

Arminian Responses to Key Scriptures Used to Support Perseverance of the Saints

All the responses come directly from Arminian scholars and commentators.¹ These are the Scriptural passages that will be responded to:²

- John 3:16, 18, 36
- John 5:24
- John 6:35-40
- John 10:27-29
- John 17:12
- Romans 8:29-30
- Romans 8:28-39
- Romans 11:29
- 1 Corinthians 3:10-15
- 1 Corinthians 10:13
- Ephesians 1:13-14; 4:30 (2 Corinthians 1:21-22)
- Philippians 1:6
- Hebrews 7:25
- Hebrews 10:10-14
- 1 John 2:19
- Jude 1, 24

¹ For additional responses to some of these passages and others like them (i.e., John 6:47; 11:25-26; 20:31; 1 John 5:11-13, etc.) see the following articles at www.evangelicalarminians.org. “Saving Faith: Is it the Act of a Moment or the Attitude of a Life?” “Saving Faith: The Attitude of a Life—*the Scholarly Evidence*.” “Saving Faith in the Greek New Testament.”

² This list was not intended to be exhaustive, but representative of the passages most often used to support unconditional eternal security or perseverance of the saints.

John 3:16, 18, 36

Frederick Claybrook:

The truths in these verses do not come close to proving “once saved, always saved.” Christ does not say that whoever *once* believed in him (past tense) has eternal life, no matter what she later does or believes. Instead, Christ puts the condition of salvation in the *present* tense, and the verse is more literally translated, “whoever *is believing* in him shall not perish but have everlasting life” (v. 16, lit.). Jesus then repeats, again referring to himself, “Whoever *is believing* in him is not condemned, but whoever *is not believing* stands condemned already” (v. 18, lit.). And Jesus reiterates, “Whoever *is believing* in the Son has eternal life, but whoever is disobeying the Son will not see that life” (v. 36, lit.). These verses only promise eternal life to those possessing a present, continuing belief in Christ. As John expresses when stating the very purpose of his gospel, “But these are written that you may *believe* that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by *believing* you may have life in his name” (John 20:31). The implications of these verses is not that, once a person has accepted Christ in faith, she can never lose her salvation. Rather, the implication is the opposite—that if she does not keep on believing until the end of her life, she will be condemned. These familiar verses, then, do not prove “once saved, always saved” theory.³

John 5:24

Robert Picirilli:

Those who teach the unconditional security of a person once regenerated often use, as an argument for their position, the strong *promises* that Bible makes to Christians. Many of these are contained in the Gospel of John, and John 5:24 is one of the outstanding examples: He that...believeth...hath everlasting life, and *shall not come into condemnation*; but is passed from death unto life.

There are two important things about such a promise. First, and most important, if it is interpreted as a guarantee that the believer’s saving relationship to God can never change, then it proves too much! The problem is that the very same kind of promises are made to *unbelievers*! And if a promise of condemnation to unbelievers does not mean that an unbeliever cannot change his state and become a believer, then a promise of no condemnation to a believer also does not mean he can never change his state and become an unbeliever.

Consider John 3:36, for example, and put the two side by side:

John 5:24 [KJV]

He that believes . . .

shall not

come into condemnation

John 3:36 [KJV]

He that believes not . . .

shall not

see life

³ *Once Saved, Always Saved? A New Testament Study*, 212-13.

The grammar of the two is identical; [therefore] they must be interpreted in the same way. No one would say that 3:36 means one who is presently an unbeliever is forever doomed to that promised destiny. He can become a believer. All 3:36 means, then, is that the person who remains in the camp of unbelievers will inevitably share the destiny promised to unbelievers. Just so, all 5:24 means is that the person who remains in the camp of believers will inevitably share the destiny promised to believers.

Second, the tense-action of the verb believe sustains this understanding of the meaning. In this verse “believing” (a present tense participle) is in linear action—just as it usually is in the Gospel of John. The faith that saves is an ongoing faith, a continuing belief. We could appropriately render the verse thus: “The one who is believing has eternal life and shall not come into condemnation.” Certainly, the person who maintains faith will share the destiny promised believers. And the very same thing applies to 3:36 about unbelief. “He that believeth not” (another present tense participle) is also linear in action. The one who persists in unbelief will share the destiny promised those who do not believe.⁴

John 6:35-40

Frederick Claybrook:

Christ promises that he will lose none of those the Father has given him and will raise them up “at the last day” (vv. 39-40). . . . “Once saved, always saved” proponents read this promise to encompass all who at any time in their life had a genuine belief in Christ, no matter what they later believed.

