 16)."<sup>8</sup>

So if you do not have all of those categories, then you have grounds to doubt whether you are one of the elect. That is what the Calvinists are saying. And to be honest with you, I do not even know some days if I would pass this test at all. Some days I might, but I have ups and downs, just like you do, in the spiritual life. One day I could think I am one of the elect because I am persevering, because I am passing the test. And other days I think, "Boy, I am not one of the elect."

So if I believe the way the Calvinists teach it, I would be like the person plucking the petals off the flower: "She loves me. She loves me not. She loves me. She loves me not." "Saved on Monday. Unserved on Tuesday. Elect on Wednesday. Reprobate Thursday." See that? You are flying your plane with perpetual doubts as to what the compass says, which is never a good place to be.

You do not live the Christian life through perpetual introspection. You live it based on what Jesus has promised you in John 5:24 and other verses. And He cannot lie (Numbers 23:19; Titus 1:2; Hebrews 6:18).

Here is a quote from James Oliver Buswell in his "Systematic Theology," published in 1962. He says,

"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 Corinthians 13:5).'"<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Luder Whitlock and Bruce Waltke R.C. Sproul, Moises Silva, et al, eds., *The New Geneva Study Bible: Bringing the Light of the Reformation to Scripture* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 1844.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> James Oliver Buswell, Jr., *A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion*, 2 vols., vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1962), 147.

So how do I deal with people who name the name of Christ, and yet their lifestyle, at least in my eyes, is not mirroring what the Bible says? Well, the first thing I think is, "Well, maybe God is working in their life in a way that I cannot see."

So if they name the name of Christ, I have a tendency to give them the benefit of the doubt. And I also have in my belief system the category of the carnal Christian, which is a very real category that we have studied in this series (1 Corinthians 3:1-3). But at the end of the day, I cannot look at their heart. And maybe they never were saved. So I am of the approach that looks at all the options.

Under Calvinism, there is only one approach. There is no doctrine of a carnal Christian, because that goes against the Perseverance of the Saints. According to Calvinism, if you are living in an unsaved way, you obviously are an unsaved person, which would throw out Samson, Lot, Saul, and countless people who clearly were saved but were not living like it.

So Calvinism's view is a very reductionistic, simplistic way of analyzing these situations—saved or unsaved; elect or non-elect. And this doctrine infiltrates even guys that I love.

I love Warren Wiersbe. I love his "Be" series. He has each of the biblical books named after "Be." "Be Rich"—that is Wiersbe's commentary on the Book of Ephesians. Some of the other ones, I cannot remember, but you guys get the idea.

Here is a quote from Wiersbe in "The Wiersbe Bible Commentary." Look at what he does here when he gets to 2 Corinthians 13:5. He says,

"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? (Ro 8:9, 16)"<sup>10</sup>

Well, it depends on which day of the week you are asking me.

"Do you love the brethren? (1Jn 3:14)"<sup>11</sup>

Do you mean all the brethren? I love some of the brethren.

"Do you love the brethren? (1Jn 3:14) Do you practice righteousness? (1John 2:29; 3:9) Have you overcome the world so that you are living a life of godly separation? (1John 5:4) These are just a few of the tests that we can apply to our own lives to be certain that we are the children of God."<sup>12</sup>

See, your certainty comes from your own behavior rather than from Christ's promise. And then Wiersbe gives this anecdotal story. And I am not denying this can happen. I am just saying this is not the only possibility. He says,

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<sup>10</sup> Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary* (Colorado Springs, CO: David Cook, 2007), 542.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

"In one of the churches I pastored, we had a teenager who was the center of every problem in the youth group."<sup>13</sup>

I am glad we do not have anybody like that in our church.

"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."<sup>14</sup>

I am going to show you in a minute that this is false. There is nowhere in the Corinthian letters where Paul challenges the salvation of the Corinthians.

So Wiersbe is taking his theology, Perseverance of the Saints, and he is reading it backwards into 2 Corinthians.

"Our churches are filled with such people today. Paul called such people reprobate, which means 'counterfeit, discredited after a test.'"<sup>15</sup>

Now, are there people that look like Christians and are not? Well, of course. We have an apostle who fit that category. His name was Judas. And when Jesus said, "One of you is going to betray Me," everybody did not point the finger and say, "It's Judas." They all said, "Is it me? Is it me? Is it me?" Judas really looked the part (Matthew 26:21-22; Mark 14:18-19; Luke 22:21-23).

