

## Neo-Calvinism vs. the Bible 043

John 15:1-8

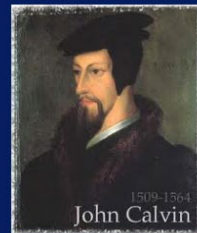
September 21, 2025

Dr. Andy Woods

Well, let's take our Bibles this morning and open them to John 15. We are going to try to persevere through our Perseverance of the Saints here as we are coming close to finishing up the Calvinism series.

### 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



We are dealing with the part of the series where we are looking at TULIP, which is the Calvinists' mnemonic device that they use, and we are comparing it with the Word to see if these things are so.

So we are on the "P," the Perseverance of the Saints. Basically what the Calvinists mean by that is not eternal security. If all it meant was eternal security, we would have no problem with it.

## V. Running TULIP Through the Grid of Scripture

- A. Total Depravity
- B. Unconditional Election
- C. Limited Atonement
- D. Irresistible Grace
- E. Perseverance of the Saints



We do not teach the Perseverance of the Saints. We teach the preservation of the saints, which puts the onus on God.

First Peter 1:4-5 says that we are headed for glory. Are you guys happy about that? You have an inheritance in heaven waiting for you that is undefiled. That is said in 1 Peter 1:4. Well, how do I know I am going to get there? Because I am being "protected by the power of God" (1 Peter 1:5). That is how I know I am going to get there. I do not know that I am going to get there based on how many good works I can do to prove I am saved.

That would put the pressure on me. By the way, 1 Peter 1:5 was written to a bunch of people that were about to get killed in Nero's bloody persecution (the first official governmental persecution against Christianity). The Christians who went under that persecution were Peter's audience. Most of those people were about to die, and he reminded them that they had an inheritance in heaven that is undefiled, and they are being protected by God's power for their arrival in heaven (1 Peter 1:4-5).

So basically, what Peter is saying is that you are saved by grace. So if you are saved by grace, you are kept by grace. Calvinism, though, has a very different understanding of the Perseverance of the Saints.

Bob Kirkland summarizes:

"'P' [in Calvinism] stands for [not preservation of the saints but] 'Perseverance of the Saints.' This is what Calvinists say gives them the assurance of eternal security, but in actuality 'the emphasis is upon the believer's faithfulness in persevering—not upon God's keeping power...uncertainty as to one's ultimate salvation is, in fact, built into the very fabric of Calvinism itself.'"<sup>1</sup>

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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.

So within the Calvinists' system, there is all this introspection. "Have I done enough to prove I am one of the elect?"

John Calvin himself taught this. He said,

"[T]hose who do not persevere unto the end belong not to the calling of God."<sup>2</sup>

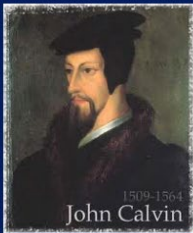
So if your life does not end on an upward ascent of perseverance in good works and doctrine, then maybe you are not one of the elect. Because if you were really one of the elect and were really given the gift of faith, then your life should be in this upward ascent. So if your life does not end in an upward ascent, then you have reason to doubt whether you are a Christian. And do not get me wrong when I teach this. We do believe in holy living and you should pursue the things of God in this life.

But if my eternity is based on my willingness to do that, that means my salvation rests upon my shoulders rather than God's. So the reason that you should consecrate yourself to the Lord is not because you are trying to keep yourself. You should consecrate yourself to the Lord out of gratitude for what He has done for you. Grace, rightly understood, becomes the proper motivation for holy living.

But in Calvinism, "grace" is a state of fear, because you do not know if there are enough good works to prove that you are one of the elect, etc. And out the window goes assurance of salvation.

E. Perseverance of the Saints

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



1509-1564  
John Calvin

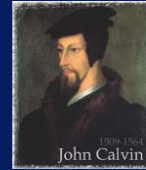
So what are some problems with the Calvinistic understanding of Perseverance of the Saints? We talked about final salvation that Calvinists are teaching, which is unbiblical (subletter "a").

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<sup>2</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



Under subletter "b" we gave a lot of examples of non-persevering saints as negative examples—people who were clearly saved in both the Old Testament and the New Testament, but their lives did not end on an upward note.

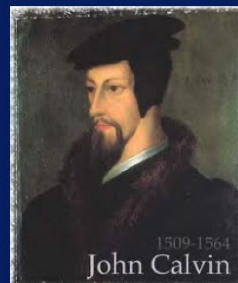
Now we are on subletter "c" here. We are looking at the verses that Calvinists use to promote this Perseverance of the Saints idea, and we are showing that they have about seven verses, most of which are out of context.

And I have in parentheses there Luke 4:9-12, which is just a reminder that just because someone throws Bible verses at you does not mean they are using them correctly. The devil himself quotes the Bible. Satan quoted the Bible back to Jesus in Luke 4.