That is not what Jesus says. To the contrary, he brackets his remarks by defining those to whom he is giving this wonderful assurance of his own power, authority, and faithfulness. He uses a figure of speech in making the point that he is the one who gives eternal life. He is the “bread of life” (v. 35a). Then, he once again describes those who will eternally benefit from eating that bread by describing them in the present tense: “the one *coming* to me never hungers, and the one *believing* in me will never thirst” (35b). . . . It is those who are *coming* and *believing* whom Christ will never lose and whom he will raise up . . . (vv. 35, 40b).

Christ repeats exactly that in this passage. It is “everyone who *is looking* and *is believing* in him who may have eternal life” (v. 40a, lit.) and whom he will “raise up at the last day” (v. 40b). The word translated “looking” has the sense of studying closely and apprehending the significance of what is seen. That is a precondition, of course, for belief, and it is those who keep on believing to whom Jesus gives the promise of acceptance by the Father and eternal security. He does not give the promise to ones who initially are believing, but then turn away and are no longer coming to him, looking to him, or believing in him.⁵

⁴ “Editor’s Note on John 5:24: Do Promises to Believers Guarantee their Security?” *The Randall House Bible Commentary: The Gospel of John*, 85-86.

⁵ *Once Saved, Always Saved? A New Testament Study*, 217.

John 10:27-29

Robert Picirilli:

This passage is often used by those who teach the doctrine of the unconditional security of the Christian. . . .

We should look at what Jesus says here from both sides. On the one hand, the strong words provide us with assurance. The destiny Christ has promised His sheep is eternal life; that is what He has planned from them. And no force outside the personal relationship between the believer and his God has the power to remove him from Christ's, or the Father's, hand. (This assurance is exactly the same as in Rom. 8:35-39, which is to be understood in the very same way.) A part of the Good Shepherd's responsibility to protect the sheep from any "wolves" (v. 12) that threaten to seize them. He can be counted on to do this absolutely; there is no force—not even Satan himself—that can overpower Christ to take His sheep against His and their will. The sheep are altogether safe in His hand. And since faith is the first and final condition of justification, the one who maintains faith has full assurance of salvation now and hereafter.

But even the Calvinist understands that this does not allow the believer to be careless of his faith or conduct. The responsible Calvinist insists that perseverance is found in the use of the means God has provided and not outside to them, and that the warnings against apostasy are part of the means of assuring that the believer will not apostatize. The difference is that the Calvinist believes God has guaranteed that the elect will use those means and persevere, while the Arminian holds open the real possibility that a true believer may turn away from faith and cease to be one of the sheep who has been promised such protection. The sheep are safe, but not apostates from the fold. The words of assurance do not invalidate the words of warning found elsewhere.

The promise of v. 28, then, is to be interpreted in exactly the same way as that in 5:24, and throughout this Gospel. See the Editor's Note on 5:24, which emphasizes that there are two sets of promises that characterize the Gospel of John, and which must be interpreted in the same manner. To unbelievers (those who persevere in unbelief) is promised eternal condemnation; they "will not see life" (3:36). To believers (those who persevere in faith) is promised eternal life; they "will not perish." Neither promise means that the person referred to can never change his status.

Perseverance in faith, then, is not unconditionally guaranteed—as the Book of Hebrews, for example, makes abundantly clear. The believer must be warned of the possibility of apostasy. He must make use of the means of grace which God has provided in order to maintain saving faith. As Westcott has said . . . we are not protected "against ourselves in spite of ourselves."⁶

⁶ "Editor's Note on John 10:27-29: Is the Believer's Security Unconditional?" *Randall House Bible Commentary: The Gospel of John*, Jack W. Stallings, 157-58.

David Pawson,

The ‘good shepherd’ says of his sheep: ‘No-one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand’ (John 10:29; v. 28 says ‘out of my hand’) But he has just defined his sheep as those who ‘listen to my voice . . . and follow me’. Both verbs are in the present continuous tense so they simply cannot be used of someone who once listened and began to follow some time ago. The statement only applies to those who are still listening and following now and will go on doing so Jesus was speaking to ‘Jews’ (i.e. Judeans) who were neither listening nor following, still questioning his right to the messianic title of ‘shepherd’ (John 10:24; cf. Ezek. 37:24). What he would have said about those who did listen and follow, but only for a time, must be deduced from other Scriptures. Furthermore, to be ‘snatched out of the Father’s hand’ would be the attempted action of someone else; it is hardly a verb or an action that can be applied to one’s self (ever tried ‘plucking’ yourself?). . . . Were this verse to be taken as an absolute statement of eternal security, it would come into conflict with the wider context of the whole book, the emphasis on which is to ‘go on’ believing in order to ‘go on’ having life. And it would make nonsense of Jesus’ command to abide (remain, stay) in him as the True Vine or wither, and be cut off and burned (John 15:1-6). So the verse should be understood as an assurance that no-one *else* can remove from the Father’s hand those who continue to listen to and follow (a synonym for obeying) his Son.⁷

