

Neo-Calvinism vs. the Bible 045

Ephesians 2:10

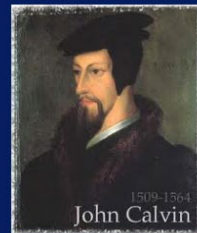
October 5, 2025

Dr. Andy Woods

Well, please locate Ephesians 2:10. As we continue our study, "Neo-Calvinism vs. the Bible," we are at a section in which we are looking at TULIP, the mnemonic device for Calvinism, through the grid of Scripture.

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 on the "P," Perseverance of the Saints, coming close to the end of the study. I know I have said that for like six months, but I think it is really true. You guys just have to persevere a little while longer.

V. Running TULIP Through the Grid of Scripture

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



And of course, when it comes to this whole idea of the Perseverance of the Saints, we do not teach that. We think it is an Augustinian, Roman Catholic type teaching taught by

John Calvin, who originally wanted to be a Roman Catholic because there were no Protestant churches.

Calvin was actually trying to change the Roman Catholic Church from the inside. He was as shocked as anybody when they gave him the right foot of fellowship and kicked him out. So the Protestant movement started as a consequence of that.

The way I understand Calvin is that he was trying, like Luther was, to start a conversation within the church, rather like when people put something on social media to start a conversation. That is what Luther's Ninety-Five Theses were.

And Calvin was called a heretic by the Roman Catholic Church. He was kicked out. So my point is, when Calvin and Luther broke away, they actually did not break away on their own. They were kicked out.

And when you are in a tar pit for over a thousand years, the Dark Ages, you do not just climb out of the tar pit and be completely clean, right?

Calvin and Luther dragged a lot of stuff with them into what later became known as the Protestant Reformation—infant baptism being part of that. There are even people, like R. C. Sproul, who still hold on to infant baptism—he upheld it till his passing, which happened just recently.

That is how to look at a lot of these doctrines that are taught in the Reformed tradition. They are quasi-Catholic. The Reformers corrected a lot of stuff, but they did not correct everything.

So the Reformers dragged with them this Augustinian doctrine of the Perseverance of the Saints, which teaches that you have to persevere to the end of your life in good works and doctrine to prove that you are one of the elect.

And if that perseverance is not happening, then you have grounds to question yourself and others perpetually whether they are the elect of God. That is not the way we teach it here at Sugar Land Bible Church, because we are Sugar Land Bible Church, right? We want to follow the Bible, not this long line of church tradition.

What we teach is the preservation of the saints from 1 Peter 1:5, that says that we are

"...protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation [that is glorification] ready to be revealed in the last time" (1 Peter 1:5).

So you are literally being shielded and protected, as a believer, by God's power. You are in the double grip of grace. You are in the Son's hands and in the Father's hands (John 10:27-29). And you know, based on that, that you are going to arrive at your final destination. It is not something that is even debatable.

So your eternal security has nothing to do with your ups and downs in the Christian life. It has to do with the power of God that protects us. But the Calvinistic system goes back to Roman Catholicism and Augustinianism.

Remember what Calvin said? He said, "I can reconstruct my whole theology based on the writings of Augustine" (paraphrase). And Augustine really was one of those guys who did not know Hebrew. So to him the Old Testament was like, who cares?

Augustine brought Amillennialism into the church in the fourth century. He brought allegorical interpretation into the church. He taught the doctrine of purgatory, which is not found in the Bible.

And Augustine is really the one that brought a lot of this hardcore sovereignty into Christianity, that John Calvin just revitalized over a thousand years later.

So that is why when you read Calvin and you read Calvin's "Institutes," he over and over again keeps saying, "Saint Augustine." Doesn't that show you a Roman Catholic mentality?

The Bible does not say that you can become a saint one day if you are good enough. What the Bible says is that you are a saint the moment you trust Christ. So we are all saints. Even if you act like an "ain't," you are still a saint, if you are a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ.

So Calvin reached back a thousand years to Augustine and recycled a lot of these things into modern-day Christianity. And one of the things that was brought back was this Perseverance of the Saints idea. So this is the Calvinistic understanding of the "P" in TULIP.

"'P' stands for 'Perseverance of the Saints.'"¹

Not "preservation of the saints"—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...'"²

I cannot tell you how many Christians I have encountered over the years that labor under this belief system. And Bob Kirkland says,

"...uncertainty as to one's ultimate salvation is, in fact, built into the very fabric of Calvinism itself."³

So if there is this life of perpetual introspection to see if you are a Christian, you could never know if you are a Christian or not, because how do you know if you have done enough?

