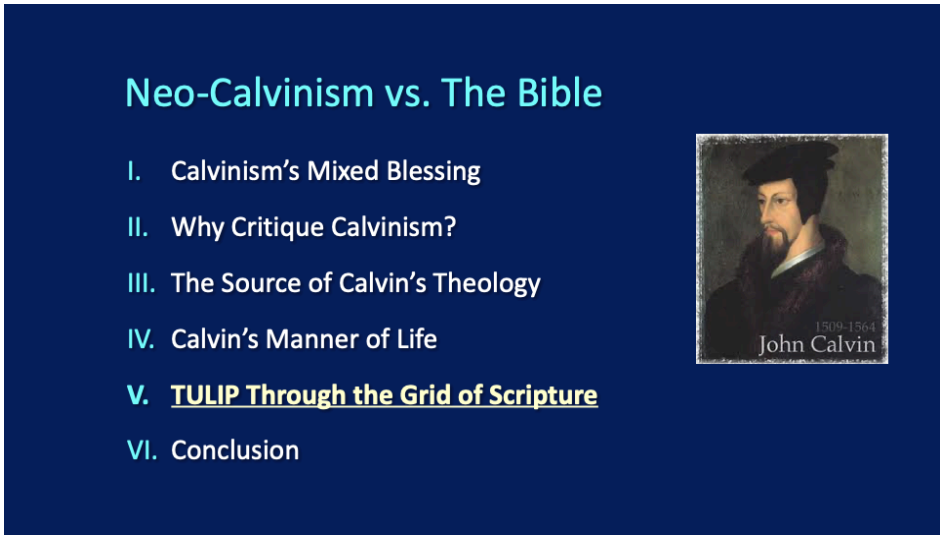
Neo-Calvinism vs. the Bible 052

John 3:14-15

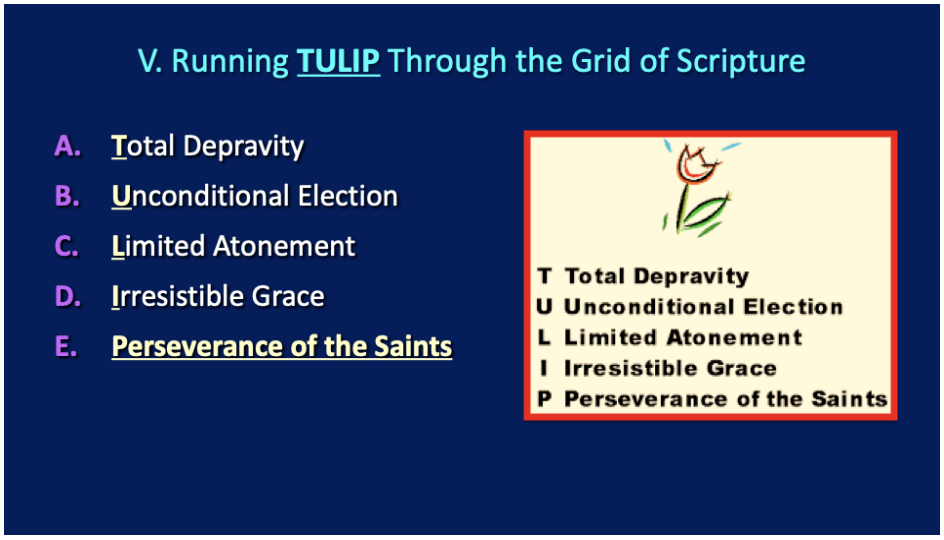
December 7, 2025

Dr. Andy Woods

Take your Bibles and open them to John 3:14-15. We are continuing along with our study "Neo-Calvinism vs. the Bible."



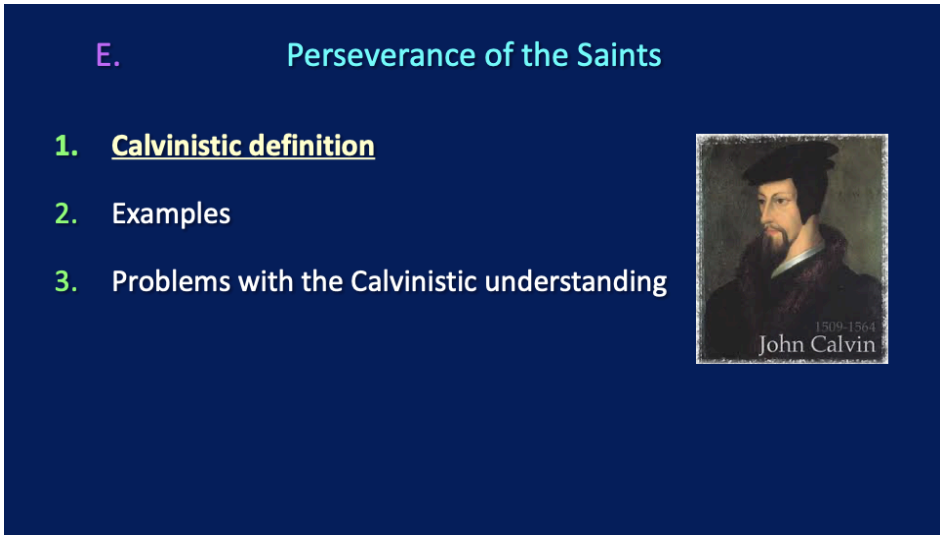
We are looking at the TULIP mnemonic device still, on the Perseverance of the Saints, which is different from the preservation of the saints.