French Arrington:

Believers are assured of divine care and protection, but does such assurance mean “once saved, always saved”? *First observe that supporters of the teaching of unconditional security often appeal to John 10:27,28: “My Sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they shall never perish; and no one shall snatch them out of my hand.”* These verses appear to teach unconditional security in salvation, but before assuming a blanket guarantee that no believer can go back and fall away, we need to give these verses their full value. A number of the verbs are present tense, implying continuous, ongoing action and can be translated: “My sheep keep on hearing My voice, and I keep on knowing them, and they keep on following Me, and I keep on giving them eternal life. . . .”

⁷ *Once Saved, Always Saved? A Study in Perseverance and Inheritance*, 157-58. Methodist scholar Ben Witherington writes:

Verses 28-29 say not only that Jesus’ sheep are granted eternal life, and so will never perish, but also that “no one will snatch them out of . . . the Father’s hand.” This speaks to the matter of being “stolen” by outside forces or false shepherds, not to the matter of personally chosen apostasy. . . . It is notable that in texts like this one, and in Rom. 8:38-39, the one thing or person that is not excluded as a possible source of severing an individual from the Father or Christ is the person himself or herself. Both John 10:28 and Rom. 8:38-39 are texts meant to reassure that no outside forces or being can snatch one out of the firm grasp of God. They do not address the issue of apostasy. (*John’s Wisdom: A Commentary on the Fourth Gospel*, 190-91; 389, fn. 72)

Those who continue to hear the Good Shepherd's voice and who continue following Him are the ones who can never perish or be snatched out of God's hand. It is these He is giving eternal life; but if a believer ceases to follow Christ and becomes an unbeliever, his spiritual condition changes and he forfeits the gift of eternal life.⁸

John 17:12

Robert Shank:

In his prayer of intercession just before His passion, Jesus prayed, "Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are. . . . I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of this world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil [one]" (John 17:11, 15). Some assert that it is impossible that any who once believe on Jesus should be lost, since God must answer the prayer of His Son. But Jesus prayed for those who sent Him to the cross, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." Are we to assume that, because Jesus so prayed, all the members of the Sanhedrin, Pilate, Herod, Judas, the soldiers, and all the mocking multitude were forgiven, simply because Jesus prayed for them? Are we to assume that the whole lot were immediately destined for salvation, simply because Jesus prayed for them? Jesus prayed aloud at the grave of Lazarus for the benefit of "the people which stand by, that they may believe that thou hast sent me" (John 11:42). Are we to assume that all who heard His prayer and for whom prayed were necessarily persuaded that He was indeed sent of God? Obviously not. It is evident that John's account that, while many of the Jews who witnessed the raising of Lazarus believed in Jesus, others did not.

Certainly there is nothing ineffectual about the keeping grace of the Father; it is infinite. But neither was there anything lacking in the keeping power of Jesus, who said, "While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name: those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition" (John 17:12). Those whom the Father gave Him Jesus kept—except one. Neither the Father nor the Son can keep those who do not wish to accept the conditions under which they may be kept. It is not, as some foolishly assert, a question of whether men are "stronger than God." Nor is it a question of what God *could* do. It is only a question of what God *does* do, as revealed in the Holy Scriptures. The Scriptures declare that men are free to depart from God, and believers are solemnly warned against so doing (Heb. 3:12). Jesus said of those whom He kept, "they have kept thy word" (John 17:6). This is of more than incidental significance, as we may discern from the promise (and warning) of Jesus, "If any man keep my word, he shall never see death" (John 8:51). "Keeping His word" is more than a momentary reception; it must be habitual, after the example of Jesus Himself, who said, "I know [the Father] and keep His word" (v. 55). Jesus said: "He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him. . . . If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him and make our abode with him. . . . As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: remain [*menō*] in my

⁸ *Unconditional Eternal Security: Myth or Truth?* 62.

love. If ye keep my commandments, ye shall remain in my love, even as I have kept my Father's commandments and remain in His love" (John 14:21, 23; 15:9, 10). Those who keep are kept.⁹

Romans 8:29-30

Robert Shank:

"For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified" (Rom. 8:29, 30). This passage has often been called "an unbreakable chain"—foreknowledge, predestination, calling, justification, glorification. For the elect, it is indeed an unbreakable chain; and only the elect are comprehended in Paul's affirmation (v. 33). The calling, justification, and glorification constitute the implementation of the predestination (conformity to the image of the Son) which God purposed for the elect. For them, calling and justification will issue in ultimate glorification, in accordance with the eternal purpose of God to "bring many sons unto glory" (Heb. 2:10), the glory of full conformity to the image of His Son. But there is nothing about Paul's affirmation which establishes that election is unconditional or that all who experience calling and justification are necessarily eternally elect and will inevitably persevere. Certainly it is true that the elect (who are foreknown to God) will persevere. But that is only *half* the truth; for it is equally true that they who persevere are elect. The latter truth is presented in the Holy Scriptures, not as the inevitable outcome of some inexorable divine decree with respect to specific individuals unconditionally, but as a matter for the constant concern and holy endeavor of believers.

The certainty of election and perseverance is with respect, not to particular individual men *unconditionally*, but rather with respect to the *ekklēsia*, the corporate body of all who, through living faith, are in union with Christ, the true Elect and the Living Covenant between God and all who trust in His righteous Servant (Isaiah 42:1-7; 49:1-12; 52:13-53:12; 61:1, 2). Consider the following:

⁹ *Life in the Son*, 276-78. Robert Picirilli writes:

In reference to the great prayer in John 17, the implications for all this in verses 11, 12 are worth noting: "Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We are. While I was with them in the world, I kept them in Your name. Those whom You gave Me I have kept; and none of them is lost except the son of perdition." The pronoun "them" can have as its antecedent nothing other than "those whom You gave me." This goes far to demonstrate (1) that "giving" them to Jesus does not guarantee their perseverance, since the son of perdition is clearly both among "them" and now lost, and (2) that His prayers for them were not therefore unconditionally efficacious—unless He had never prayed this for them before, which is patently unlikely. (*Grace, Faith, Free Will. Contrasting Views of Salvation: Calvinism and Arminianism*, 190).

God's eternal purpose in grace:

Eph. 1:4, He chose us in Christ that we should be
hagios kai amōmous [holy and blameless] before Him.

Col. 1:22, He reconciled us to Himself in Christ, through His death, to present us
hagios kai amōmous [holy and blameless] before Him.

Fulfillment corporately (certain):

Eph. 5:27, Christ will present the *ekklēsia* [church] to Himself
hagios kai amōmos [holy and blameless] before Him.

Fulfillment individually (contingent):

Col. 1:23, He will present us *hagios kai amōmos* [holy and blameless] before Him
—if we continue in the faith grounded and settled and be not moved
away from the hope of the Gospel.

To assume that eternal glory is the inevitable terminus of “an unbreakable chain” for every one who once experiences saving grace is to ignore the explicit warnings, not only elsewhere in the Scriptures, but in the very passage before us. Paul warns: “Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh. For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God” (Rom. 8:12-14). “And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together” (v. 17).

Let not vain assumptions concerning the meaning of such passages as Rom. 8:29, 30 destroy our concern for heeding the many warnings and exhortations to persevere in the faith. God will present us holy and unblameable and unprovable before Him only if we continue in the faith and be not moved away from the hope of the Gospel.¹⁰

Jerry L. Walls and Joseph R. Dongell:

Calvinists often speak of these verses as “the golden chain,” an unbreakable sequence of steps in God's sovereign plan leading from unconditional election to final glorification. The elect can find great comfort in the assurance that all those who begin the process (by God's election) will make it through to glorification. All those who know for certain that they have been justified possess an ironclad guarantee of their final salvation and glorification.

Our first hesitation in accepting this interpretation stems from the warning Paul issued to his Roman readers only sixteen verses earlier: “If you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live” (Rom 8:13). Paul makes it clear that glorification depends on a Christian's continued connection to Jesus: “If we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if *indeed we share in his sufferings*” (Rom 8:17, emphasis added). Later we find Paul again warning his Gentile Christian readers that those who veer away

¹⁰ *Life in the Son*, 365-67.

from God's grace face fearful prospects: "For if God did not spare the natural branches, he will not spare you either. Consider therefore the kindness and sternness of God: sternness to those who fell, but kindness to you, provided that you continue in his kindness. Otherwise, you also will be cut off" (Rom 11:21-22). Why would such a warning ever be uttered if the "golden chain" of Romans 8:29-30 functions as an absolute guarantee for individuals?

Likewise, in Galatians, Paul identified the two lifestyles and their consequences: "Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life" (Gal 6:7-8). This warning itself reemphasizes what Paul had declared to the Galatian believers earlier: "I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God" (Gal 5:21).