"I only helped two old ladies across the street last week. I think I needed to help three. And because I did not help three and only helped two, maybe I am not a believer." And

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

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

that is the disaster that you live under when you misunderstand this Perseverance of the Saints, when God wants you to understand the preservation of the saints.

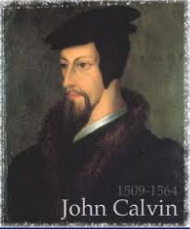
So John Calvin himself, in "Calvin's Calvinism: God's Eternal Predestination and Secret Providence," said,

"[T]hose who do not persevere unto the end belong not to the calling of God."⁴

So what we have been dealing with are problems with the Perseverance of the Saints perspective.

E. Perseverance of the Saints

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

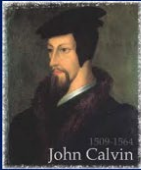


1509-1564
John Calvin

And one of the terms that is being thrown around today is "final salvation." I will show you that in just a minute. I have given you a lot of quotes on that.

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



1509-1564
John Calvin

⁴ 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.

But what does "final salvation" even mean? Basically what that means is that you have to get to the end of your life and the good had better outweigh the bad. And then God makes some kind of determination that the good outweighed the bad.

And then you say to yourself, "Whew, I am glad I made it. I guess I was one of the elect. I guess when I trusted in Christ, it was the real deal, and it was not fake."

And I really will not know whether I am saved till the end of my life when God makes that determination. And that determination will not be made until data is gathered on me. And that is called final salvation.

I have tried to show you that final salvation is just a completely untrue, unbiblical idea. Jesus gave the thief on the cross immediate assurance of salvation. He said,

"...today you shall be with Me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43).

Jesus did not say, "Well, let's see how the next fifteen minutes go as you are hanging on the cross there. Let's see if you really tough it out, buddy."

And if you can put yourself in that position of the thief on the cross, that is exactly what God gives you the moment you trust in Him (John 5:24; 6:47; 1 John 5:13). First John 5:13 says,

"...that you may know that you have eternal life" (1 John 5:13).

So the Bible does not just teach eternal security. Calvinism teaches eternal security. But the way it is biblically supposed to be taught is that you can actually know that you have eternal security.

See the difference? If you believe in the Perseverance of the Saints idea, you might believe in eternal security, but you never know if you have it or not, which is just a terrible way to live, in my opinion.

You are doing things for God out of fear, which is a completely different motive for service to the Lord from what the Bible says. You should not serve the Lord because you do not know if you are going to make it in final salvation. You should serve the Lord out of gratitude, because it is reasonable.

That is what Romans 12:1 says:

"...present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God,..."
(Romans 12:1).

Why would I ever do that? Because it is reasonable (see Romans 12:1, New King James Version). It is very logical. If God did all this for me—and I hope we understand that the story of the Bible is not what we do for God, right?

If you think the story of the Bible is like us climbing up some kind of ladder to get to God, you really do not understand the Bible, because the Bible does not teach that.

The story of the Bible is not man reaching up to God. It is God reaching down to man. And Jesus's final words on the cross were,

"... 'It is finished!'..." (John 19:30).

It is not an "I bought lunch, and you had better leave the tip or we are not going to get out of here" kind of thing. It is done. It is finished. And you, as a lost sinner, received that as a gift.

So then what do you do? You live the rest of your life in fear, afraid that maybe you did not say it right, or pray right, or believe right? No. You just take it as a gift, a free gift offered to any human being who wants it, to be received by faith alone.

And then what do you do with the rest of your life? Well, you give the rest of your life to the Lord, because that is logical. If God gave everything to me, why would I not want to give myself completely and wholly to Him?

So that becomes the motivation for service, which is not perpetual fear. But you see that a lot of ministers, a lot of pastors, will not teach it that way, because they want to keep control of the people.

"Boy, you guys might hear about the grace of God on Sunday and live like the devil on Monday through Saturday. So I need to keep you in a perpetual place of fear that maybe you did something—from the Arminian perspective—to forfeit your salvation during the week."

"Or maybe you did something—from the Calvinist perspective—to not persevere enough. And maybe you are not one of the elect. So I have to dangle hell in front of everybody every single week to keep them under control. Because if you teach those people the grace of God, boy, they are going to live like the devil the rest of the time."

And, I will be honest with you, that is a pretty powerful motivational device—being told every Sunday that you are going to hell. But we do not teach that, because it is not in the Bible. We teach "Once saved, always saved": the assurance of salvation.

We just believe that when people understand the grace of God, it becomes the most powerful motivating force in a person's life to serve God. So there is no need to threaten and coerce and intimidate people with eternal retribution over and over again.

Now, if you are not a Christian, then yeah, we will talk about hell. But I am not dealing here with non-Christians. I am dealing here with Christians.