So that is a possibility. But that is not the only possibility. You have other people in the church who are, as we like to say, "a lot like Lot," who did not have a lifestyle that backed up his profession, but was clearly regenerated and saved. Second Peter 2:7-8 clearly teaches that.

So Wiersbe, "The New Geneva Study Bible," Buswell, MacArthur, and many others that I could quote on this—Alistair Begg, R.C. Sproul, and on and on—are giving you only one option: if your life is carnal, you are not saved because you are not persevering the way the elect are supposed to persevere.

And although that is an option, it is not the only option, because of the concept of the carnal Christian. There are people in the natural world who are born and are not developing properly. That does not mean that they were never born.

It works the same way in the spiritual realm. You are born again. But you might not be in a good environment where you are being taught the truth. You are not around people that can hold you accountable. So you are really not developing as you should develop.

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

And that does not mean that you are not saved. It just means you are in a state of carnality, or infancy, which you can stay in way longer than you should.

<b>Three Tenses of Salvation</b>			
<b>Phase</b>	<b>Justification</b>	<b>Sanctification</b>	<b>Glorification</b>
<b>Tense</b>	<b>Past</b>	<b>Present</b>	<b>Future</b>
<b>Saved from sin's:</b>	<b>Penalty</b>	<b>Power</b>	<b>Presence</b>
<b>Scripture</b>	<b>Eph 2:8-9; Titus 3:5</b>	<b>Philip 2:12</b>	<b>Rom 5:10</b>

So here are the three tenses of salvation. The first is justification, the past tense of salvation, in which we are saved from sin's penalty. So in a nanosecond, when you place your faith in Christ for salvation, you are born again, in a split second.

And then God takes the Christian and moves them into the middle tense of their salvation, which is sanctification, which has nothing to do with your birth. Sanctification has to do with your growth, in which you are gradually being delivered from the power of sin in daily life, as you learn about God's resources, and then access those moment by moment through obedience and faith.

Some make great progress there; some do not. And that is why some receive greater rewards at the Bema Seat than others. So justification is a moment. Sanctification is a process. You are in the sanctification process as long as you are in this body, because this body still has a sin nature, amen? You just do not have to go back to the sin nature, because you have resources inside you that you did not have before.

And then the third tense of salvation is glorification, and that one is easy. All you have to do is die or be raptured, whichever comes first. And then at that point you are freed from sin's very presence.

So when someone asks you, "Have you been saved?" the right answer is, "I have been saved; I am being saved; and I will be saved."

And that is why when you look at the bottom of the screen, you see the word "saved" used in the past tense for justification; used in the present for progressive sanctification; and used in the future glorification. Those are the three tenses of salvation.

Now, what you have in the Neo-Calvinists' system is that they are taking 2 Corinthians 13:5, and they are applying it exclusively to justification—it is a test to determine if you have been justified.

Whereas what I would like to convince you of is that 2 Corinthians 13:5 is not talking about that subject. If you want to talk about that subject, do not use this verse to do it, because 2 Corinthians 13:5 is not dealing with that. What 2 Corinthians 13:5 is dealing with is a test for your growth, or your development. Your justification is assumed by the time you get to 2 Corinthians 13:5.

So 2 Corinthians 13:5 is referring to a test to see if I am growing in the Lord. It is not a test to see if I have ever been brought into the family of the Lord. See the difference?

In the Calvinistic system, the whole focus of 2 Corinthians 13:5 is on justification. But I think that when you look at 2 Corinthians 13:5 in context, the whole focus is on the middle tense of salvation.

I did have a chance to write an article on this for a book that was published back in 2015—something like that. I just have one chapter in there dealing with this issue.

I wish I had copies to give to everybody, but if you are an internet type and want to look for it online, I think it is easy to find. boldgrace.org (<https://boldgrace.org/books/21-Tough-Questions-about-Grace.html>) is where you can find it.

The book has a lot of other articles in there by a lot of other really good people dealing with the grace issue. So what I am going to do is give you a summary of that chapter, and if you want to delve deeper into that, that is a chapter you could get and study.