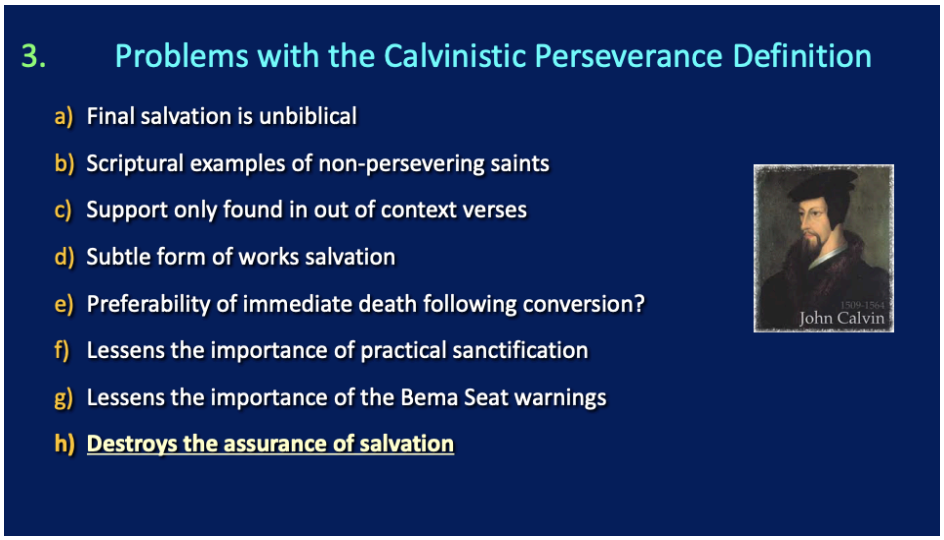
One of the things John Calvin said was,

> "[T]hose who do not persevere unto the end belong not to the calling of God."[1]

The Calvinists' understanding of the Perseverance of the Saints is that you have to endure to the end of your life in good works and doctrine to really know if you are one of the elect.



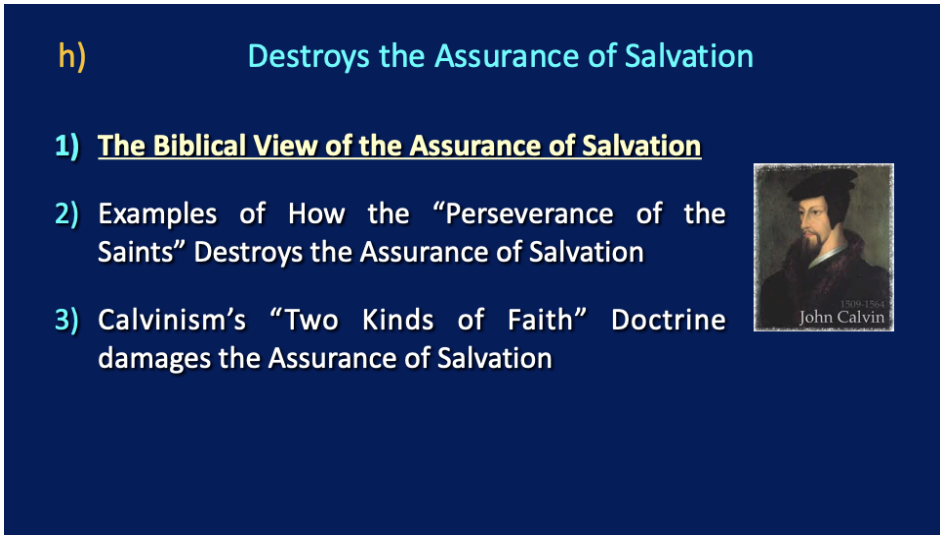
We have been going through biblical problems with that perspective, and I would like to continue with that today.



One of the things that we have been camping on here is that the Perseverance of the Saints idea, if you believe it, will destroy the assurance of salvation. We believe that the

[1] 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.

Bible teaches not just eternal security, but that you can know that you have eternal security. There are a lot of places that will teach you eternal security, but they will make you think that maybe you have it, and maybe you do not because you have not persevered enough.



You will notice 1 John 5:13. This is the primary way that you know you are saved: through God's written Word. John writes,

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

Eternal life is something that you can actually know that you possess. Notice this word *"know" (1 John 5:13)*—that is one hundred percent. You know that you possess eternal life because of God's written Word. It is something that is objective. It has nothing to do with how you feel at any given moment, or with your emotions or your work performance that day or that week.

Now, what about subjective experiences that we have? You ask your typical Christian, "How do you know you are saved?" And they will say, "Well, I am evangelizing like I have never had before. I go to church. I sing in the choir. I take communion. I love God's people. I love the Word of God." The thing to understand about those things is that those things are evidences of salvation, but they are what Lewis Sperry Chafer called "secondary evidences."[2]

The reason they are secondary evidences is that those things can ebb and flow, and you do not want to attach your assurance to those things because you are attaching your assurance to a moving target. Chafer writes,

> "...all such experiences are but secondary evidences,..."[3]

---

[2] Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Salvation: A Clear Doctrinal Analysis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977), 60.
[3] Ibid.

So if those are secondary evidences of assurance, what is the primary evidence? It is God's written Word. You can take that to the bank. If you have placed your trust in Christ for salvation, then God makes you a promise. His promise is that you are going to heaven, and it has nothing to do with whether you behave or misbehave on Monday if you have accepted the Lord by way of faith on Sunday.