"Yeah, but, pastor, someone might come into the church service that is unsaved." Great! That is why we give the gospel every week. But the primary audience that we are dealing with is the saved.

So, there is no such thing as final salvation. The moment you trust Christ, your salvation is secure. Now, rewards at the Bema Seat, fruitfulness in this life,—that is up in the air. That depends on your response, as a child of God, to the things of God.

But as far as eternal salvation is concerned—your name being written in the Lamb's Book of Life—that is a done deal. And there is no eraser with God. He is not going to take your name out.

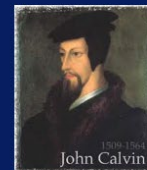
The apostles, in Luke 10, came to Jesus and said, "Even the demons are in submission to us" (paraphrase, Luke 10:17). And remember what Jesus said?

He said, "Do not rejoice that the demons are in submission to you. Rejoice that your names are recorded in heaven, because that is a done deal. That is the most important issue" (paraphrase, Luke 10:18-20).

Demon submission, or whatever God wants to do in your life,—that is just the cherry on top. I guess that is just icing on the cake.

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So, final salvation is unbiblical. And then we moved into subletter "b," where I gave you tons of examples of Old Testament saints and New Testament saints that were non-persevering.

These were people that were clearly saved. We looked at Lot, Saul, Demas—countless people in the Bible. It is crystal clear that they were saved, but their lives did not end well.

So the Calvinistic system would say they were not saved. And I am telling you that, based on the Bible, they were saved. And then from there we went to Scripture verses taken out of context, subletter "c," to support the Perseverance of the Saints idea.

I have in parenthesis Luke 4:9-12, in which passage the devil quoted the Bible back to Jesus. Jesus quoted the Book of Deuteronomy, and then Satan said, "Two can play at that game. I will quote to you Psalm 91:11-12." This took place during the three temptations of Jesus by the devil in the Judean wilderness.

So just because someone quotes the Bible, you should not be impressed by that. Gee, do I get political here? Oh, what the heck, why not? Executive amnesty.

One of our presidents, President Obama, made a decision to just illegally grant a bunch of people in the country instant amnesty. It was called, in his time, executive amnesty. And, when Obama got in front of the American people and told them what he had done and tried to explain it, he started quoting the Bible.

I could not believe it. Pastor Gabe came into my office and said, "The President's quoting the Bible." And of course, he was going to these verses in Leviticus and Exodus and all of these verses about being kind to the sojourner amongst you.

Obama was not recognizing that there is a distinction between the Hebrew word for "sojourner"—"gar" (גַּר)—like Ruth, someone who comes into the country legally and tries to follow the laws of the land and respects the culture;—

—and the completely different Hebrew word that describes people that want to come into the country and wreck it from the inside and violate the laws of the land to get into the country.

So all these verses that Obama was quoting were using "gar" (גַּר) and not that other Hebrew word. I think it is "nekar" (נֶכָר) if I remember right, but do not quote me on that one (may be "nakri" [נִכְרִי]). It is a different Hebrew word from "gar" (גַּר).

So all these verses about being kind to the sojourner are basically talking about legal immigrants within the land. They are not dealing with people that want to come in and change the culture from within.

Remember what Ruth, who was from the Transjordan area, a Moabite, said to Naomi: "You God will be my God. Your people will be my people" (Ruth 1:16, paraphrase). Ruth was a sojourner—"gar" (גַּר).

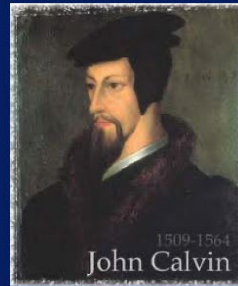
So when the President at that time was using those verses to support what he was doing with illegal immigrants, he was completely mutilating the Bible.

But your average person does not understand those differences in Hebrew words. And it sounded so skillful, like, boy, if you are against executive amnesty, you are against God—you are not spiritual—you are not compassionate—you are not loving.

So am I trying to give you a speech on immigration policy? No, I am just trying to show you that just because people quote the Bible should mean nothing to you unless they are going to use the Bible correctly. After all, the devil himself, the father of lies, quotes the Bible all the time.

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 all these verses that are used to support the Perseverance of the Saints doctrine are just mutilated, ripped out of context, verses we covered in prior weeks.

We covered Matthew 24:13—"He who perseveres until the end will be saved" (paraphrase). That has nothing to do with the Perseverance of the Saints. That has to do with the perseverance of the Tribulation Jews who see the temple desecrated midway through the Tribulation Period.

And then, a few weeks back, we went over John 15, about the branch in the vine that gets out of the vine and does not bear fruit and is thrown into the fire.