**9 Reasons Favoring the  
Progressive Sanctification View**

- I. **The Corinthians' Assumed Believing Status**
- II. Proving Oneself Applies to the Believer
- III. Disqualification Applies to the Believer
- IV. In the Faith Refers to Experience Rather than Position
- V. Christ in You Relates to Progressive Sanctification



So why do I think that 2 Corinthians 13:5 is not about examining myself to see if I am a Christian. Why would I say that? I have nine reasons.

The first reason relates to the Corinthians' assumed believing status all the way through 1 Corinthians and 2 Corinthians. All the way through, Paul assumes they are believers. When you go back to 1 Corinthians 1:2, if you were stuck on a desert island with this verse and you did not know anything about Calvinism, would you think that these people were saved or unsaved?

Well, I would think that they were saved, because Paul says,

*"To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified..." (1 Corinthians 1:2).*

Sounds like believing people, doesn't it?

*"...in Christ Jesus, called to be saints..." (1 Corinthians 1:2).*

It is rather interesting that the Corinthians are called saints. Their behavior in these books is not very saintly. But they are saints positionally.

J. Vernon McGee said, "You are either a saint or an ain't." You have either trusted Christ for salvation, or you have not.

*"...called to be saints together with all those who in every place [look at this—would an unbeliever do this?] call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours" (1 Corinthians 1:2).*

So if you start to say, "Well, maybe there were some in Corinth that were not saved," then you have to question whether Paul was saved, because he speaks of "our" spiritual heritage.

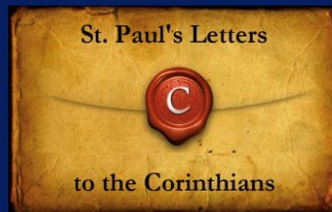
That is how 1 Corinthians opens. And then when you go to the second book, 2 Corinthians, it opens virtually the same way.

*"To the church of God that is at Corinth, with all the saints who are in the whole of Achaia" (2 Corinthians 1:1).*

In prior studies, we have worked through and looked through all these verses.

## THE CORINTHIANS' ASSUMED BELIEVING STATUS

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



There are a ton of verses in 1 Corinthians, and there are a ton of verses in 2 Corinthians. And as you look at all of these verses, there is no doubt that you are dealing with regenerated, saved people.

Just to jog your memory, you might remember 1 Corinthians 6:19. According to 1 Corinthians 6, the Corinthians were visiting—this was pretty bad—temple prostitutes. Total sexual immorality, right?

So what does Paul say? "You guys are not persevering, so you never were saved," right? No, Paul does not say that. He says,

*"Or do you not know..." (1 Corinthians 6:19).*

There is a knowledge problem here.

*"Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body" (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).*

So as Paul is dealing with this issue of temple prostitutes, he says, "Do you not understand what you are doing when you get involved in sexual immorality? You are taking the Lord and joining Him to a prostitute. That is what you are doing, because the Holy Spirit is inside of you."

By the way, for how long is the Holy Spirit inside believers? Forever. John 14:16-18 says that in the Church Age we have the Holy Spirit inside us individually forever.

So if I am shacking, I just brought the Lord into that sin. If I am looking at things on the internet that I should not be looking at, I brought the Lord into that sin. If I am engaging in marital infidelity, I am bringing the Lord into that sin. If I am involved in homosexuality, I am bringing the Lord into that sin.

There is no hint in 1 Corinthians 6 that maybe the Corinthians are not Christians. Paul says, "You do not even understand what you are doing in terms of grieving the Holy Spirit when you involve yourself in that sin—and quite frankly, in any sin" (1 Corinthians 6:15-20, paraphrase).

That becomes quite a motivation, doesn't it, to stay away from sin. I could be responsible for pulling the Lord into something that He came into the world to die on a cross to deal with.

So what you have here in this Calvinistic teaching is that the Corinthians are saved all the way through 1 Corinthians. They are saved all the way through 2 Corinthians.

And then finally you get to the last chapter of 2 Corinthians (13)—then all of a sudden everybody says, "Well, maybe they were not saved." Do you see how crazy that is?

"Saved, saved, saved, saved." And as Paul is getting ready to sign off and say good bye, all of a sudden, the whole hermeneutic shifts, and now all of a sudden, we are dealing with an audience of which some are potentially unsaved, when people would never say that elsewhere in 2 Corinthians.