So using the Bible and throwing the Bible around, which a lot of people do today, should not impress you unless they are using the verses in context. So this is what we call rightly dividing the Word of God (2 Timothy 2:15).

#### 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



So the first verse the Calvinists use is Matthew 24:13, which we looked at last time.

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

And Calvinists basically use that to teach that you have to persevere to the end of your life in good works to be saved, to prove that you are one of the elect. Yet Matthew 24:13 is not talking about that at all. The *"end"* (Matthew 24:13) is the end of the Tribulation Period. *"Saved"* (Matthew 24:13) is being protected from the Antichrist at the end of the Tribulation Period.

And Matthew 24:13 was written to a Jewish audience who will see the temple desecrated midway through the Tribulation Period. So Jesus says to that group in Matthew 24, "Because the devil has been thrown out of heaven and is trying to gobble you Jewish people up in the second half of the Tribulation Period, you have to make it to the end of the Tribulation to be physically protected by the Messiah."

(That is what it means in Revelation 12 when it says that Satan has come down to you, knowing he has but a short time [Revelation 12:12]. He is trying to destroy Israel so that the Kingdom which comes at the end of the seven year Tribulation Period can never come.)

Jesus says to that group of Jews, "You have to make it to the end of the Tribulation Period to be physically protected by the Messiah" (Matthew 24:9-13, paraphrase). So that is obviously a totally different understanding of Matthew 24:13 than just throwing it out at you, saying that he who endures to the end will be saved (Matthew 24:13).

So the second verse that the Calvinists use is John 15:5-6. So we are going to look at that this morning, Lord willing. John 15:6 says,

*"If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned" (John 15:6).*

So here is just another example that people who believe in the Perseverance of the Saints will say, "The branch is the Christian. And if the branch is not bearing fruit, then it is disconnected from the vine, meaning that it was never a believing branch. It was just kind of loosely connected to the vine.

"And so because that branch is not bearing fruit, it was never saved. It is representing a person that was never saved. And because the branch is not bearing fruit, there is no perseverance in a person's life. So what God is going to do with that person, or that branch, is that at the final judgment He is going to say, 'You are a branch, but not a believing branch.' And He is going to throw you into hell, because after all, fire in the Bible represents hell. You are going to be burned, you are going to be thrown away, etc."

So you look at John 15:6 and say, "Wow, that really looks like it is a strong verse to support the Perseverance of the Saints. Unfruitful branches are ultimately non-elect, unbelieving branches that are going to be thrown into hell by God. So you read that and you spend the rest of your life as a Christian wondering, "Boy, I do not want to be in that

category. So I need to be bearing fruit, because if I am not bearing fruit, maybe I am not one of the elect."

And the Calvinists never tell you how much fruit you have to bear. I mean, how many old ladies do you have to help across the street? If you do it three times a week, is that enough? So you are spending the rest of your life saying, "Boy, I'd better do this. I'd better do that. And if I do not do it, maybe I am not one of the elect. Maybe I am not bearing fruit.

"And God is going to say, 'Depart from me, you workers of iniquity. I never knew you' (Matthew 7:23, paraphrase). And I am going to go to hell."

So is that what John 15:6 is teaching, or is there a different reading of it based on context? And I am going to show you a different reading of this, rather than just cherry picking it out of thin air and throwing it into someone's lap.

That is not how you study the Bible. You have to put things back into their context. So here is a six-part outline that we are going to work through as we are trying to de-Calvinize John 15:6.

**Context of John 15:5-6, 8**

1. Context – John 15:1-8
2. Saved audience
  - a. "In me" (John 15:2; 14:11)
  - b. "Clean" (John 15:3; 13:10-11)
  - c. Judas' departure (John 13:29-31)
3. Abiding (vss. 4, 5, 7) and fruit bearing (vss. 2, 4, 5, 8, 16)
4. Men (not God) cast the branches into the fire (vs. 6)
5. "Fire" not always hell (1 Cor. 3:15; Heb. 6:8; 1 Pet. 1:6-7)
6. Pruning to bear more fruit (John 15:2; Heb. 12:5-11)



A small, circular portrait of a man with a beard and a cap, identified as Jacobus Arminius, a Dutch theologian. The portrait is set within a decorative frame and includes a Latin inscription at the bottom: 'JACOBUS ARMINIUS A. S. THEOLOGIAE PROFESSOR'.

The first thing to point out is the context of this. Surprise, surprise, right? This verse takes place during the Upper Room Discourse. Why do we call it the "Upper Room Discourse"? Because it was given in the Upper Room. This context is very different from the Olivet Discourse, which we studied last time—Matthew 24:13—which was given on the Mount of Olives. So these are two different discourses that take place during two different times of Christ's final week on the earth, called Passion Week.

These discourses took place during different days and they have two completely different purposes. In the Olivet Discourse, Jesus is saying farewell to Israel. That is why it looks so Jewish. And in the Upper Room Discourse, Jesus is saying hello to the church. So when Jesus talks in the Olivet Discourse, He is talking to the apostles, who are going to play a role in judging Israel's twelve tribes (Matthew 19:28).