That has nothing to do with someone losing their salvation. It has nothing to do with someone who did not bear enough fruit to prove they had salvation. That is dealing with in fellowship and out of fellowship issues.

That is the whole context of John 15. And the fire is a loss of rewards at the Bema Seat Judgment. We went through that last time we were together, which was last week.

We went over 2 Corinthians 13:5, which says, "Test yourself to see if you are in the faith, to see if Christ is formed in you" (paraphrase).

That verse is used all the time for people to query themselves—test themselves—to see if they are one of the elect. Yet in reality 2 Corinthians 13:5 is not talking about that at all.

Second Corinthians 13:5 is not, as I showed you last week, a test of birth. The Corinthians' birth is already assumed in the Corinthian letters. Second Corinthians 13:5 is a test for the Corinthians' growth, which changes the meaning entirely.

So now we are going to go through a few more of these verses. Let's go to Ephesians 2:10. I think that these next verses will go by fast.

You know this one. This is one of the verses you probably memorized as a new Christian. Ephesians 2:8 says,

"For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God;..." (Ephesians 2:8).

Now, we have gone over in prior lessons that the "gift" (Ephesians 2:8) is not faith. The Calvinistic system wants you to believe that the gift is faith. We went into depth on this, that the gift is not faith.

The gift is the salvation that occurs as a result of faith. "Faith" ("pistis" [πίστις]) and "gift" ("doron" [δῶρον]) are different genders. So to figure out what the gift is, you cannot necessarily go back to the nearest antecedent, which is what usually works.

Usually you go back to the nearest antecedent to figure out what something means. But you cannot do that here in Ephesians 2:8 because "gift" ("doron" [δῶρον]) and "faith" ("pistis" [πίστις]) are different genders, and gender is a big deal in the Greek language.

Faith is the means. It is the response. The gift is salvation itself, which would encompass the thirty-three things you receive the moment you trust Christ.

There are thirty-three things that you get the moment you trust Christ, and they have nothing to do with your experience. They have nothing to do with emotional highs and emotional lows.

These things are not experiences. They are positional realities. And the only way you would ever know you have them is by studying the Bible, because they are not revealed anywhere else.

Ephesians 1:3 says that we have been blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. What the Bible is saying is that you are filthy rich and you do not know it.

It is like these stories in the news that you run into periodically about somebody who is living under a bridge or something, when in reality they are a multimillionaire—they just never were told.

And they do not know anything about money. They do not know how to access the money. They do not know that they have inherited all this money. They are living in poverty-stricken conditions, which is totally unnecessary, because they have not investigated financial reality.

So that is rather how your average Christian today is living. They are living like some worm theology—thinking they are like a poverty-stricken person. "Gee, does the Lord want me to start this ministry? I don't know. I had better not." What are you talking about? Don't you know who you are in Christ? "Gee, Lord, it's just me down here, a little worm. I know You will never hear a single prayer I ever pray." What are you talking about? Don't you know who you are?

So salvation, followed by many spiritual blessings, is the gift that you receive, which is accessed by faith.

"For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God;" (Ephesians 2:8).

And how do you get into the program? How do you opt in? Ephesians 2:9 says,

"not as a result of works,..." (Ephesians 2:9).

If God opted you in by works, you would have something to boast about. God has set this whole thing up so that there is no boasting. Nobody is in heaven proud as a peacock, strutting their stuff.

So we may have heard that part of the verse before, but what about the rest of it? Ephesians 2:10 comes after Ephesians 2:9. You have to go to a Bible church to learn that, right? Verse ten comes after verse nine. So keep reading.

"For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk [lexical form: 'peripateo' (περιπατέω); subjunctive mood: 'peripatesomen' (περιπατήσωμεν)] in them" (Ephesians 2:10).

So I am not saved by good works, but I am saved unto good works. There is more to my salvation than just keeping me out of hell—which is great; I do not want to go to hell.

But God, when He offered me salvation, had in mind not just keeping me out of eternal retribution, but actually using my life in an eternal way that can have eternal fruit and eternally impact other people.

So that is what God had in mind. So He has these good works prepared in advance that we may walk in them. Now, all of that is good theology so far. But let me tell you how the Calvinistic system distorts this verse.

And I know this to be true because I lived under this, thinking that it was true—while it was not true—for years and years and years of my Christian life.

It goes something like this: "We are not saved by faith alone..." I am going to mess it up—I am glad I forgot how this goes. But let's see—well, maybe some of you Calvinists out there can help me with this.

Let's see. "But faith, which is authentic, is never alone." There we go. "We are not saved by faith alone, but faith which is authentic is never alone." Have you ever heard that?