Zane Hodges, in his book "Absolutely Free!," which is a response to Lordship Salvation, writes, concerning 2 Corinthians 13:5,

"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."<sup>16</sup>

(Zane Hodges is a long-time professor of Greek exegesis at Dallas Seminary.)

"After twelve chapters [of 2 Corinthians], 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."<sup>17</sup>

See, the Calvinistic movement is trying to make 2 Corinthians 13:5 a verse about "Maybe you are not a Christian." And it is just a strange way of reading the Bible, because the rest of the book does not read that way.

Why are you doing it at the end of Paul's two letters to the Corinthians to make this work? You are interpreting 2 Corinthians 13:5 in a way that you would never interpret it through the rest of the book.

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<sup>16</sup> Zane C. Hodges, *Absolutely Free! A Biblical Reply to Lordship Salvation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989), 200.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

So that really becomes the first problem with this Perseverance of the Saints understanding of 2 Corinthians 13:5. The second problem is the idea of proving oneself—examining yourself. That is not just for unsaved people.

Saved people are supposed to examine themselves. People who are blood-bought and on their way to glory are supposed to examine themselves in terms of their daily behavior. Notice what 2 Corinthians 13:5 says. It says,

*"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?" (2 Corinthians 13:5).*

A similar word to the verb "examine" ("dokimazo" [δοκιμάζω]) is found in 2 Timothy 2:15. In 2 Corinthians 13:5, the verb form is used. In 2 Timothy 2:15, the adjective form ("dokimos" [δόκιμος]) is used. Both words, when you look at this in Greek, come from the same root.

And what does Paul say in 2 Timothy 2:15? Who is he talking to? Timothy. Is Timothy saved? Boy, I hope so, because I really doubt Paul would put an unsaved person into the pastorate at Ephesus, which is the most influential church of the Greco-Roman time period.

Paul tells the saved man (Timothy),

*"Be diligent to present yourself approved..." (2 Timothy 2:15).*

"Approved" ("dokimos" [δόκιμος]) in 2 Timothy 2:15 is from the exact same root as "examine" ("dokimazo" [δοκιμάζω]) in 2 Corinthians 13:5.

*"Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15).*

So when Paul says, "See that you are approved" (2 Timothy 2:15, paraphrase), he is aiming it at someone whose salvation is not in doubt, because the issue in 2 Timothy 2:15 is not justification. It is, "Are you handling the Word of God correctly? Are you studying the Word of God as you should?"

So when the exact same root form is used in 2 Corinthians 13:5, you say to yourself, "Well, this could easily apply to a person whose salvation is not in doubt as well." So just because you see the words—

*"...examine yourselves..." (2 Corinthians 13:5)*

—you do not have to automatically conclude that the recipients of those words are potentially unregenerate any more than you would do that in 2 Timothy 2:15, where the same word is applied to Timothy, whose salvation is not in doubt.

There are all kinds of things we are supposed to do as Christians to prove ourselves, that have nothing to do with whether we are justified.

The third problem that I am having with the Reformed, Calvinistic understanding of 2 Corinthians 13:5 is that disqualification can apply to a saved person whose salvation is not in doubt.

Let's remember what 2 Corinthians 13:5 says.

*"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?" (2 Corinthians 13:5).*

So under Calvinistic teaching, people say, "Well, maybe I failed the test, and am not a Christian, because a Christian could not fail a test, could they?"

Well, in fact, a Christian can fail tests that have nothing to do with initial salvation, because Paul the Apostle takes that same Greek word for "fail the test" ("adokimos" [ἀδόκιμος]) used in 2 Corinthians 13:5, and applies it to himself.

Paul says this in 1 Corinthians 9:27:

*"but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified" (1 Corinthians 9:27).*

"Disqualified" in 1 Corinthians 9:27 is a translation of "adokimos" (ἀδόκιμος), which is the exact same word for "fail the test" in 2 Corinthians 13:5. So if you are going to say that the failure means that maybe you are not a Christian, well, then maybe Paul was not a Christian. Is Paul saying here in 1 Corinthians 9:27, "Maybe I am not a Christian"? Of course not.