It has often been suggested that these warnings expose no eternal danger to real Christians. We are told either that Paul was not addressing genuine Christians at all or that he was envisioning purely temporal dangers, such as illness or premature (physical) death. But neither of these explanations can account for the specific content of these passages. At other times we are asked to imagine that Paul was engaging in rhetorical overstatement to spur his readers on to good behavior. This suggestion is both psychologically and morally troublesome, reminding us of parents who use empty threats to manipulate their unruly children (e.g., "Put that toy down now and come with me, or Mommy's going to leave the store without you"). If Paul believes that the elect are absolutely guaranteed ultimate salvation and that this guarantee forms the very bedrock of Christian confidence in the face of suffering and trial, then it is puzzling to find him undercutting this very guarantee with warnings to the contrary. But if these stern warnings teach that the journey from election to glory is not inevitable. Then we doubt that Paul was attempting to establish just the opposite in Romans 8:29-30.¹¹

Romans 8:28-39

Ben Witherington,

In Romans 8:29-30, Paul is speaking to believers, showing them reasons they have for confidence. God has a glorious destiny planned for them—namely, conformity to the image of the Son, which in this case likely means gaining a resurrection body like Christ's, though progressive sanctification might also be implied. The stress on God's sovereignty is prevalent throughout all of Romans 8 and 9 and is reflected here.

The flow of Paul's thought may be summarized as follows: "We know all things work together for good for those who love him [v. 28] . . . for those whom he foreknew, he predestined [v. 29]." The *hoti* in v. 29 almost certainly means "because" or "for" introducing an explanatory and subordinate clause. Verse 29 shows how one knows that all things work together for good for believers—namely, because a loving God is working them together. It is God who is the subject of each of the verbs in vv. 29 and 30. Paul is stressing God's sovereignty so much that even the part of salvation that is yet future, glorification, is spoken of in the aorist tense by attraction to the other verbs in this

¹¹ *Why I Am Not A Calvinist*, 79-81.

sequence. Because it is God “who is working to will and to do,” glorification for the elect group is seen as a certain conclusion. That this is an election text is not to be denied, but the question is, what role does *proegno* [foreknowledge] play in this process?

. . . The object of this verb [foreknowledge], whether it means knowing or loving in advance, is *Christians*—those who love God and are called to God’s purposes [v. 28]. We are not told *what* God knew about the ones he knew in advance, but definitely the *hous* (“those who”) here cannot refer to God’s knowing and choosing some unsaved individuals from out of a mass of unredeemed humanity in order that they might be Christians. The antecedent of *hous* is “those who love God.”

This passage is about God’s loving concern and action for believers, to ensure that they reach their destiny of being conformed to the image of God’s Son. I. H. Marshall is correct when he says:

Proegno... means that God’s loving regard rests upon [persons] before they are aware of it. In neither case however, is it necessary to assume as J. Calvin did, that it refers to God’s selection of the elect and their separation from the reprobate. For here Paul is thinking of [people] who are actually believers, and all that he is asserting is that God’s regard was fixed upon them in time past and that [God] is now carrying out the purpose which he has for those whom [God] loves. The thought of [people] who are not believers is absent from this passage, and the idea of a separation between two types of people is not there.

The function of this material in Romans 8 is not to enunciate a doctrine of election, but rather to tell the story of the glorious destiny of those who are already Christians, as a means of reassuring the audience that they are in God’s able hands and that God’s purpose is to see that they reach the intended destiny God had in mind from all eternity. In other words, this is not about being chosen to be saved, but being destined as saved to conformity to Christ. To suggest that in Romans 8 Paul has a different concept of election from the group notion of election enunciated in Rom. 9–11, applied first to Israel after the flesh and then to those in Christ, is not convincing.

In this manner, God does not deal with Christians, including Paul, any differently than God dealt with Israel “according to the flesh.” Paul warning in 11:21 to Gentile Christians that they could be broken off from the elect group is more than an idle threat. Paul believes that one is eternally secure only when one is securely in eternity. Short of that, one has the possibility, however unlikely, of committing apostasy and being excluded from the eternal kingdom. The glorious benediction in Rom. 8:35-39 is meant to reassure believers that no outside force, not even supernatural ones, can separate the believer from Christ’s love against their will. What Paul does not include in his listing in 8:35-39 is the individual himself or herself, who may indeed commit apostasy—hence all Paul’s warnings and urgings about faithfulness and perseverance.¹²

¹² *Paul’s Narrative Thought World: The Tapestry of Tragedy and Triumph*, 230-32. Robert Shank wrote about these “warnings”:

The eighth chapter of Romans, as someone has said, “begins with no condemnation and ends with no separation.” It is well to observe, however, that it is punctuated with sharp warnings that “if ye live after the flesh ye shall die, but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the