So what the Calvinists are saying is that good works always accompany authentic, saving faith. And that helps them in their Perseverance of the Saints doctrine. And that is the way it looks at first glance, doesn't it?

"For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10).

So you look at that and you say, "Well, what if I am not walking in good works? What if the last six months to a year of my life was a total spiritual shipwreck, but I received the Lord at VBS or whatever when I was a child? What do you do with that?"

Well, from the Calvinistic viewpoint, then you get into "Well, maybe I never received the Lord. Maybe my faith was not genuine. Maybe I am just a professor, but not a possessor."

And suddenly your birthright, which is the assurance of salvation, is stolen from you because of that Calvinistic understanding of Ephesians 2:10—that the faith which saves is alone, but the faith that authentically saves is never alone, because it has to be accompanied by good works.

Now, Calvinists never tell you how many good works there have to be. It is a very subjectively defined category. So you never know if you have reached the mark, and you will not know until you get final salvation.

It is a very simple thing. Here is why that understanding of Ephesians 2:10 does not work. It has to do with this verb "walk" (lexical form:"peripateo" [περιπατέω]):

"...that we would walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10).

Walk in what? Walk in good works. God wants us to do good works and He wants us to walk in them (Ephesians 2:10).

But here is what was never told to me about the Calvinistic rendition of Ephesians 2:10. It has to do with the mood of the Greek verb "peripateo" (περιπατέω). In Ephesians 2:10, the mood is subjunctive.

Your average person looks at that, and their eyes kind of roll into the back of their head. And who cares? What does that mean?

Here is why it is a big deal. The subjunctive mood in Greek is the mood of possibility. It is the mood of potentiality. It is the mood of the hypothetical.

"Maybe this is going to happen. Maybe it is not going to happen." The subjunctive mood is not speaking of factual reality.

So what Paul is saying is that you have been saved by grace through faith, not of works (Ephesians 2:8-9). Now start walking with the Lord because He has good works for you (Ephesians 2:10). But whether you are actually going to fulfill those good works or not is a possibility.

The subjunctive mood in Ephesians 2:10 just changes everything. It should be translated "that we might walk in them," not "that we will automatically walk in them."

So the Calvinistic system, with its repetition over and over again of "The faith that saves is faith alone, but faith that is authentic is never alone"—you hear that enough times and it affects the way you are reading the Scripture.

You would think that walking in those good works is automatic, and if those things are not happening, then maybe you never had the right faith. Maybe your faith was just a spurious faith.

But when you look at Ephesians 2:10 in Greek and you start to see that this is in the subjunctive mood, that is a game changer.

Should you walk in good works? Of course you should. That is the logical, reasonable thing to do. And as you do that, your life will be fruitful. You will have a very good rendering of rewards at the Bema Seat Judgment.

But what if I do not walk in good works? Or what if I walk in good works for half of the day and not the other half of the day? What does that mean? Does that subtract anything from Ephesians 2:8-9?

No, because of the subjunctive mood of "walk" (lexical form: 'peripateo' [περιπατέω]; subjunctive mood: 'peripatesomen' [περιπατήσωμεν]) in Ephesians 2:10.

If "walk" were not in the subjunctive mood—"that we might walk in them" (alternate translation, Ephesians 2:10)—then I guess I could argue that not enough good works erases what has happened in Ephesians 2:8-9.

But the Greek text will not allow that. I realize that there are a lot of preachers out there who will just bore you to death with Greek and Hebrew, and dump data onto you that has no relevance to anything, other than to show you how much research they did that week, or something.

Yeah, I can use Logos too. I can use computer programs and assemble a bunch of unrelated Greek and Hebrew data. But I do not do that because you would just tune me out if I did that.

But I will bring Greek and Hebrew up when it is a big deal. This is a big deal. Do you know what you should do? I am reading out of the New American Standard Bible. It says,

"For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10).

You should cross out the word "would" and put "might." That is what you should do. And no, you are not changing God's Word.

You are changing a bad English translation to "that we might walk in them" so that you can see here that walking in good works is not an ironclad reality, but a possibility.

Hardly anybody will talk about that possibility because it destroys the Perseverance of the Saints doctrine. And if you destroy the Perseverance of the Saints doctrine, you just took away the preacher's control over the congregation.

I told you these would move fast. We are moving to a second one here. Let's go to Hebrews 12:14. Here is another verse that creates terror in people.

I am going to quote the NKJV. Both the NASB and NKJV do a pretty good job with this.

The author of Hebrews (we do not know who the author was) says,


"Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord" (Hebrews 12:14, NKJV).

Now how is Hebrews 12:14 used? "You had better pursue holiness, brother, or sister. Because if there is not holiness in your life, you are not going to see the Lord."