What Paul is talking about in 1 Corinthians 9:27 is "I have been laboring in ministry, and I do not want to be in this situation where I have preached one thing to others in terms of holy living, but my lifestyle did not match my preaching. "And if my lifestyle did not match my preaching, then I am disqualified for salvation." No way. "Disqualified from a reward above and beyond salvation," which is what Paul was fearful of forfeiting.

And that is why Paul disciplined his body and made his body his slave. This is why he preached. Why? Because if he did not discipline his body, make his body his slave, and preach to others, he was not a Christian? Boy, I hope that is not what Paul is saying, because if so, he just taught salvation by works there. Paul is not dealing with whether he is a Christian or not—whether he is regenerated or not—whether he is born again or not.

Paul says, "I do not want to be disqualified for the prize or reward that I can receive above and beyond salvation at the Bema Seat Judgment" (1 Corinthians 9:27, paraphrase). So, the concept of disqualification clearly can apply to a believer whose salvation is not in doubt at all.

Joseph Dillow writes this in his book "Final Destiny." He says that if "adokimos" (ἀδόκιμος) or "disqualified" here (1 Corinthians 9:27) 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!"<sup>18</sup>

If Paul had doubts about his salvation, what does that do for little old me? Because I am no Apostle Paul, and neither are you.

The whole problem is rectified when you understand that Paul was afraid not of hell, but of not being fully rewarded at the Bema Seat Judgment of Christ. That is why Paul said, "My biggest fear is if I preach to someone else and live differently, then I am disqualified for the prize. I am disqualified for the crown."

At the Bema Seat Judgment of Christ, post-Rapture, Christians will either be given or not given rewards, while all of us are in heaven. We will all be in heaven, but we are not all equally rewarded in heaven.

<b>Scripture's Five Crowns</b>		
<b>(Rev 4:10; 3:11; 2 John 8)</b>		
<u><b>Scripture</b></u>	<u><b>Crown</b></u>	<u><b>Purpose</b></u>
1 Cor. 9:24-27	Incorruptible	Gaining mastery over the flesh
1 Thess. 2:19-20	Rejoicing	Soul winning
Jas. 1:12; Rev. 2:10	Life	Enduring trials
1 Pet. 5:2-4	Glory	Shepherding God's people
2 Tim. 4:8	Righteousness	Longing for His appearing

At the Bema Seat Judgment of Christ, five different crowns will be given: the incorruptible crown for the believer who gains mastery over the flesh (1 Corinthians 9:24-27), which is what Paul was talking about in 1 Corinthians 9.

The incorruptible crown will not be rewarded to the believer who is sinless, but to the believer who is sinning less under the resources that God provides, appropriating those resources by faith.

Then there is the crown of rejoicing for the soul winner (1 Thessalonians 2:19-20). (In the left column you can find the Scriptures where these crowns are mentioned.) There is the crown of life for enduring trials (James 1:12; Revelation 2:10).

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<sup>18</sup> Joseph Dillow, *Final Destiny: The Future Reign of the Servant Kings* (Monument, CO: Panyim, 2012), 454.

There is the crown of glory for shepherding God's people (1 Peter 5:2-4). And there is the crown of righteousness for longing for Jesus' appearing (2 Timothy 4:8). Also, there is the prospect in the Bible (Revelation 3:11 and 2 John 1:8) of being an unrewarded believer.

Second John 1:8 says,

*"Watch yourselves, that you do not lose what we have accomplished, but that you may receive a full reward" (2 John 1:8).*

In Revelation 3:11, Jesus says to the churches,

*""I am coming quickly; hold fast what you have, so that no one will take your crown"" (Revelation 3:11).*

Jesus says, *""your crown"" (Revelation 3:11)*, not "your salvation," not "your arrival in heaven," but your reward once you do arrive in heaven.

And that is what Paul is expressing fear over in 1 Corinthians 9:27). So when Paul expresses fear over this, he uses the word disqualified, "adokimos" (ἀδόκιμος), which is the same word used in 2 Corinthians 13:5 for "fail the test." So in 2 Corinthians 13:5, it is not a failure of "Maybe I am not a believer." It is a failure of "I am not going to be a fully rewarded believer."

Now, I know how a lot of people think because they send me emails. They say, "I do not really care about crowns. Crowns, schmounds, you know. I just want to get to heaven."