B. J. Oropeza:

Our perspective of 1 Corinthians 10 and Romans 9-11 calls into question the assumption that unconditional election to final perseverance is a guarantee for the individual Christian (as supposed by some in Romans 8:28-39). Since Paul in Romans 9-11 seems to consider both Israel and the Christians as corporately elect, this may help one interpret Paul's perspective of election when final perseverance is in view in the letter. As in 1 Corinthians 10, the language of election in Romans 11 is applied to both Jews (11:28f cf. 9:11; 11:5) and Christians (11:7 cf. 9:24ff; 10:20). This is not to say, however, that all the language of election in Romans 9-11 is completely void of individuality (cf. Rom. 9:13, 19), but that individuality seems bound up in illustrations (e.g., Esau, Jacob, Pharaoh), which are used as a means to argue conclusions about attaining righteousness by faith instead of works (9:30ff) and the rejection and/or salvation of corporate groups or subgroups such as ethnic Israel (e.g., 9:1-6; 10:18-21; 11:26ff), the Israel of promise (e.g., 9:6-8), the remnant (11:1-7), and Gentile Christians (e.g., 9:30 cf. v. 24; 11:13-22). The individual language in the text points rhetorically to a climax ultimately concerned with corporate Israel in chapter 11.

Our perspective supports that when election with the goal of final perseverance is in view, Paul seems to be speaking of communities rather than individuals. Namely, the predestination and election of Christians in Romans 8:29-30 may rest on Paul's assumption that election to final perseverance refers to the election of a *community* rather than individuals as such. Paul stresses the use of the plural and collective terms such as "those," "many," and so forth to refer to the Christians in 8:28-39 . . . Like the Christian community, Israel itself is called, elect, and beloved of God (Rom. 11:28-29; cf. 11:2), yet many in Israel fell away so that in the present age, they do not participate in the salvific experience. Israel's corporate election is clearly in view when Paul claims that all Israel will be saved in the "not yet" future (Rom. 11:26). Nevertheless, in the "now" eschaton, Romans 11 (and 1 Corinthians 10) suggests that *individuals* and subgroups who are part of the elect community (whether Jews or Gentiles) may apostatize and be cut off from salvation (cf. Rom. 11:22).

deeds of the body, ye shall live" (v. 13); that only such as are lead by the Spirit of God are truly sons of God (v. 14); that only if we suffer with Christ shall we be glorified together with Him (v. 17); and that, despite our infirmities but aided by the Spirit, we must continue to wait in patience and hope (vv. 24-27) for the ultimate realization of salvation and the full manifestation of our divine sonship (vv. 16-23), "the glory which shall be revealed to us . . . if so be that we suffer with Him" (cf. 2 Tim. 2:12).

We have strong encouragement in the hour of trial. We have the assurance that "all things go on working together for the good of those who keep on loving God" (v. 28 Williams). We have the assurance that an eternal purpose of God is at work to issue in the ultimate glorification (full conformity to the image of His Son) of all who keep on loving Him (vv. 29, 30). We have the encouragement of Paul's argument (vv. 31-39) that, since God is for us and Christ intercedes for us, no external power or circumstance can separate us from the love of God in Christ. But certainly these precious assurances are intended, not to mitigate the sharp warnings of the earlier part of the chapter, but to encourage us to "keep on gloriously conquering through Him who loved us" (v. 37 Williams). (*Life in the Son*, 211)

If Paul is speaking about the assurance of election to final perseverance in Romans 8:28-39, then this promise – like Romans 11 and 1 Corinthians 10 – would seem to be affixed to a community rather than individuals *per se*. First, as in 1 Corinthians 10, the Deuteronomic tradition is clearly evident in the background for Paul’s argument in Romans, especially in chapters 9–11. In this tradition, Paul seems to adopt a corporate view of election (cf. Deut. 7:6ff) while at the same time affirming that apostasy can happen to individuals and sub-groups (cf. Deut. 13:1ff; 29:18-20).

Second, the Christians in Rome who are called in accordance with God purpose are identified as “the ones who love God” (Rom. 8:28). Paul seems to adapt this phrase from the Deuteronomic tradition where Israel is identified as a community of those who love God *and keep his commandments* (Deut. 5:10; 7:9; . . .). Paul probably does not intend to suggest that “the ones who love God” be understood as a *mere* designation . . . for Christians – the phrase takes on the additional implication that a responsibility rests among the people of God to demonstrate their love for God through obedience. God works for good with those who are obedient to God.