In the Upper Room Discourse, Jesus is talking to the twelve apostles who are going to be the foundations of the church (Ephesians 2:20). They are the same apostles addressed in the Olivet Discourse, but they are going to have different functions. One is a Jewish function; one is a church function.

So that is why you see the Old Testament quoted up one side and down the other in the Olivet Discourse, because it is a Hebraic background. And the Old Testament, although it is referenced in the Upper Room Discourse, is not quoted nearly as much in the Upper Room Discourse as in the Olivet Discourse.

<b>OUTLINE OF JOHN</b>	
<b>1:1-18</b>	<b>HEAVENLY GENEALOGY (Explains who Jesus is)</b>
<b>1:19-11:57</b>	<b>PUBLIC MINISTRY ( 7 signs &amp; discourses)</b>
<b>12:1-50</b>	<b>TRIUMPHAL ENTRY (public national rejection of Christ-12:37)</b>
<b>13-17</b>	<b>UPPER ROOM DISCOURSE (new dispensation)</b>
<b>18-21</b>	<b>PASSION NARRATIVES (crucifixion to resurrection)</b>

So you can take John's Gospel and you can divide it into five parts. There is a heavenly genealogy, linking Jesus to heaven (John 1:1-18). Every Gospel has a genealogy in it, other than Mark.

Matthew connects Jesus genealogically to David and Abraham. So it is a Jewish lineage, because Matthew is writing to a Hebrew Christian audience (Matthew 1:1-17).

In Luke 3:23-38, Jesus is connected genealogically back to Adam, because he has a different audience and a different purpose than Matthew. Luke's purpose is demonstrating that Jesus is the Son of Man, which is a broader theme than just a Hebrew theme.

Mark's Gospel has no genealogy in it, because he is trying to portray Jesus as a common servant and a slave, writing to a Greco-Roman audience. And in the Greco-Roman world, slaves did not have genealogies. So that is why Mark does not have a genealogy, whereas the others do.

John is trying to show that Jesus is the God-Man that came from heaven. So in John 1:1-18, he is connecting Jesus back to heaven from which He came.

And then after you get finished reading John 1:1-18, there is the largest section in John's Gospel (John 1:19-11:57), in which Jesus has His public signs and discourses. It (John 1:19-11:57) is called the "Book of Signs," and consists of seven signs and seven discourses showing who Jesus is: the great "I Am." And you are supposed to read the "Book of Signs" (John 1:19-11:57) and say, "Well, this man is the Son of God. There is no doubt about it."

And then you move into part three, and that is Christ's Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday (John 12:1-50). That is where Jesus publicly presents His credentials to the nation of Israel.

John 12:37 is the turning point, which says,

*"But though He had performed so many signs before them, yet they were not believing in Him" (John 12:37).*

So this identification of Christ as the Jewish Messiah in the Triumphal Entry is supposed to inculcate faith. And the Jewish leadership, when He was publicly presented to them with his Messianic credentials on Palm Sunday, said, "Thanks, but no thanks."

So the Triumphal Entry (John 12:37) is the turning point. It is very clear that Israel is not going to embrace their King.

So that leads to the Upper Room Discourse, which is John 13-17, in which Jesus is preparing His hand-picked disciples for the Church Age which we now know is on the horizon, since Israel has rejected the King and the offer of the Kingdom. And that is why Jesus talks over and over again in this discourse about the apostles' resources in Christ—resources that are coming on the day of Pentecost that the apostles had no idea would be at their fingertips.

The most prized of the resources is the Paraclete, the one who comes alongside to assist: the Holy Spirit. And Jesus says to the apostles, "You know Him (they knew a little bit about the Holy Spirit) but it is going to be different on the day of Pentecost because He is going to be inside of you forever" (John 14:16-17, 26; 15:26; 16:7, 13-15).

And Jesus talks about all these resources that are at the apostles' fingertips. And it is in that context that you have the vine and the branches discussion that we read from a little earlier.

And then when that is over with, then you have the last part of John's Gospel, John 18-21, which is the Passion narratives dealing with the crucifixion, the resurrection, and the post-resurrection ministry of Jesus Christ.

So the first thing you do when you hear a verse is you say, "Well, where does it fit in the outline? Where does it fit in the overall flow of John's argument that he is giving here?"

Most people do not do that. They just take a verse and fling it at you to win a theological discussion. And it is one of those things where you are so busy studying the veins on the leaves of the tree that you forget what the forest looks like.

So you have to back up and look at the big picture. It is like in basketball when I got injured. The coach just said, "Just go to the top of the bleachers and sit there," which I did. And I am telling you, that was the greatest lesson, because when I was up there in the bleachers, I could see the whole game. I could see the whole team working together. When I was playing, all I could focus on was my position and my role. But when you are up there at the top and looking at everything, you see what you are supposed to do relative to everyone else on the team, which is a totally different perspective.