Okay, well, then riddle me this one. Number one, why does God talk about crowns and rewards if it is not important? It is in the Bible.

Number two, according to Revelation 4:10, what do we do with our crown or crowns? I do not strut around proud as a peacock—"Look at my crown." Every time God is worshiped, we take that crown and we cast it at His feet.

And I would anticipate that God is going to be worshiped a lot in the afterlife. And would it not be a little embarrassing that your hands were empty and you had nothing to cast at His feet—not to pay Him back, not to add to salvation, but to glorify Him? That becomes the incentive for these crowns.

The fourth problem that I am having with the Reformed interpretation of 2 Corinthians 13:5 is how they are using the expression "in the faith."

*"Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith;..." (2 Corinthians 13:5).*

To Calvinists, "in the faith" means that you are justified or you are not. Second Corinthians 13:5 says,

"Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith;..." (2 Corinthians 13:5).

To the Calvinist, this means that if the readers fail the test, they are not in the faith. They do not belong to God. But the problem is that "in the faith" is an exhortation that can apply to a Christian in the faith, or a Christian not in the faith.

That is real, because Paul in the first book says,

*"Be on the alert, stand firm in the faith,..." (1 Corinthians 16:13).*

"Well, maybe these people were not believers."

*"Be on the alert, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong. Let all that you do be done in love. Now I urge you, brethren,..." (1 Corinthians 16:13-15).*

Who are the "brethren" (1 Corinthians 16:15)? Those are the believers. You can have brethren in the faith and brethren out of the faith. So sometimes this expression "in the faith" and "out of the faith" can apply to regenerated people.

Look at what Peter says 1 Peter 5:8-9:

*"Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. But resist him, firm in your faith,..." (1 Peter 5:8-9).*

So Satan comes knocking at my door. Some days as a Christian, I might not resist him in my faith. Other days as a Christian, I might resist him in my faith.

So "in your faith" or "in the faith"—"not in the faith" "in the faith"—those are experiences that can easily apply across the board to regenerated people. You do not have to read potentially unregenerated people into the passage because of that expression "in the faith."

The fifth problem that I am having with the Reformed understanding of Perseverance of the Saints is how they are using the expression "Christ in you" from 2 Corinthians 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?" (2 Corinthians 13:5).*

So you look at that and you say, "Well, if I fail the test, I guess Jesus is not in me. And if Jesus is not in me, I guess I am not a Christian."

Yet the reality of the situation is that Jesus Christ being in you is not just something related to justification. It can be related to sanctification.

Last week we learned about the branch and the vine in John 15—fruitful branch, unfruitful branch; branch in the vine, branch out of the vine; Christ in you, Christ not in you.

When Jesus gave that talk, He gave it to eleven saved men that were already clean and in Him—"in Me" (John 15:2, 4, 5, 6, 7). "In Me" is a phrase used to describe the security within the Trinity:

*"...I am in the Father and the Father is in Me;..." (John 14:11).*

And yet people like the eleven disciples—Judas already having left the room—are called "clean" at any moment in time. They can be that branch in the vine, and be fruit bearers; or the branch out of the vine, which can bear nothing—in fellowship or out of fellowship. That is not the difference between saved and unsaved. It is the difference between in fellowship and out of fellowship.

That is why, when we started this study, we started with prayer, and part of the prayer was 1 John 1:9. Why? Because I was acting as an evangelist and trying to get a bunch of unsaved people saved?

No, my assumption is that you are saved. And I want you to be in fellowship. Confession is necessary to restore broken fellowship so that you can receive everything that God has for you at Sugar Land Bible Church today.

So when Paul says,

*"...Jesus Christ is in you—..." (2 Corinthians 13:5),*

He is not dealing with a positional issue. He is dealing with a fellowship issue.

Now look at what Paul says to the Galatians in Galatians 4:19. The Galatians were a group of people that he had won to Christ on the first missionary journey, who then got trapped into legalism.

Paul writes to them,

*"My children,..." (Galatians 4:19).*

Do the Galatians look saved to you? You do not call unsaved people your spiritual children. This is why Paul called Timothy his son in the faith. When Paul uses words like this, he is dealing with regenerated people.