So the Calvinistic system, as does the Arminian system, takes the assurance of salvation away from people. Arminianism teaches that if you misbehave, God yanks the carpet out from under you. You lost your salvation. Calvinism teaches that if you misbehaved, you are not persevering like you should, so maybe you are not one of the elect. Both of those systems end up stealing from God's people a birthright that God wants them to have: the assurance of salvation.

I gave you this quote from the Westminster Confession:

> "This infallible assurance doth not so belong to the essence of faith,..."[4]

This means that if you are a believer you cannot have assurance the moment you take Christ as your Savior by faith. So how would you ever develop assurance of salvation? The Westminster Confession goes on and says,

> "...but that a true believer will wait long, and conflict with many difficulties before he be a partaker of it."[5]

So you cannot have assurance of salvation the moment you place your faith in Christ. You have to go through a lot of conflict and difficulties, and you have to wait for a long time just to see if there is enough fruit in your life to determine that you are really one of the elect. Just compare that to 1 John 5:13, which says the exact opposite.

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

There is nothing here about a long wait. There is nothing here about many conflicts and difficulties. Assurance of your eternal security is just your birthright.

One of the things that is so destructive in this Calvinistic system is their doctrine of the two kinds of faith. There is a faith that saves and the faith that does not save. There is the faith that is the gift of God, which is exegetically incorrect, as we have talked about in this series. Faith is not a gift from God. Faith is the means by which the gift of God is gained. The gift of God is salvation. Faith is not a gift. You either are going to trust Christ or you are not.

However, according to Calvinism, there is the faith that saves and the faith that does not save. Here is a quote of William Hendriksen in his commentary on John's Gospel. You were just asking me about good commentaries on John's Gospel. You can cross this out of your list. It is not very good at all.

---

[4] Westminster Confession Chapter XVIII, Article III– Of the Assurance of Grace and Salvation.
[5] Ibid.

Hendriksen says right here,

> "Not all faith is saving faith..."[6]

So what does that do to people? You spend your whole life wondering, "Well, do I have the right kind of faith?" And if you are wondering if you have the right kind of faith, then out the window goes the assurance of salvation.

So what is faith? What is saving faith? This is not rocket science. The answer is actually pretty easy. Vine's lexicon defines "believe" ("pisteuo" [πιστεύω]) as "...'to be persuaded of,'...."[7] You hear the gospel, and you are persuaded it is true.

> "...and hence, 'to place confidence in, to trust,' signifies, in this sense of the word, reliance upon, not mere credence."[8]

Mere credence has to do with intellectual understandings of Christianity. That is mere credence. That is what I had for the first sixteen years of my life in the church that I was raised in and water baptized in. I could recite all kinds of data about Jesus, but I was not trusting Him for anything. So it was a head knowledge, but it was not what we would call biblical faith.

Then, as I have shared before, about the age of sixteen, in the spring of 1983, I heard the gospel and understood it for the first time, perhaps. And I am not sure why it hit me all of a sudden at age sixteen. I think it had something to do with how it was presented. I had never heard it presented quite like that before. At that point, head knowledge moved into trust.

I can tell you all kinds of things about George Washington. I could tell you about his wife. I can tell you that he was the father of our country. I can tell you that he liked to cut down cherry trees. I could tell you about his Mount Vernon estate. I can tell you about that. But, see, I am not trusting in George Washington for anything. It is just data.

That is sort of where I was at for sixteen years. I could rattle off all kinds of information about Jesus, but I really was not trusting Him for anything. So it was not until head knowledge (which, by the way, is important, because you want to trust in the right object) moved into trust that I became a born-again Christian. That is what Vine's is saying here.

> "'Pisteuō' [the Greek word for]...'to believe,' also 'to be persuaded of,' and hence, 'to place confidence in, to trust,' signifies, in this sense of the word, reliance upon, not mere credence."[9]

---

[6] William Hendriksen, *A Commentary on the Gospel of John*, 3d ed. (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1964), p. 127. (1978). *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 135. (1978). *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 135.
[7] W. E. Vine, Merrill F. Unger, and William White, *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of the Old and New Testament Words* (Nashville: Nelson, 1996), 61.
[8] Ibid.
[9] Ibid.

So if you want synonyms for belief, it is being persuaded of something, and putting your confidence in it—you put your trust in it—you put your reliance upon it.

It is like Blondin, who would walk across Niagara Falls over a tightrope, suspended in midair. You have heard the story. He was very skilled at doing this. He would walk across blindfolded, and the crowds would gather. He would always up the ante. He would start pushing a wheelbarrow across this tightrope, suspended across Niagara Falls. And people would come from everywhere to watch him do this.

Finally, he would yell out to the crowd, "Which of you believes that I can push this wheelbarrow across this tightrope suspended over Niagara Falls?" And they all would say, "We believe." And he would say, "Okay, which one of you wants to get in the wheelbarrow?" That is different. Now you are trusting in what you say that you believe in. That is what becoming a Christian is. It is a one-step plan.

> "It [this word 'pisteuo' (πιστεύω)] is most frequent in the writings of the apostle John, especially the Gospel. He does not use the noun ['pistis' (πίστις)]...Of the writers of the Gospels...uses of the verb... John ninety-nine."[10]

When I came to this church, back in 2010, this was the first major book study that I did. I went verse by verse through John's Gospel, partly because I wanted to get out of this church all the legalistic things that you find in typical Christian churches, where the gospel is presented almost as a works salvation.