So that injury was probably one of the best things that ever happened to me, because it helped me to be a better team player. And that is what you need to do when you study the Bible. You need to be able to back up and look at the big picture. So John 15:6 occurs in that context of the Upper Room Discourse. And when John records the words of Christ, referring to the branch in the vine, and the branch out of the vine, he is recording the words of Christ to eleven saved people.

Christ is not talking to a big crowd of which we do not know whether they are believers or not. He is only talking to eleven saved people.

Now, how do we know that? Because of the reference to *"in Me"* (John 14:11; 15:2). Look at John 15:2.

*"Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit" (John 15:2).*

So whether you are dealing with a branch bearing fruit or a branch not bearing fruit, the prepositional phrase *"in Me"* (John 15:2) indicates that Jesus is talking to eleven saved people. How do I know that? Because that same prepositional phrase is used one chapter earlier in John 14:11. This is what it says in John 14:11, also in the Upper Room Discourse:

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

So when Jesus used that prepositional phrase *"in Me"* (John 14:11; 15:2) in John 14:11, He was talking about His relationship to the Father—the relationship between the Father and the Son in the Triune Godhead.

Now, do you think there is any insecurity in that relationship? There is no way that relationship could ever be broken. The only time you even come close is when Jesus became the sin bearer. Some would argue that the fellowship then was temporarily suspended for a moment of time, for Christ to be the sin bearer of the world. But other than that, the Father is always in the Son, and the Son is always in the Father. There is no way the two could ever be separated.

So when John 15:2 uses that same prepositional phrase as Jesus is speaking to the eleven disciples, talking about a branch in Me that bears fruit, and a branch in Me that does not bear fruit, if the same exact prepositional meaning is used there that is used one chapter earlier in the same discourse, you cannot develop a theology of insecurity. Just because a branch is not bearing fruit does not mean that it is insecure, any more than the relationship between the Father and the Son is insecure. You cannot drive a wedge into the Trinity. And just like you cannot drive a wedge into the Trinity, you cannot drive a wedge in between Jesus speaking to these eleven, talking about how in Me some bear fruit and some do not (John 15:2).

So all these branches are saved from that standpoint, whether they are fruit bearing or not. And if you look at John 15:3, Jesus calls the disciples *"clean."* Tell me if this could describe an unsaved person.

*"You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you"*  
(John 15:3).

Now what does *"clean"* (John 15:3) mean? It means that the disciples are believers. All these branches, whether they are fruit bearing or not, are clean. They are believers.

And to get help with that, go back to John 13:10-11, also from the Upper Room Discourse.

*"Jesus said to him, 'He who has bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all of you'"* (John 13:10).

When Jesus says,

*"...not all of you..."* (John 13:10),

He is talking about Judas, the only unsaved member of this group, who left the room. As I will show you in just a second, Judas left the room in John 13.

So when Jesus is talking to the disciples in John 15, Judas is not there. So Jesus is obviously talking to eleven saved people. And he calls them *"clean"* (John 15:3).

And we have a definition of what *"clean"* (John 15:3) is from a couple chapters earlier, in the same discourse. They are clean because they have taken a bath (John 13:10).

Taking a bath, or taking a shower, is analogous to salvation. You become clean at that point, meaning that your identity is changed. You are now rightly related to God the Father through the sacrifice of God the Son, through faith alone in Christ alone.

So you have taken your bath at that point. But John 13:10 goes on and it says,

*"...He who has bathed [Greek "louo" (λούω), "bathe (the whole person)"] needs only to wash [Greek "nipto" (νίπτω), "wash"] his feet,..."* (John 13:10).

Now, this is probably coming from the Greco-Roman understanding of a bath at a bathhouse, because you took your bath and then you walked home in your bathrobe, but your feet got dirty.

So when your feet got dirty, you did not need a "louo" (λούω). You needed a "nipto" (νίπτω). You just needed your feet cleaned.

(Now, if you go back to the studies that we did through John's Gospel, you will get a much more elaborate explanation of this than what I am giving you here [[https://slbc.org/series\\_event/john/](https://slbc.org/series_event/john/)]. That was actually before we had video. I do not think we had video until John 16, but we have audios of the John series.)

And the "louo" (λούω) distinction is the distinction between salvation versus broken fellowship. That is why we just exercised 1 John 1:9, written by John, who also recorded these words here.

So the truth of the matter is "Once saved, always saved." I am in Christ. I am as secure as the Son is to the Father and the Father is to the Son. But you know what? My feet can get dirty. So when your feet get dirty, what does that mean? You lost your salvation? Not at all. You cannot lose your salvation. What it means is that fellowship between you and the Lord has been broken to some extent.

It is like if I offend my wife (which unfortunately can be a regular occurrence). If I offend my wife—do something selfish—we are still married. Legally, we are still married. It does not change my position towards her in terms of a legal marital partner. However, until I apologize for my behavior, my moment-by-moment enjoyment of her has been damaged. I cannot enjoy her to the fullest extent because it is not a positional issue at that point—it is a fellowship issue.