Meaning what? Meaning that the good will not outweigh the bad. And when it comes time to final salvation and its declaration, you are going to hear those words, "Depart from me, ye workers of iniquity. I never knew you" (paraphrase, Matthew 7:23).

You are not going to see the Lord because you did not persevere. And because you did not persevere, you never had authentic faith on the front end. It was just what Calvinists call a "spurious faith."

Hebrews 12:14



1. Holy life + faith to get to heaven
2. Others seeing the Lord through the believer's life and witness
3. Not seeing the Lord in heaven
4. Context = personal relationships with others (Heb. 12:14a, 15b)
5. Not requiring faith + holy life to get to heaven

And again, Hebrews 12:14 is an example of a verse you read, and you say, "Wow, well, that is a pretty strong verse, but what are we going to do with this verse?"

We are going to do with this verse what we have done with every verse. We are going to put it in its context. You can make the Bible sound any way you want it to sound if you do not care about context.

"Judas went out and hanged himself. Go thou and do likewise. What you do, do quickly" . So get with it, folks, suicide this week. And the devil himself will manipulate verses up one side and down the other to make it sound one way when it is not saying that. And that is why you have to be a student of the context of Scripture.

This is why in this church we teach the Bible verse by verse. Because only as you go verse by verse can you see the context.

If we are going to pick these topics—"We are going to do an eight-week topic on this, and then we are going to switch to another topic and another topic."—basically, it becomes an exercise of just grabbing a bunch of verses out of nowhere to support the topic.

The first time that I, as a Christian, got totally disillusioned with this, I was in a church. (I met my wife in this church, so at least a good thing came out of it.) The guy was doing a sermon on "SHAPE."

And each letter in "SHAPE" stood for a different point in his sermon. So the "S" stood for spiritual gifts, and so on. It was about having to find God's shape for your life.

It was really disillusioning to be in a secular bookstore the next day and see the whole sermon in Stephen Covey's book (Covey is a motivational speaker), just without verses.

That was really disillusioning, particularly regarding the academic countenance of this pastor. He had all the pedigree to be an outstanding Bible teacher, and this is what he was serving up on Sunday.

You got to the "H" in "SHAPE," and the "H" was supposed to stand for "heart," meaning that you have to find God's purpose which He has placed in your heart.

And it was one of those things where you got a piece of paper with fill-in-the-blanks. So nobody was looking at their Bible. Everybody was looking at fill-in-the-blanks.

And the pastor got to the "H," and he used Revelation 17:17, which talks about how God has put it into their hearts to fulfill His purpose.

Some translations say that. And a lot of times what these preachers do is, if the particular English translation does not support what they want to say, they find a different English translation.

So I remember filling in the blank. I had to fill in "heart"—"H-E-A-R-T." And it had all these verses under it, and one of them was Revelation 17:16-17.

And I thought to myself, "Well, that is weird," Because I had been studying the Book of Revelation at that time. "And I don't think the Book of Revelation talks about that the way he is using it."

So I actually had my Bible as he was speaking, and I looked it up, which is what you should do with anybody, including me. And I read the whole verses.

You know what they say. They say that God has put His purpose into the heart of the beast to burn the city of Babylon by fire.

Well, that is a completely different meaning from what the pastor meant. And I kind of did a little eye scan of the congregation. Nobody had a Bible open, and everybody was just kind of blindly filling in "H-E-A-R-T."

So once I saw what was happening within evangelicalism with all this topical preaching, I became really opposed to what they were doing. And I felt like the only way to maintain the integrity of the text was to teach it in context.

Most churches do not want to go that direction, because most people do not have the attention span to sit through something like that. Most people want to hear what God says to them.

They do not want to hear about a genealogy in Moses's life, tracing him back to the tribe of Levi, which is what you guys get to hear this morning. Aren't you guys happy about that?

I mean, who would want to hear something like that? "I want to hear what it means to me. Because after all, I am the center of the universe, right? My Trinity is me, myself and I. And I do not want exegesis. I want narcigesis. Jesus, what does it say to me?"

And when you have a pastor like myself who wants to develop context, it is antithetical to church growth, because your average person does not want that. They do not have the patience to listen to that.

"You guys get out at 12:30?" "Well, on an early day, yeah." And there is just this impatience. Now, when it comes to the Super Bowl—when it comes to Star Wars—people have unbroken concentration for hours.

But when it comes to the Word of God, people are very, very impatient. Yet if you are seduced by this perpetual "me first" topical preaching, you are going to be open to deception, because people are going to start lifting things out of context.

And the reason people keep doing it is that the people keep rewarding them by showing up to their church services the very next week. And their churches are growing, and the budget is growing, and we are buying new buildings, and all these kinds of things, and we must be in the will of God.