Third, in Romans it is evident that if a believer lives after the flesh or does not continue in Christ, he or she may become eternally separated from God (Rom. 8:12-13 cf. 11:22; 14:13, 15, 23). But in 8:28-39 Paul does not contemplate whether personal sin or unbelief could finally disrupt a Christian’s salvific relationship with God.¹³ Hence, the promise of any final perseverance in this passage does not necessarily apply to Christians who follow their sinful nature. In other words, Paul in 8:28-39 may indeed affirm that the collective community of God is foreknown, predestined and elect in the eternal plan of God and will persevere to final glorification.¹⁴ This would be a great comfort to Paul’s readers when he mentions the various trials that the Christians in Rome my face. The readers, as individuals, could take comfort in the promises of this passage, but *only* as they are identified as members of the Christian community. The passage centers on the

¹³ In a footnote here, Oropeza says,

Doubtless, Paul did not intend to include the Christians themselves as hostile enemies of their own communion with God by the phrase “another creature” or “any other creature” (Rom. 8:39 . . .). Paul is stressing *external* or objective hostile forces, be they natural or supernatural. He is neither focusing on the internal or subjective volition/nature of the Christians themselves, nor on temptation through vices. As elsewhere in Romans, he is not using “another/any other” in some unqualified sense that transcends even the categories and parameters at hand (Rom. 13:9; cf. 1 Tim 1:10). If we could paraphrase Paul, he probably implies this: “and if there is a different (external) opposing force out there which I have failed to mention, neither can it separate us (the ones who love God) from the love of God in Christ.” (*Paul and Perseverance*, 209 fn. 73)

¹⁴ In a footnote here, Oropeza writes,

Note also the parallel in 1 Peter 1:2 where it is said that God elected the Christian communities based on his foreknowledge. In Romans 8, God foreknows “those who love him” (8:28) – the collective elect (Rom. 8:31 ff) – and they are predestined to be conformed to Christ’s image (cf. Eph. 1:5). (*Paul and Perseverance*, 209 fn. 74)

Christian community as elect, not the Christian individual. A person who is not part of this community has no claim to its promises.

Thus, Paul's use of terms related to predestination and election in Romans 8:28-39 give no necessary indication that genuinely elect individuals cannot finally apostatize. It seems that Paul believes that God can choose, foreknow, and predestine an elect people to final perseverance even though individual members can fall away (cf. Rom. 11). Some elect my fall away, perhaps even most, but never all.

Paul's thought here is consistent with many ancient Israelite traditions which portray the reality of individual and sub-group apostasies within the elect community while at the same time maintaining the continuity of that community *as a whole*. In every episode of Israel's tradition history, a faithful remnant survives after apostasy and judgment/expulsion occur (e.g., Deut. 4:23-31). Paul habitually cites or echoes the Jewish traditions for authoritative support of his arguments, and for him, there is an analogy between Israel and Christians in relation to election (Rom. 11; 1 Cor. 10). It seems implausible that he would have divorced himself so completely from the presuppositions of his Jewish heritage that he now teaches that individuals which make up the elect body are each unconditionally preserved so as to never be able to completely fall away.¹⁵

Romans 11:29

Robert Shank:

"The gifts and calling of God are without repentance" (Romans 11:29). Some assert that Paul's statements indicates that, regardless of subsequent circumstances, God cannot withdraw from any individual the gift of justification and salvation, once it has been bestowed. But Rom. 11:29 is not a general principle applicable to any and every situation in God's dealings with men; for such would contradict many passages of Scripture. The meaning of Paul's statement is governed by context (Rom. 9-11, esp. 11:26-29). Context indicates that Paul's affirmation concerns the corporate election of Israel. Despite the present unfaithfulness of Israel, collectively, God's promise to the fathers will yet be fulfilled in a generation who will seek the King of glory and who will be willing in the day of His power (Ps. 24:6; 110:3; cf. Hos. 3:4, 5; 5:15-6:3; Zech. 12:10; 13:6 ff., etc.). Meanwhile, even those in whom the promise cannot be fulfilled—a rebellious generation—are yet "beloved for the fathers' sakes." God's gifts and calling of Israel to the privileges of their corporate election, though temporarily unrealized through the general unbelief of rebellious generations, will never be finally withdrawn and will ultimately be realized in a "willing" generation. Rom. 11:29 has no application to the question of individual salvation and security (contra. vv. 20-23). Paul's statement in v. 29 was written, not concerning saved men, but concerning men who were "enemies concerning the gospel" (v. 28).¹⁶

¹⁵ "Excursus: Election in Romans 8:28-39 in Light of Israel's Election and Apostasy," in *Paul and Apostasy: Eschatology, Perseverance, and Falling Away in the Corinthian Congregation*, 206-10.

¹⁶ *Life in the Son*, 358.