That is what the "nipto" (νίπτω) is. That is what the dirty feet are. You got your bath and you got your bathrobe on, but then you have to walk back to your house. This was very common in the Greco-Roman world because they had those communal bathing places.

So when you walk back to your house in your bathrobe, now your feet are dirty. And so what do you do? Do you say, "Well, I need a "louo" (λούω). I need to go back to the bathhouse and totally immerse myself." No, you do not need a "louo" (λούω). You need a "nipto" (νίπτω). You need your feet cleaned. And so in that sense, that is what John is talking about.

John is saying, "Once saved, always saved." You are positionally made right with God. But as human beings, unfortunately, as long as we still have a sin nature, we still sin. And when that happens, it does not destroy my saved status. But it could damage my prayer life. It could damage rewards that I might receive at the Bema Seat judgment. There are a lot of temporal issues that can flow out of that. It could damage my usability before God.

And what I need to do is confess my sin (1 John 1:9)—"homologeō" (ὁμολογέω), "confess." "Homo-" means "same" (as in "homosexual"); "-logeō" means "spoken." I agree with God that my sin is wrong. And when that happens, I just got a "nipto"

(νίπτω). I did not need the "louo" (λούω), but I got the "nipto" (νίπτω). In other words, broken fellowship was restored.

So my marriage to my wife is intact, but fellowship has been restored when I agree with her that what I said or did was wrong. And that is what Jesus is developing here in John 15.

Jesus is not developing this idea that you are unclean, that you need a "louo" (λούω). Jesus tells them right there in the context,

*"You are already clean..." (John 15:3).*

"We are not going to deal with the "louo" (λούω) issue. We are going to deal with the "nipto" (νίπτω) issue." So that is what is being spoken of when John 15 talks about the branch outside of the vine, and the branch inside the vine. John 15 is not dealing with saved people versus unsaved people. It is not dealing with a "louo" (λούω) issue. It is dealing with a fellowship issue.

See, you have fruitfulness before God not because you are saved, but because you are in fellowship with Him. And when you just put this whole thing into its context, you start to see it very clearly. It is like, "Well, of course that is what Jesus is talking about, because that is what He finished talking about in John 13. And He is talking to eleven saved people."

So to turn this into some kind of heaven or hell issue is just completely unwarranted from the context. I mentioned Judas. Judas was the only unbeliever amongst the twelve disciples, and he was not even there in John 15.

How do we know that? Look at John 13:29-31. It says in John 13:29-31,

*"For some were supposing, because Judas had the money box, that Jesus was saying to him, 'Buy the things we have need of for the feast,' or else, that he should give something to the poor. So after receiving the morsel he [Judas] went out immediately; and it was night" (John 13:29-30).*

It is rather common in John's Gospel that a lot of bad things happen at night. Night is kind of a motif for sin. And then Jesus said this in John 13:31,

*"Therefore when he had gone out, Jesus said, 'Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in Him;'" (John 13:31).*

So the only unbeliever in the group (Judas) is gone. The only people left to talk to in the Upper Room are the eleven saved people, the eleven disciples. So if you want to put into John 15 a bunch of stuff about heaven and hell, you have to have Judas in the room, don't you? And he is not in the room. He left.

We know that Judas was unsaved, right? Some people have tried to tell me that Judas was saved. And that is not true, because if you look at John 13:27, it says,

*"After the morsel [speaking of Judas], Satan entered into him. Therefore Jesus said to him, 'What you do, do quickly'" (John 13:27).*

And I do not think that God and Satan can be roommates. I really do not think that works. When John 13:27 talks about how Satan went into Judas, what happened was that Judas was possessed by the devil.

In fact, in Scripture, only Judas and the Antichrist are called the "son of perdition" or the "son of destruction" (John 17:12; 2 Thessalonians 2:3). The Antichrist is called the "son of destruction" in 2 Thessalonians 2:3. Judas is called the "son of perdition" in John 17:12.

What do both Judas and the Antichrist have in common? They are two people—and maybe the only two people in history, for all I know—who were, or will be, personally indwelt by the devil—not a demon, not a fallen angel, but Satan himself. Judas and the Antichrist have big roles to play in Satan's program, so Satan goes right inside them. So clearly Judas was unsaved.

And that is why Jesus said of Judas, "It'd be better for him if he had never been born" (Matthew 26:24, paraphrase). Remember that? Well, that is a strange way to refer to a believer, isn't it?

Very clearly Judas was unsaved. And when Judas committed suicide—and I am not saying that suicide is the unpardonable sin, because I could show you in the Bible people who committed suicide who went to heaven (Saul being one; Samson being another)—

Acts 1 says of Judas that when he committed suicide, as Luke was describing it in Acts 1, "Judas went to his own place" (Acts 1:25, paraphrase), which is a very weird way of describing a believer, because the Bible says that to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord (2 Corinthians 5:8).