I came to loggerheads with a few folks over this. A lot of parachurch ministries were connected with this church at the time, and they were teaching, "Yeah, you have to trust in Christ, but here are some other good works you have to do as well." And every time we would teach the Book of John, and we got to a place where it said "believe" ("pisteuo" [πιστεύω]) I would make an issue out of it—apparently, I did this ninety-nine times—that there is one condition here: to believe, which means to trust.

I think I taught John's Gospel longer than Christ's earthly ministry, actually. You have to understand something about John's Gospel. It is unique. It is special. It is set up to reach the lost. It is not as though the lost cannot be reached by reading some other section of Scripture, but John's Gospel is set up for it—its very purpose is to reach unsaved people. You find that in the purpose statement of the book, which, Lord willing, I am going to get to a little bit later.

John's purpose statement is John 20:30-31. We do not have to guess as to why John wrote this book. John 20:30-31 says,

> *"Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name" (John 20:30-31).*

---

[10] Ibid.

So John says, "I am writing you this book to give you the signs of Christ. There are seven of them. The first one is the water to wine at the wedding in Cana of Galilee. The seventh one is the resuscitation of Lazarus from the dead." There are actually two more signs. There is Christ's resurrection. That would be number eight.

Then the Book of John concludes with the fishing expedition, when the glorified (resurrected) Christ is there on the banks of the Sea of Galilee. He sees his disciples out there trying to catch fish. They had been out there all night. And Jesus says, "Hey, guys, just take your nets and throw them on the other side of the boat."

The disciples probably said to themselves, "That is the stupidest thing I have ever heard. We are the professionals." Yeah, how is that working for you? You guys have not caught anything all night. All you need to do is throw your nets on the other side of the boat. And you know the story. There were so many fish the disciples had a hard time pulling them all in. So that would be sign number nine.

This is not a David Copperfield exhibition. It is designed to communicate who Jesus is, that He is the Christ, the "Christos" (Χριστός). "Christ" is not His last name, right? We do not call him Mr. Christ, or Dr. Christ. "Christos" (Χριστός) refers to the Messiah, the anointed one. Jesus is the one everybody has been waiting for.

Also, Jesus is the Son of God. What He says He has the power to do, He has the power to do. He claims the power to give eternal life if people will trust in Him. And of course, this is communicated through seven "I AM" statements dispersed throughout the Book of John, and seven discourses. You are reading the Book of John as an unsaved person—it is written to those who have not believed and have not received the gift of life yet—and you are reading it, and you are saying, "This Jesus is really something else. He must be who He said He was."

John was an eyewitness who says, "I saw all of this stuff, and I want you to not just move to a Christological understanding. [I had the Christological stuff down for sixteen years, but that does not save anybody.] I want it to move into a soteriological understanding, where knowledge moves into trust." Christology is knowledge. Soteriology, the doctrine of salvation, is trust. When that happens, just like that, the light goes on. The Holy Spirit comes into somebody, and they become born again.

So when you get that question, which you are going to get at some point in your Christian life—"Hey, I am your coworker, I see that you have been studying your Bible. You must be a Christian. I am kind of interested in this Christian thing. Where should I start? What book should I study in the Bible?"—you immediately say, "John's Gospel." Because that is why John's Gospel is set up.

Can they get saved by reading Matthew or Leviticus or Numbers? Yeah, I am not saying they cannot. What I am saying is that those books are not set up for that purpose. John's Gospel is. So that is why this concept of "believe" ("pisteuo" [πιστεύω]) is so dominant in John's Gospel. It uses the word "believe" ("pisteuo" [πιστεύω]) ninety-nine times.

So why has God set up the plan of salvation on the basis of faith alone? God could have set up the plan of salvation on the basis of anything. But He chose to do it on the basis of faith alone. Why did He do that? Well, the answer is right there in Romans 4:5.

> *"But to the one who does not work, but believes..." (Romans 4:5).*

That means that work and belief are opposites, because of that conjunction ("but"). In God's mind, the one non-meritorious thing a lost sinner can do, non-works-oriented, is to believe when they come under the convicting ministry of the Holy Spirit.

God is not going to believe for you. He is going to give you opportunity after opportunity after opportunity to believe. But God set it up this way because believing is the one thing which is not a work that the lost sinner can do. That is why there is so much in the Bible about faith.

Hebrews 11:6 says,

> *"And without faith it is impossible to please Him,..." (Hebrews 11:6).*

Why is that? Because faith is the one thing that a lost sinner can do which is not a work. God is not going to justify people on the basis of their works, because if God justified people on the basis of their works, then they would have something to brag about. We could strut into heaven proud as a peacock—"Look at me. Look at what I did."

It is just brilliant what God has done here. You are in heaven and you have no bragging rights at all. The biggest shock, as I have heard it said, that people are going to have when they get to heaven is, number one, who is there. "What are they doing here?"

It fits with Jesus' ministry, how He was always attending meals with tax gatherers and prostitutes and people like that. He was criticized: "What are you hanging out with those people for?" Well, because amongst them was a ripe harvest of people that wanted to trust in Him. The religious people would not trust in Him.