Yet in reality, what you are doing is tickling people's ears, which is what Paul said would happen to the church at the end of the age.

So all of that to say, Hebrews 12:14 can be completely lifted out of context to make it say whatever you want it to say, particularly if you are in a topical environment.

So is Hebrews 12:14 saying that I have to persevere in good works until the end of my life, or I will not see the Lord? Is that really what this is saying?

The Calvinistic understanding of Hebrews 12:14 is that the holy life plus faith will get you to heaven. No, faith alone gets you to heaven. Forget the plus. There is no plus.

Jesus, to the thief on the cross, said nothing like this. He did not say "plus" anything. He said, "Today you will be with Me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43, paraphrase), to a guy who was nailed to a cross and really could not do any good works when you think about it.

The only thing the thief could probably do was persevere till the end. But Jesus did not even require that of him. He just said, "Today you will be with Me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43, paraphrase).

So the moment you see a "plus" in anything is the moment you have to say to yourself that this kind of doctrine is not right. "Faith plus holy life will get you to heaven." That is how the Calvinists understand Hebrews 12:14.

"Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord" (Hebrews 12:14).

So here is a quote from Michael Horton. They used to have a show on the radio when I was living in California called "The White Horse Inn." I actually enjoyed it at the time.

It came on Sunday evenings, and I would listen to it. At the time, I did not realize that they were force feeding, through that broadcast, Calvinism, Calvinism, Calvinism, Calvinism; Amillennialism, Amillennialism, Amillennialism, Amillennialism.

But I liked it because they sounded so good in what they were saying. And that is how a lot of people are. It is not what is said that matters. It is how they say it.

"Hey, did you know that so-and-so just taught rank heresy?" "Yeah, but it sounded so good as it was being communicated." Isn't that what Paul says would happen? Tickling of the ears.

So here is a quote from Michael Horton commenting on Hebrews 12:14.

"The New Testament lays before us a vast array of conditions..."⁵

I thought there was only one condition for not salvation. But what does it say?

"...final salvation."⁶

What is that? That is God declaring you righteous at the end. "Well, I thought God declared me righteous at the beginning—Genesis 15:6."

Why the Christian world does not rise up against this and condemn it, I have no idea. This is sold in Christian bookstores and on Christian radio stations and Christian computer programs.

I have no idea why it is even there. I do not know why it is not condemned as heresy, because Horton says right here,

⁵ Horton, Michael. (2006). *Introducing Covenant Theology* (p. 182). Grand Rapids: Baker.

⁶ Ibid.

"Not only initial repentance and faith, but perseverance..."⁷

So right here: faith—that is not enough. And I do not like what Horton is doing with repentance and faith either, because my understanding of repentance and faith is that they are both different sides of the same coin.

Repentance just means change of mind. When you hear the gospel and trust in it, your mind has already changed by way of justification. We are not dealing with a two-step approach.

This is not the Texas two-step, right? This is one step. You trust in the gospel. Your mind changed. Well, did you believe or did you repent? Yes, it is all-encompassing.

But Horton is saying, "Number one, repentance; number two, faith; and number three, perseverance" (paraphrase).

And if you do not have all three, then you are going to hear some terrible words at final salvation: "Depart from me, ye workers of iniquity. I never knew you" (Matthew 7:23, paraphrase).

Well, Michael Horton, how do I persevere?

"...perseverance in both, demonstrated in love toward God and [love towards your] neighbor,..."⁸

Those are all good things, by the way, but your salvation does not ride on them. Should you have love towards God in your neighbor? Of course.

But Horton is saying that your salvation is riding on that. Well, what is your Scriptural support for this, Dr. Horton? Well, here it comes: Hebrews 12:14.

"...are part of that holiness without which no one will see the lord (Hebrews 12:14)."⁹

So we have to have number one, repentance; number two, faith; and number three, perseverance, as demonstrated by love towards God and love towards man.

And if you do not have all three, no final salvation for you. You are not going to see the Lord. There it is in the Bible: Hebrews 12:14.

Here is a quote from John Piper, saying essentially the same thing.

"Essential to the Christian life and necessary for final salvation..."¹⁰

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ John Piper, "Does God Really Save Us by Faith Alone?" (<https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/does-god-really-save-us-by-faith-alone>).

These guys—they must all read each other's books. They must all go to the same conferences. They must listen to the exact same people—because they all sound an awful lot alike to me.

It is like listening to some of our politicians. They all start sounding like each other. Was there like a group email sent out at the start of the day? "Everybody emphasize this."

That is the way these guys read to me now. I did not used to read them this way. I used to worship these guys.