The Bible does not say of believers, "He went to his own place" (Acts 1:25, paraphrase). So when you put all the data together, I think that it is very clear that Judas was unsaved.

And when you flip back to John 6 for a minute, and you look at John 6:64, it says,

*"But there are some of you..." (John 6:64).*

(And I call this chapter [John 6] "How to Shrink a Church," because Jesus had this huge throng of followers when He was performing the miracles—the loaves and the fish and all of that. And when He started talking about faith alone in Christ alone, His crowd disappeared.

And I do not even think that Jesus would be hired today in most churches based on what He did here. I mean, He wrecked the church. And then everybody kind of whittles away. And Jesus says to the disciples, "Well, you do not want to leave too, do you?" [John 6:67, paraphrase].

And Peter—I love Peter—says, "Where else are we going to go? You have the words of eternal life that we have never heard" [John 6:68, paraphrase]. And so now Jesus had a church of twelve disciples.

Then Jesus says, "One of you is a devil" [John 6:70, paraphrase]. So Jesus just shrunk it from twelve to eleven. What Jesus does here is so contrary to what you are taught in modern-day homiletics, about how to work the crowd up and gather a crowd. Jesus totally decimates a crowd here.)

Jesus says this in John 6:64:

*"But there are some of you who do not believe.'..." (John 6:64).*

See, that is what makes you a believer, right? Either you believe or you don't. Jesus says,

*"But there are some of you who do not believe.' For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who it was that would betray Him" (John 6:64).*

So the one who would betray Jesus was never a believer. And if you drop down to John 6:71, it is very clear. John writes,

*"Now He meant Judas the son of Simon Iscariot, for he, one of the twelve, was going to betray Him" (John 6:71).*

"The guy who will betray Me never believed." It is very clear that of the twelve, one of them was not saved: Judas. And Judas is not in view in John 15. Judas has gone off to do his betrayal in John 13.

So if you are going to make John 15 all about saved people and unsaved people, you have to put Judas in the room. "Hey man, I hope you are bearing enough fruit to prove you are one of the elect." Why would you go into a conversation about that with eleven saved people, with Judas not even being there? I would think that Jesus would talk about being saved or not with Judas there, but Judas was not there.

So what is Jesus dealing with in John 15:5-6, 8? He is not dealing with the issue of being a believer. He is dealing with the issue of being a disciple. He is not dealing with the issue of being a believer. He is dealing with the issue of needing to stay in fellowship with Jesus.

He is not dealing with a "louo" (λούω) issue. He is dealing with a "nipto" (νίπτω) issue, because He is trying to explain to them, "Here is how you are going to be fruit bearers for Me."

Jesus discusses a branch in the vine, and a branch out of the vine in John 15, and people look at that and say, "Heaven and hell, oh my goodness!"

No. It is an "in fellowship and out of fellowship" issue. That is why we exercised 1 John 1:9 before we started teaching today, right? We want to be in fellowship.

When we exercise 1 John 1:9, it is not an altar call. It is an invitation for the out-of-fellowship Christian to get back in fellowship with Jesus so that we can learn from the Holy Spirit.

So that is the kind of discussion that is happening there in John 15. Let's go back to John 15:5. The whole issue is abiding. The Greek word for "abide" is "meno" (μένω).

The Greek word for "believe" is "pisteo" (πιστεύω). Pisteuo is not used here. It is "meno" (μένω), "meno" (μένω), "meno" (μένω). "Abide," "abide," "abide," "abide."

So look at John 15:5. What is Jesus saying to these eleven clean people?

*"I am the vine, you are the branches; he who [not "believes"] abides..." (John 15:5).*

By the way, John is really good at saying "believe" ("pisteuo" [πιστεύω]). He says it about ninety-nine times in his Gospel. But John does not say "believe" ("pisteuo" [πιστεύω]) here because there is no need to. These guys already believed. Jesus says "meno" (μένω).

*"...he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing" (John 15:5).*

"Do not have dirty feet," in other words. "You do not need a whole bath over again. Just your feet are dirty."

*"...he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing" (John 15:5).*

Look at John 15:7.

*"If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you,..." (John 15:7).*

Now Jesus is talking about your prayer life.

*"...ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you" (John 15:7).*

So if believing gets me to heaven, what does abiding do? Isn't getting to heaven enough? I guess in the minds of some people it is.

But Jesus says, "There is more to it than that. If you abide in Me now, you are a disciple. If you abide in Me now, you are qualified to bear fruit—fruit that will last because you are connected to the eternal source."

It is very hard for an orange branch to bear oranges when it is not connected to an orange tree, right? All the branch has to do is stay connected to the tree, and the fruit comes naturally, spontaneously, and organically.

This is the kind of fruit that Jesus wants to bring forth in our lives, because it is fruit that will last. And you cannot bear fruit that will last when you are not connected to the eternal source, Jesus.