So the first shock that people have when they get to heaven is who is there, and the second shock they have is who is not there. "Well, where are all the religious people? Where are all the Pharisaic-oriented, piety-type folks? How come they are not here?" Well, they are not here because they did not meet God's condition.

This is why the gospel is set up as an offense. (Galatians 5:11). It is the most offensive thing. We know that God hates pride, right? That is why God expelled Lucifer from the heavenlies: pride. God hates pride. The gospel itself is the biggest assault on human pride you can ever have, because it gives a human being absolutely no bragging rights. There is no boasting. Romans 3:27 says that. So that is why everything hinges on this whole subject of faith.

When I first came here, I just did not know how hard it was going to be to maintain that, because everybody and their mother wants to promote some kind of evangelistic tract or some kind of commentary or some kind of ministry that blurs this very simple thing. I wondered, "Why is it so hard to maintain the obvious?" And the answer, I think, has to

do with people in general always wanting to contribute something to salvation. "Let me raise a hand." "Let me walk an aisle." "Let me give some money."

It is "me," "me," "me." Why do people do that? Because everybody wants a little credit for this. But the truth of the matter is that the only opinion that matters is God's. My opinion really does not mean much at the end of the day. It is what God says that matters. This is what His Book says. I did not write the Book. This is what it teaches. God has set this up so that no human can boast (Romans 3:27). That is why it all hinges on faith.

So let's get into this a little bit. How much faith do you have to have? Do you have to have a lifetime of faith? Do you have to have a faith which is unbroken? What if you have lapses in faith? What if you believe and then stop believing? What happens then? Have you ever wondered those kinds of questions?

These are big issues that are debated today within Christianity. That is why I had you open up to John 3:14-15. John 3, of course, is the famous "Nick at Night" discourse, where Jesus is talking to Nicodemus about being born again, which, by the way, was the passage that led me to Christ—the new birth. Jesus is talking about the new birth by faith alone, and Nicodemus does not really seem to know what Jesus is talking about. Jesus says to Nicodemus, "Are you the teacher of Israel, and you do not understand this?" (paraphrase, John 3:10).

That is a frightening thing. Could you imagine being the teacher, like Pontifex Maximus or whatever, over the whole nation of Israel, and yet you miss something, or you are errant in something so basic as salvation? That is what Jesus was dealing with here in this discussion.

This is the John 3:16 chapter (John 3:16 comes right after John 3:15, as you know). These are all verses you know. In the course of this conversation where Jesus is trying to get Nicodemus away from this Pharisaical maze that he is in, He makes this statement.

(I love how Jesus interacted with these religious leaders. He did not go to the Mishnah. He did not go to what Rabbi A says versus Rabbi B. There was a big debate between Rabbi Hillel and Rabbi Shammai, and the Jewish religious leaders were always wanting Jesus to weigh in on some controversial issue between the rabbis, but Jesus never took the bait. He went back to the Scripture—their Scripture.)

As Jesus is describing the simplicity of salvation, He says this:

> *"'As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness,...'" (John 3:14).*

That serpent on the pole—maybe my medical friends can help me here—that is the symbol, is it not, of medicine, or the Hippocratic oath? I think that imagery comes from the serpent in the wilderness because it was a great healing that took place there physically. Jesus says, "This is how it works spiritually."

"'As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up [speaking of His crucifixion]; so that whoever believes will in Him have eternal life'" (John 3:14-15).

What is Jesus talking about? Let's go back to the Book of Numbers for a minute, Numbers 21:4-9. Jesus uses this as an example of how easy salvation is. Numbers 21:4-9 says,

"Then they set out from Mount Hor by the way of the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; and the people became impatient because of the journey. The people spoke against God and Moses,..." (Numbers 21:4-5).

Now, notice that when you speak against Moses, you are speaking against God, because Moses is in the place of leadership. I do not know if I want to digress on this, but a lot of people that grumble against church leadership need to understand that. Leaders are not perfect and beyond correction, but when a lot of people come to a church, it is like a fault-finding mission.

"Hey, my gift is the gift of criticism." And they just want to find everything that is wrong. There is room for improvement anywhere, but it is a very critical, judgmental attitude. You have to be really careful about that. I have had that when I have gone to churches.

One of the nice things about being a pastor is that if you are not a pastor, you have to live with someone else's mess. If you are a pastor, you get to create your own mess. So in my non-pastoral days, I would go to churches and find everything I did not like. And finally the Lord said, "You are speaking against My leadership when you do that. I am the one that put those leaders in place." No extra charge for that, by the way—that is a little digression.

"The people spoke against God and Moses, 'Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness?...'" (Numbers 21:5).

This is a group that saw the ten plagues and everything, and they think God brought them out there to die. They had a complete lack of faith.

"'...For there is no food and no water, and we loathe this miserable food'" (Numbers 21:5).

"In Egypt, yeah, we were beaten up all the time, but at least we got three hots and a cot, so to speak." Notice the Lord does not like this.

"The Lord sent fiery serpents among the people and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died" (Numbers 21:6).

Wow. So God, as discipline, judgment, whatever you want to call this, unleashed these poisonous serpents amongst the people. The serpents were just killing people left and right.

> *"So the people came to Moses and said, 'We have sinned, because we have spoken against the Lord and you; intercede with the Lord, that He may remove the serpents from us'..." (Numbers 21:7).*

I love Moses. If I were Moses, I would have said, "Well, let's let you bleed for a while, you bunch of rebels." Moses is so much more gracious than that.