"Essential to the Christian life and necessary for final salvation..."¹¹

How do I know I am going to get final salvation?

"...is the killing of sin (Romans 8:13) and the pursuit of holiness (Hebrews 12:14)."¹²

So if you are going to get the right announcement from God at final salvation and not hear those frightful words, "Depart from me, you workers of iniquity" (paraphrase, Matthew 7:23), there had better be the killing of sin and the pursuit of holiness in your life.

So it is faith plus works. That is really what this is. And what Scripture does Piper cite? He cites Hebrews 12:14, which is what we are going over here, which is why I am bringing this up.

So what is Hebrews 12:14 saying? Is it saying that there has to be faith, repentance, love of God, love of man, killing of sin, and pursuit of holiness? Gotta see all of the above or no final salvation?

Is that what Hebrews 12:14 is saying? It is not saying that at all, even though Calvinists keep quoting it. What Hebrews 12:14 is talking about is others seeing the Lord through the believer's life and witness.

Hebrews 12:14 is not talking about you seeing God one day, vertically, which is the Calvinistic rendition of this. It is talking about others seeing the veracity and the truth of Christianity through your life, horizontally.

See the difference there? And if that is what Hebrews 12:14 means, the Calvinists have completely hijacked this verse. It is not about seeing God in heaven. It is about others seeing God through you now.

"Well, but I don't want to slay sin. I don't want to pursue holiness. I don't want to love man and love God." Fine, then people cannot see God through you. Unbelievers cannot see the reality of Christianity through you, horizontally.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

Now, how do I know this? How do I know that Hebrews 12:14 is dealing with something horizontal and not vertical? Because if it is horizontal and not vertical, the whole meaning just changed.

Well, what am I going to look at? It starts with a "c"—context. Why don't we look at Hebrews 12:14-15. Can we do that? Here is Hebrews 12:14:

"...holiness without which no one will see the Lord" (Hebrews 12:14).

What is the first part of the verse?

"Pursue peace with all people,..." (Hebrews 12:14).

That is not talking about something vertical. It is talking about something horizontal.

Verse 15 comes after verse 14, amen?

"looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled" (Hebrews 12:15).

Do you think you are going to defile God? If we go out and live an unholy life this week, do you think God is defiled? That could not be what it means.

What Hebrews 12:15 is dealing with is the people you interact with become defiled—your children and grandchildren cannot see the authentic work of God in your life. They cannot see Jesus through you.

Because it is true that you may be the only Bible somebody ever reads. Your coworkers that do not know Christ—how are they ever going to see the authentic Christianity in you if you will not pursue holiness and peace?

So it has to do with your ministry on the earth being short-circuited. And a basic contextual reading of this shows us that it has nothing to do with faith, repentance, pursuit of holiness, pursuit of peace, and slaying sin.

It has nothing to do with "Do this, this, this, and this, and this, and this, and maybe you persevered enough so that you are going to heaven."

Yet Hebrews 12:14 is used that way constantly. It is dealing with the fact that if you will not pursue these things, then the other people around you cannot see God in your life.

It is a pretty simple reading and meaning. You just have to put it in its context and stop listening to all the philosophers.

At some point the Bible has to become more important to you than all these people with the gift of gab who are trying to tell you what it says.

That is where I am today. I do not really care anymore. I used to care about all the famous preachers and teachers out there, and their massive media presence, and printing, and fifty million people in their church, or whatever—heard around the world.

You know what? To me, I watch a little of that just more for entertainment these days. The Bible is far more important to me than that stuff. And we have to graduate to that level.

This is kind of the issue that Paul was dealing with when he said, "Some of you say, 'I follow Paul. Others say, 'I follow Cephas.' 'I follow Apollos.' 'I follow Christ'" (1 Corinthians 3:4, paraphrase).

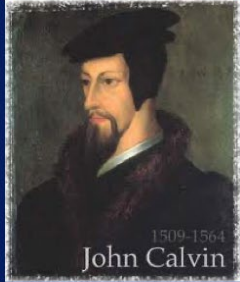
That is a sign of immaturity. What you need to follow is God. I do not even like social media, when it tells you that you have "x" amount of followers. I do not want any followers. I want to make disciples of Jesus.

I do not want some kind of cadre of cheerleaders, because if I get interested in that, rather than interested in the Great Commission, then why even be in the ministry?

You can probably get popular other ways, I would think. If popularity is the goal, I think there are other ways to do it rather than rip the Bible out of context over and over again, which God is very upset about.

**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



1509-1564
John Calvin

So Hebrews 12:14 is not requiring faith plus a holy life to get into heaven. We have two more verses to cover in this section: Revelation 13:10 and Revelation 14:12, which we will do next time.