So the Galatians did not have a justification problem. They had a sanctification problem. They did not have a birth problem. They had a growth problem. Their conversion was real. But their growth in Christ was being sidetracked and hoodwinked by legalism.

So Paul says,

*"My children, with whom I am again in labor until Christ is formed in you—"  
(Galatians 4:19).*

"I gave birth to you once you got saved, but now I am going to have to go through the whole thing again. And I am in agony again as a woman in travail, because I want to see not just birth—I want to see you grow."

And Paul describes their lack of growth as Christ not being in them. It is not a justification issue, because he calls them

*"My children" (Galatians 4:19).*

The Galatians are clearly saved, because Galatians 3:3 says,

*"Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?" (Galatians 3:3).*

You do not have people that have begun by the Spirit who are unregenerate. But the Galatians thought that "I grow as a Christian through legalism and self-effort." So Paul says, "I am a laborer all over again for you."

Galatians 4:6 shows that the Galatians are clearly saved, because Paul says,

*"Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts,..." (Galatians 4:6).*

This is the same group that Paul is in labor with all over again in Galatians 4:19.

In Galatians 5:16, Paul says,

*"But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh" (Galatians 5:16).*

You cannot walk by the Spirit unless you have the Spirit, and you cannot have access to the Spirit unless you are saved.

So when Paul says, "I am in labor for you all over again" (paraphrase, Galatians 4:19), that is, I believe, how the concept is being used in 2 Corinthians 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—..." (2 Corinthians 13:5).*

That is a fellowship concept, not a justification concept. So what Paul is saying is, "Test yourself to see if you are growing" (paraphrase, 2 Corinthians 13:5). That is what Paul is saying.

He is not saying, "Test yourself to see if you are one of the elect," which is the way Calvinism handles 2 Corinthians 13:5.

## 9 Reasons Favoring the Progressive Sanctification View

- VI. Reform View Destroys the Passage's Symmetry
- VII. Only Believers Experience Discipline
- VIII. Scripture Nowhere Tells Believers to Test the Authenticity of Their Faith
- IX. The Reformed View Damages Assurance of Salvation



The sixth problem I am having is that the Reformed view of 2 Corinthians 13:5 destroys the symmetry of the passage, because the Corinthians were challenging Paul's apostleship.

The Corinthians were not challenging whether Paul was saved. They were challenging—"You are not a real apostle because you were not one of the twelve."

Paul says,

*"Since you are seeking for proof of the Christ who speaks in me,..." (2 Corinthians 13:3).*

And then he says a few verses later,

*"But I trust that you will realize that we ourselves do not fail the test. Now we pray to God that you do no wrong; not that we ourselves may appear approved, but that you may do what is right, even though we may appear unapproved" (2 Corinthians 13:6-7).*

"Fail the test"—"unapproved"—"whether Christ is in me"—what is Paul responding to here? Not whether Paul was saved or not, but whether he was an apostle. Because if he was an apostle, the Corinthians had better submit to his authority, which they were not doing.

So do you know what Paul does? He takes their argument and turns it around on them, and he takes the same terminology and applies it back to them in 2 Corinthians 13:5, and uses the exact same words: "examine," "Jesus Christ in you," "fail the test."

So if the initial charge against Paul had nothing to do with whether he was saved, but with whether he was an apostle, Paul turns it right back around at the Corinthians.

It is beautiful symmetry here. Paul is asking the Corinthians the same question: "Are you even mature enough as a Christian to assess whether I am an apostle or not?" That

is what Paul is saying. "Do you want to put me to the test? Test yourselves" (2 Corinthians 13:1-7, paraphrase).

And given the symmetry of the passage, when Paul takes those same words and turns it right back around on the Corinthians, it is a question of the Corinthians' growth, which is what the Corinthians were challenging Paul on. That whole symmetry is lost if you make this an issue of saved versus unsaved.

This is background that you never get from these Calvinistic teachers who will just take 2 Corinthians 13:5 and hammer it away. They do not give you this context that I am providing.

The seventh problem I have with the Reformed view is that 2 Corinthians 13 is dealing with church discipline. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 13:1,

*"This is the third time I am coming to you. EVERY FACT IS TO BE CONFIRMED BY THE TESTIMONY OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES" (2 Corinthians 13:1).*

Do you know what Paul is probably referring to here? Church discipline. "I am coming to exact and implement church discipline on you." It is the steps of church discipline outlined in Matthew 18:15-17.