> *"...And Moses interceded for the people. Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a standard; and it shall come about, that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, he will live. And Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on the standard; and it came about, that if a serpent bit any man, when he looked to the bronze serpent, he lived" (Numbers 21:7-9).*

So the only thing that was required was a look. "If you want to be exempted from the poison of the snake bites, look at this serpent that has been lifted up."

> *"Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a standard; and it shall come about, that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, he will live.' And Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on a standard; and it came about, that if a serpent bit any man, when he looked to the bronze serpent, he lived" (Numbers 21:8-9).*

So that is the historical narrative that Jesus uses to explain salvation to Nicodemus (John 3:14-15).

> *"'As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up;'" (John 3:14).*

Jesus is speaking of the crucifixion, right? When you travel a little further into John's Gospel and get to John 12:32, Jesus says,

> *"'And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, [crucifixion] will draw all men to Myself'" (John 12:32).*

Now, I was in a school, a seminary in California, where they were into this church growth philosophy. You have the Boomers, you have the Busters, you have whatever the different generations are, and you have to do church differently for each generation. As I heard that, I thought, "Well, that is an A plus for business marketing," which I was a major in, in college—that was one of my majors: business.

I even taught management and marketing and business law at the community college level for a few years in Southern California. So I knew marketing theory pretty good. I noticed that what they were doing in this particular seminary was teaching me marketing principles from the secular world with a few Bible verses slapped on. It is this idea that all generations are different, and you have to tailor your marketing mix to each generation.

If you know your target audience and you come up with the right marketing mix for the right generation, then your church will grow. That is the mentality. Many churches today are following that hook, line, and sinker. The problem is John 12:32. Jesus made a promise: "When I am lifted up, I will draw all men to Myself" (paraphrase, John 12:32). That includes the Boomers, the Busters, Generation X, Generation Y, Generation Z generation whatever—Jesus made a promise. When the Son of Man is lifted up, He will draw all men to Himself (John 12:32).

So I thought to myself, "Well, forget all this marketing stuff. Let's just lift up Jesus. Let's promote Him. Let's exalt Him. And then He will convict people of their need for Him, whether they are twenty or eighty or anything in between or even very, very young."

That is what is being spoken of here when the Son of Man is lifted up. John 3:15 says,

> *"'so that whoever believes will in Him have eternal life'" (John 3:15).*

Here is the map. I like to give you guys maps just to show you that these things really happened. In Numbers 21, Israelites are making their way through Edom, which is right here through what is called the Transjordan. They are on the precipice, under Joshua, of entering the land of Israel.

They get out into that area and the supplies are not there like they had in Egypt. So they start complaining against Moses and Aaron. God did not like it because they were grumbling against Him, as they were grumbling against His established leader, Moses. So God brought, as God has the right to do, because He is holy and righteous, discipline, or justice, or judgment, or whatever you want to call it, against His very own people.

There were these poisonous snakes, and people were dying, and they cried out to Moses for help. God gave grace and said, "All you have to do is look at this raised

serpent, and the snake bite will not have any power over you." So by way of analogy, we have all been bitten by a snake, right? Is not Satan called the serpent? Original sin—we all have a snake bite. You might feel young and energetic, but you are dying, and I am dying.

I was commiserating to somebody over my mother, who is eighty-nine and does not have the health that she once had. I said, "She is dying." And this person I was talking to said, "Yeah, that is tragic, and you know what? We are all dying." That is true, isn't it? We are all dying. Just go to your high school class reunion and you will see it as clearly as it can be seen.

I went to my thirty-year reunion ten years ago. (They just had the fortieth. I did not have a chance to go to that one.) I could not recognize anybody. I really could not, if they had not had the little thing from the yearbook as a little badge—"Oh, yeah, you are the person." Our physical bodies are dying. All you do is break out your high school yearbook and look at your modern day driver's license.

We are dying. That is just how it is. We have all been bitten by a snake. It is called original sin. People have this mindset. They say, "I do not believe in a God that sends people to hell." Well, here is the truth of the matter: we are all going to hell without God's intervention. You are going there anyway because we are all dying, and we are moving into the lake of fire. God, in His grace, created salvation for us so that we could avoid the consequence that we are now experiencing.

Just as the serpent was lifted up and people just had to look to the serpent to be exempted from the snake bite, Jesus says to Nicodemus, "That is all you have to do to be exempted from original sin and its consequences. You just have to look at the cross." Jesus defines what looking at the cross means. Looking at the cross means believing. Why believing? Because, as we explained earlier, according to Romans 4:5, believing is the one thing that we can do that is non-meritorious.

You have to just put your trust in what Jesus did, and just like that, you are exempted from the snake bite, which to me sounds like a pretty good deal. Are you going to hold out for a better deal? I do not think you are going to find one. It is so easy. It is so simple.

So how much faith do you have to have? And how long does faith have to last for? Just as long as merely looking at something for a moment was enough to exempt someone from this curse (the serpent bite). That is the analogy that is used by Robert Gromacki. I am not crazy, okay? I am teaching things that theologians in our camp have acknowledged for a long time. It is just that these things are not spoken of in many pulpits for whatever reason.

Robert Gromacki, a longtime professor of theology, exegesis, etc. at Cedarville College, writes in 1989, in his book "Salvation Is Forever,"

> "How many times did the people have to look at the serpent to be healed? Just once. One look prompted by faith was enough. So it is with Calvary. How many times must one look at Christ in faith to be saved? Just once.