So when I get out of fellowship with Him, I disqualify myself not from salvation, but from fruit bearing. And I might be able to gin up some things in the flesh, some good deeds or whatever, but they do not last because they are my own work.

What I want is for Jesus to produce in me eternal things, and I cannot do that disconnected from Him. And apparently, as a Christian, I can disconnect myself from Him, not because I am going to hell, but because of the sin nature.

So I need 1 John 1:9. That is why there is a distinction between "louo" (λούω) and "nipto" (νίπτω) in John 13:10-11. And how do you stay close to Jesus exactly?

Well, how do you stay close to anybody? This is not rocket science. You talk to people and say, "Hey, so-and-so's my best friend." Well, when was the last time you talked to them? Oh, like fifteen years ago. Well, that is a strange friendship, because the whole definition of a friendship is relational. How do you stay in fellowship with the Lord? You talk to Him. That is called prayer. And you let Him talk to you.

So it is a two-way deal, a two-way conversation. Have you ever been in a relationship with someone where they monopolize everything? That is not a lot of fun. There is no two-way there.

So you talk to the Lord through prayer. He talks to you through His Word, which means that you have to open the Book and read it. You have to be in an environment that wants to teach it.

So when you offend your friend, what do you do? You apologize and you move on. That is what 1 John 1:9 is doing in your Bible.

So why should you pursue this relational aspect with Jesus? Because when you do it now, you are qualified, not just for heaven—that already got taken care of at the "louo" (λούω) stage—but also for fruit bearing.

Look at John 15:2.

*"Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit" (John 15:2).*

Look at the repetition of "bear(s) fruit" here.

John 15:4-5 says,

*"Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing" (John 15:4-5).*

By "apart from Me you can do nothing" (John 15:5), Jesus means, "Without Me you cannot produce things that will remain."

John 15:8 says,

*"My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples" (John 15:8).*

John 15:6 says,

*"You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and that your fruit would remain,..." (John 15:16).*

This is eternal fruit. This is a life of an eternal impact.

*"...so that whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give it to you" (John 15:16).*

So I look at that and I say, "Well, Lord, that is the kind of life I want. I want a life that is having an eternal impact in this world."

And Jesus says, "I am so glad you are interested in that, because I am going to show you right here how to have that." It is more than simply believing in Christ for salvation. It is staying in close proximity to Jesus by way of fellowship.

It is not a "louo" (λούω) issue, it is a "nipto" (νίπτω) issue. It is a 1 John 1:9 issue. And I cannot tell you how relieved I was as a fairly new Christian to discover that God has not called me to produce fruit.

I thought I had to produce fruit. That is not what John 15 says. It says to bear fruit. See the difference? Bearing fruit is something that comes naturally, spontaneously, and organically, by staying connected to the source.

I completed my fifty-ninth trip around the sun this morning. This is my fifty-ninth birthday. Thank you. So I am past half-time.

So in your life, you get past half-time, and you ask yourself, "Well, what do I want the rest of my life to produce?" And here is what I want right here. I just want to stay in very close fellowship with Jesus and let Him bring forth whatever He wants to bring forth.

I do not know who, when, or how. I do not even need to know. All I have to do is stay in fellowship. And if you stay in fellowship, Jesus will take care of the fruit.

Where am I going to go? Where am I going to live? How much money am I going to make? Who am I going to impact? What kind of ministry am I going to have?

Jesus says, "You do not need to worry about that." You just need to worry about you as the branch, staying in fellowship with Him, and He will take care of all the other stuff.

So that is the difference between an understanding that says that you have to get out and produce fruit, which is what I used to think John 15 taught, versus bearing fruit.

And once I figured that out, or the Lord showed it to me through His Word, it was like, "Whew! That takes all the pressure out of Christianity. I just have one responsibility, which is to stay close to Him."

And the fruit, whatever Jesus wants to produce, will come forth organically. We get the cart before the horse real easy because we are works-oriented. That is our problem.

So here is a whole other thing I will point out to you about this. What does John 15:6 say?

Calvinism and Arminianism, for that matter, would say, "If you don't bear fruit, then God takes the branch and throws it into hell."

Read John 15:6 very carefully. Does it say that God took the branch and threw it into the fire? Does it say that?

I have to be honest with you: I read this for years and I thought it said, "God takes the unfruitful branch and throws it into the fire." And John 15:6 does not even say that. It says,

*"If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up;..." (John 15:6).*

The verse does not even name God here. That is interesting.

*"...and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned" (John 15:6).*

I think that it was Bret Nazworth who pointed this out to me at a conference, and I said, "You are kidding me. I thought it said that God throws the branch into the fire. It does not even say that."

Now, what about the fire? You know the quote from the "Wizard of Oz," right? "How about a little fire, Scarecrow?" "Fire" in the Bible is always referring to hell, right? Every time you see fire in the Bible, it is hell, right?