*"If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that BY THE MOUTH OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES EVERY FACT MAY BE CONFIRMED...." (Matthew 18:15-17).*

You do not discipline unsaved people. Church discipline is for the saved. What unsaved people need is to be regenerated. But Paul is not dealing with the regeneration issue here. He is dealing with the church discipline issue.

Number eight, Scripture nowhere tells believers to test the authenticity of their faith. Did you know that? Second Corinthians 13:5 is used so frequently to say that you should test whether you are a Christian.

You would think that the Bible would be full of such commands, but it is not. Joseph Dillow says,

*"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 in faith [sanctification] and life [sanctification] to see if he is walking in fellowship and in conformity to God's commands."<sup>19</sup>*

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<sup>19</sup> Joseph Dillow, *Final Destiny: The Future Reign of the Servant Kings* (Monument, CO: Panyim, 2012), 454.

Yeah, but what about Matthew 7?

*"Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes nor figs from thistles, are they? So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. So then, you will know them by their fruits" (Matthew 7:15-20).*

So I need to be looking at my fruits all the time to see if I am one of the elect, right? Is Matthew 7:15 in your Bible? This does not apply to yourself. You apply this to false teachers who are outside of yourself.

So when people grab this and turn it into a perpetual life of introspection, they are ignoring what Jesus is talking about here. Jesus is dealing with people who are false teachers. That is whose fruit you inspect.

We are to test false teachers. Revelation 2:2 says,

*"I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot tolerate evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false" (Revelation 2:2).*

Other than those kinds of commands in Scripture, there is no command that says to constantly look at yourself to see if you are really saved or not.

The ninth problem, and probably the biggest that I have with this Reformed understanding, is that if you believe what the Calvinists are saying about 2 Corinthians 13:5, you will spend your whole Christian life with no assurance of salvation whatsoever, which is tragic, because assurance of salvation is your birthright.

We do not just teach eternal security at Sugar Land Bible Church. The Calvinists teach that too. We teach the assurance of salvation—that you can actually know that you possess eternal life.

Calvinists will say, "Yeah, we believe in eternal security, but spend your whole life wondering whether you have it, ha ha ha." What a way to live.

And if you believe what the Calvinists are saying about 2 Corinthians 13:5, you are headed for a life of perpetual introspection, in which some days you will think you are saved and some days you will think you are not.

Now, people have looked for this quote from John Piper, and they cannot find it. The reason is that when Dave Hunt exposed it in his book, "What Love Is This," the Calvinists stripped it from the website.

It was an actual quote that John Piper gave in 1997, that was on his website at the time. The Calvinists have really learned how to tone down their act. Sometime I will show you

similar statements that Piper has made more recently, which are not as aggressive as this.

But Piper said in 1997,

"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."<sup>20</sup>

That got the Calvinists so much bad press that they purchased it from the internet. But in 1997, that was a real statement.

And that is no way to figure out if you have the assurance of salvation, because how do I know if I am dedicated enough? How do I know if I am denying myself enough? Those are very subjective categories.

Here is how you know you are saved. Jesus told you that you are saved because you placed your trust in Him. He said, "Here is a gift." You received it on His terms. You are saved.

*"Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has [present tense] eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of [perfect tense—one time event] death into life" (John 5:24).*

First John 5:13 says,

*"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" (1 John 5:13).*

How could I ever know that I have eternal life if the whole thing is riding upon my shoulders to examine myself all the time to see if I am one of the elect?

You know that you are saved because you are looking at the promises of Jesus. You are a pilot flying based on the compass, which cannot lie. The moment you go with feelings instead of what the compass says, you will go off course.

And pilots have told me, you feel all kinds of things as a pilot. You even sometimes feel as if the plane is flying upside down. But you do not suddenly adjust things based on feelings. You adjust things based on mathematical realities.

First John 5:13 is your mathematical, objective reality that cannot lie. You are given the assurance of salvation at the point of faith alone in Christ alone.

The issue is, "Are you going to grow as a Christian?" And that is what the test is for in 2 Corinthians 13:5. I hope you guys enjoyed that as much as it can be enjoyed.

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<sup>20</sup> 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.