> The faith that heals or saves is an act, a completed event, not an attitude."[11]

"Hey, man, you had better have the right attitude. You had better come to Christ with contrition and sorrow. And you had better recant every sin you have ever committed in your life. And you had better vow your best to live for Jesus from that time onward."

There is nothing like that in this passage. Should you, as a Christian, under the resources of God, avoid sin and seek to live a holy life? Of course you should. But it has nothing to do with this one-time look. Living for God is a growth issue. We are not dealing with growth issues right here. We are dealing with birth issues.

I want you to see how complicated people make this. John MacArthur, in his book "The Gospel According to Jesus," page 46, comments on what I have been trying to explain: this "Nick at Night" conversation alluding to Numbers 21. He says,

> "A more careful study of Numbers 21..."[12]

So if I do not come to his conclusion, I guess my studying is not careful. I do not know if you need a more careful study of Numbers 21. Just read Numbers 21. We are dealing with a reading comprehension issue, not reading it through a certain lens.

> "A more careful study of Numbers 21 reveals that Jesus was not painting a picture of easy faith...."[13]

I read those words "easy faith," "easy believism," and I say, "Can you find those for me in the Bible? Where in the Bible does it condemn easy believism?" The only passage they really are able to come up with is James 2, which says, "The demons believe and tremble" (paraphrase, James 2:19). They do not understand that it is a total apples and oranges comparison, because the plan of salvation is not open to the demons.

By the way, James 2 does not say anything about Jesus. It is talking about monotheistic faith. James uses that as an example of dead orthodoxy. So people run to James 2 and they try to yank it into this discussion, not telling people that it is not even dealing with what we are talking about here, which is human salvation. It is talking about the angels. That is a completely different category. The plan of salvation is not open to the angels.

Every legalist I have ever encountered wants to run over to James 2 for some kind of cover with what I am saying here. It is just far-fetched to do that.

> "A more careful study of Numbers 21 reveals that Jesus was not painting a picture of easy faith...."[14]

---

[11] Robert Gromacki, *Salvation Is Forever* (Schaumburg, IL: Regular Baptist Press, 1989), 88.
[12] John F. MacArthur, *The Gospel According to Jesus: What Does Jesus Mean When He Says, "Follow Me"?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), 46.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Ibid.

MacArthur is using words that are not found in the Bible. What the Bible says is, "You believe or you do not. You trust in the finished work of salvation to help you with your snakebite, which we are all suffering from, or you do not."

It is like a plane. And I have used this example before. Sometimes I get on the plane very confident. Other times I get on the plane looking at the crew, and they look no older than my daughter who is sitting up here, because of all these kinds of DEI hires and things. And I am wondering, "Is a plane the best place to work on DEI hires?" And I am a bit nervous. But I still got on the plane. I can get on the plane with boldness, or I can get on the plane with sweaty palms, but the issue is, did I get on the plane or not?

You can trust in Christ with all kinds of great trepidation, or you can trust Christ with boldness, but the only thing God requires is faith. It does not matter if it is what John MacArthur calls "easy faith" or "hard faith" or whatever word he is going to use here. It is just faith. The Bible never condemns easy believism. There is no such thing in the Bible. MacArthur is using nomenclature that the Scripture is not even using.

MacArthur says this:

> "...In order to look at the bronze snake on the pole, they [the people] had to drag themselves to where they could see it."[15]

We read Numbers 21, didn't we? Was there anything in Numbers 21 about the people having to drag themselves where they could see it? In fact, that is the whole point of the serpent on the pole: it was lifted up so everyone could see it. No one had to drag themselves anywhere.

What MacArthur just did here is he added a condition that God does not add. Now, you go to Revelation 22, and it is very clear you are not to subtract from the Word of God, and you are not to add to it (Revelation 22:18-19). I look at stuff like this and I say, "That is an addition to the Bible, because MacArthur is saying something that the Bible is not saying."

Moses did not say, "Okay, look at the bronze serpent, but first drag yourself in front of it." That would be two conditions, wouldn't it? This is sort of the struggle that you face in a free grace church, particularly with people coming in here constantly who listen to other teachers.

One of the hardest things to come to grips with as a Bible teacher is that you are not the only person people listen to during the week. There are all these internet options, radio options, and TV options. They have their favorite preacher, and he teaches differently from you. He teaches the ABC method, or the XYZ method or whatever.

So as a preacher, you are always struggling with people to get them back to what the Bible says. The issue is not your favorite preacher. The issue is not me. The issue is the Word of God. And the Word of God does not say in Numbers 21 that the people had to drag themselves to see the snake on the pole.

---

[15] Ibid.

MacArthur says,

> "They were in no position to glance flippantly at the pole and then proceed with lives of rebellion."[16]

Where does Numbers 21 say that? I am wondering, "John, have you read the rest of the book?" These people rebelled against God all the time. Almost everywhere they went, they rebelled against God. So when MacArthur says, "You just cannot flippantly look at it and then go live a life of rebellion," that is not what the text says.

So why do people keep doing this? Why do they keep adding all this stuff? I think it has something to do with something that is core within us that wants to give us credit for doing something. So let me drag myself. Let me vow. Let me whatever. We start adding conditions that God does not add.

"Yeah, but pastor, you are going to put yourself out of fellowship with all the John MacArthur people, and John MacArthur's church, and they are not going to carry your book in his bookstore. They are not going to invite you to his conferences as a speaker."