Now, do not get me wrong. Fire can be hell. Matthew 25:41 says,

*"Then He will also say to those on His left,..." (Matthew 25:41).*

Notice that the goats are always on the left. That just cracks me up. But we will not go there.

*"Then He will also say to those on His left,..." (Matthew 25:41).*

(That is why we have our voting booth out there...)

*"Then He will also say to those on His left, "Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels;..." (Matthew 25:41).*

So there is no doubt that fire can be hell. But it is rather startling to discover that sometimes the Bible uses fire not related to hell. Did you know that?

Referring to the judgment seat of rewards, at which our works will pass through a fire to ascertain their quality, 1 Corinthians 3:15 refers to fire that is not hell.

We have talked about this. Whatever is left after the fire finishes its work is part of some kind of reward that we receive above and beyond salvation.

There 1 Corinthians 3:15 talks about fire, but it is not hell. It is talking about the appraisal of our works.

*"If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire" (1 Corinthians 3:15).*

That could be what John 15 is talking about with the branch in the fire. It is not "You are going to hell."

It is "Your works are going to pass through a fire to determine whether they are human works because you did them while you were not in fellowship with Jesus as a Christian, or whether are they gold, silver, and costly stones because you did those works connected to Him and you did not produce fruit, but bore fruit."

And then Hebrews 6:8 talks about a field, and says,

*"but if it yields thorns and thistles, it is worthless and close to being cursed, and it ends up being burned" (Hebrews 6:8).*

Now, study the agrarian society of the Greco-Roman world. They lit a field on fire, not to destroy the field, but to make it more productive.

So when John 15 talks about being a branch not bearing fruit, going through a fire could easily refer to the Lord putting you through some kind of trial or some kind of discipline to make you more productive.

And then 1 Peter 1:6-7 (earlier we quoted 1 Peter 1 about the preservation of the saints) says,

*"...you have been distressed by various trials...tested by fire,..." (1 Peter 1:6-7).*

That is not talking about hell. That is talking about the ordinary trials of life that we go through.

So you will notice that we have a lot of different meanings on the table here for "fire," for the branch thrown into the fire in John 15. It could be the test of works at the Bema Seat judgment. That is one possibility.

The branch thrown into the fire that is nonproductive could be some sort of tribulation that the Lord puts the nonproductive branches through to make them more productive.

Nothing causes us to get closer to the Lord than a trial, which is analogized in the Bible to a fire.

And the pruning could be the fire. Look at what Jesus says in John 15:2:

*"Every branch in Me..." (John 15:2).*

Now that is both the fruitful and the unfruitful branches in Me. Both are eternally secure.

*"...that does not bear fruit, He takes away;..." (John 15:2).*

Now the finest of the finest Greek scholars that I know, Dr. Wayne House being one, say that the original text does not say "takes away" (John 15:2). What it says is "lifts up."

Why do you take an unfruitful branch and lift it up? To give it sunlight, so that it can be more fruitful. And those that have studied all of these things in the agrarian world say that is exactly how it works.

*"Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He ... [lifts up]; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit" (John 15:2).*

So even if you are bearing fruit, you sometimes still go through a fire because God wants to make you more productive:

*"...that it may bear more fruit" (John 15:2).*

So again, when you connect John 15:2 to John 15:6 and understand that fire does not have to mean hell every time it is used in the Bible, you start to see that this is a discipline issue.

This is burning the field so that it is more productive. This is an "in fellowship; out of fellowship" issue. This is a "nipto" (νίπτω) issue and not a "louo" (λούω) issue.

The disciplinary hand of the Lord can be very severe, can't it? Hebrews 12:5-11 says that whom the Lord loves the Lord chastens. Have you ever been under the disciplinary hand of God? I have. It is not a fun place to be.

David was under God's disciplinary hand during His time of unconfessed sin and he was miserable. Just read what he writes in the Psalms during that time period. Read Psalm 32:1-5, and you will see what it feels like to be under the disciplinary hand of God.

And yet we would all agree that David had been saved before that whole experience and stayed saved throughout it. And fortunately for him, he came out on the right end of it. But even if he had not, he was still "louo" (λούω). It is just the "nipto" (νίπτω) that is the problem.

So when you put all of this together, you start to see that there is a totally different meaning from, "Hey, if you are not bearing fruit, it proves you are not one of the elect, so you are going to hell."

That is the way the verse sounds when it is just thrown at you out of the clear blue. But when you put the whole thing into its context, you see that is not what it is talking about at all. So hopefully we have kind of de-Calvinized John 15:5-6, 8.

But what about this one here? "Examine yourself to see if you are in the faith"—2 Corinthians 13:5 (paraphrase)? I have had that verse thrown at me more times than I care to admit.

"You might fail the test. That is what 2 Corinthians 13:5 says. And if you fail the test, you are not a Christian. So examine yourself." What is that all about? And obviously I cannot get into that now, so we will look at that next time.