You know what? As much as I would love to be involved with everyone's conference and everyone's bookstore as a Bible teacher, at some point, you have to make a decision. Who are you more afraid of? Are you more afraid of God, or are you more afraid of people? I have to give an account for what I teach. I do not have to give it to you. I do not have to give it to our elders. I do not have to give it to colleagues. I have to give it to God.

James 3:1 is very clear: Let few of you presume to be teachers, knowing that the teacher will incur the stricter judgment (paraphrase). There probably is not a day in my life when I do not think about that. Being banned by Group A or Group B—I wish that would not happen, but if I have to make a choice between pleasing God and pleasing man, my mind is made up.

John 5:24 adds equal clarity to the whole thing.

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

"'Has eternal life'" (John 5:24) is present tense in Greek. *"'Has passed out of'" (John 5:24)* is perfect tense in Greek. You say, "Well, who cares?" I try not to bore you with every little grammatical nuance when I am teaching except when it is really important. Here is where it is really important.

When you believe in Christ, you have eternal life, present tense. It is not something that you get when you die, which is what I used to think when I was a new Christian. I think, "Wow, one of these days I am going to die and I am going to get eternal life." Yet the Bible is saying that you have it right now because you have a relationship with the God

[16] Ibid.

who made you, a relationship that you did not have before, because the sin debt between you and God just got removed.

I used to think, "Well, I have to really live a good life for Jesus, so I can gradually, by way of a process, pass out of death into life." I used to look at this as some kind of gradual deal. The perfect tense will not allow that, because the way the perfect tense in Greek works, it is a one-time action. It is like slamming your hand down on something. It happens once and then there is a reverberating noise.

When you placed your faith in Christ, what happened was you already passed out of death unto life at the point of salvation at a (here is big word time) punctiliar point in time. "Punctiliar" means. I had to go to school to learn these words, so I have to use them on somebody. No one else will listen to me. "Punctiliar" means a nanosecond. Your passing from death to life happened in a nanosecond. There is no gradual process.

Your reception of eternal life is not "I hope I get it when I die." It is "You have it pronto. You already have it if you are a believer in Christ." What was required to get these things? There is only one condition, which is to believe, which means to trust. No crying. No weeping. No altar calls.

"Yeah, but, Pastor, why don't you guys give altar calls here?" Well, you know what? I am not really against altar calls, if people understand that it is not walking an aisle that saves them. If you want to walk an aisle, walk 2,000 of them. We will send you over to the stadium stairs, and you could be like my coach and make me run the stadium stairs.

We will get you running and hopping and jumping any way you want. But running the stadium stairs or doing any other thing—raising your hand, praying a prayer—has absolutely nothing to do with your salvation. It is the faith expressed in those things that gives salvation, that gives us this gift that we have called eternal life.

I was trying to explain this at the Bible college where I taught for seven years, and I had a gal in the class and after class she said, "I am so glad you covered that, because at my church they give altar calls, and I have been trying to muster up the courage every week to go up front, and I just do not have the courage. I am so grateful to know that I can sit in the back of the church, hear the gospel, and not walk anywhere, without any courage to, and be saved."

"Yeah, but Jesus said, 'If you confess Me before men, I will confess you before My Father.'" Well, that is a rewards issue, not a birth issue. That is a growth issue, not a birth issue. Birth is simple.

Here we jump from the frying pan into the fire, because John 20:30-31 says,

> *"Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name" (John 20:30-31).*

What people say is "You cannot just believe. A look of faith is not enough. You gotta keep believing." The moment you stop believing is the moment—according to Arminius—you lost salvation, or—according to Calvin—you only had your faith and not the gift of faith, because the gift of faith is going to endure.

This is an articular present participle in Greek, meaning that it has a definite article in front of it. Man, do people jump on this and say, "It does not just say 'believe.' It says 'believing.' So you had better keep believing. And if you doubt, or if you come to a place in your life where you do not believe, then it is all canceled."

Let me show you how common this mindset is. Here is a quote of Dr. Dan Wallace of Dallas Theological Seminary. He is probably one of the best Greek scholars out there. This is not just his Greek grammar. This is his advanced Greek grammar—"Beyond the Basics." This is what Dan Wallace says:

> "The aspectual force of the present [tense] 'ho pisteuōn' [commenting on John 20:31]..."[17]

That is the Greek word for that articular present participle. "Articular" means that it has a definite article. There is a definite article there: "the."

> "...seems to be in contrast with 'ho pisteusas' [what it says earlier in the passage: just 'believe']...The present [tense] was the tense of choice most likely because the NT writers by and large saw continual belief as a necessary condition of salvation. Along these lines, it seems significant that the promise of salvation is almost always given to 'ho pisteuōn' ['believing'], almost never to 'ho pisteusas' [just 'believe']."[18]

What he is saying here is, "Oh, you have faith in Christ, but it really does not matter. You had better have the right kind of faith." The right kind of faith always endures. And if your faith is not enduring, then it was never given as a gift from above because you are not one of the elect. You had the wrong kind of faith.

Wallace is building his whole case from the present tense participle 'believing.' How in the world would little old me answer that? There is an answer. You just have to come back next week to find out. How is that for a cliffhanger?

---

[17] Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament with Scripture, Subject, and Greek Word Indexes* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 621, n. 22.
[18] Ibid.