1 Corinthians 3:10-15

Kent L. Yinger:

1 Corinthians 3:5-9a

Nearly all commentators agree that the initial larger unit in the letter runs from 1:10–4:21. The opening subsection (1:10-17) names “divisions” and “quarrels” as the problem at hand, whereby the Corinthians are boasting in some leaders to the denigration of others. There appears to be a developing conflict between Paul himself and the church at Corinth, relating both to his apostolic authority and his kerygma [i.e., preaching or proclamation] [2:1-5; 4:1-5, 8-21; 9:1-23]. Some of the Corinthians view themselves as *spiritual ones* [*pneumatikos*, 2:6-16; 3:1; 14:37], but are not so sure about Paul, who has not exhibited the power, prerogatives or wisdom of a truly spiritual leader-teacher.

After an initial appeal to the church to cease their disagreements and quarrels regarding the merits of various leaders, Paul turns immediately to the underlying error in their thinking – an exaltation of “eloquent [human] wisdom” which empties his message of its power (1:17). The message of the cross of Christ is opposed to the wisdom of this world (1:18-25), something evidenced both by God’s choice of the Corinthians who were weak and foolish in the world’s eyes (1:26-31), as well as by Paul’s original preaching which was without persuasive words of wisdom, yet with divine power and results (2:1-5). Ultimately, of course, God’s wisdom is indeed wise not foolish, but this is discerned only through the Spirit by those who are spiritual (2:6-16). Here Paul wrests the label [*pneumatikos*] away from those who would tie it to a form of worldly wisdom, binding it instead to “the mind of Christ” (2:16).

Chapter 3:1-4 is a transitional paragraph connecting the foregoing discussion of wisdom to the problem of boasting in various leaders. Far from being wise, the Corinthians reveal themselves by their boasting to be immature and fleshly. Then over against their notion of attachment to a particular wise leader, Paul unfolds his view of Christian teachers/leaders (3:5-23), emphasizing that they are servants of God, and to be valued equally (in spite of diversity), though the servants themselves must be careful to build in accordance with the one gospel foundation (= Christ). Thus neither worldly wisdom (3:19-20) nor boasting in persons (3:21) have any place, but only Christ (3:21b-23).

Then in chapter 4 Paul turns to the issue which has been beneath the surface all along, his own apostolic relationship to the church at Corinth. As God’s servant, a judgment upon his service lies in God’s hands, not theirs (4:1-5). With biting sarcasm he contrasts their expectation of worldly wisdom and power in the present (“Already you have all you want!” verse 8) with his apostolic weakness and suffering which identify him with Christ (4:6-13). He concludes with the reminder that he alone is their “father through the gospel” (4:15) and a warning against arrogance in the light of his planned coming (4:18-21).

Having exposed their false view of who is really wise and scolded their fleshly attachment to supposedly wise teachers, Paul sets forth in chapter 3 his view of Christian leadership in a series of three metaphors (verses 5-9a, 9b-15, 16-17), with the goal of his

argumentation made clear again in verse 21, “So let no one boast about human leaders” (cf. also 3:3). He begins by singling out Apollos and himself as a case study “so that none of you will be puffed up in favor of one [Apollos] against another [Paul]” (4:6). “What, then, is Apollos? What is Paul?” (3:5). That is, “as what (or “with what sort of status”) should one regard them?” In contrast to the Corinthians’ proclivity [i.e., strong inclination] to evaluate them as competing itinerant philosophers, Paul calls them servants [*diakonoi*, verse 5] and co-workers [*sunergoi*, verse 9] in God’s field, the church. Thus, he can answer the question as to comparative status – “So neither the one who plants [Paul] nor the one who waters [Apollos] is anything, but only God who gives growth” (verse 7). In comparison to the true source of growth, the servants cannot lay claim to great status. How foolish for the Corinthians to be quarreling about whether one belongs to Paul or to Apollos. The conclusion (verse 9a) captures the heart of the entire argument, Paul and Apollos are laborers together (not in competition) in God’s field, the church; and most importantly, as such they are *God’s* workers in *God’s* field.

The relative insignificance of the human workers certainly does not, however, make them altogether worthless. It was, after all, “through [them] you came to believe” (verse 5). Their respective status, like their differing tasks and abilities, can be determined not by comparing them with one another – as co-workers in a common task they are “one” (NRSV: “they have a common purpose,” verse 8) – but only in relation to their Master. It is “as the Lord assigned to each” (verse 5b). Paul is perfectly ready to acknowledge individual differing achievements (verse 8b), but this gives no occasion for exalting one servant over another (verse 9a).

How then does the recompense statement of verse 8b function within this argument?

And each will receive wages according to the labor of each. (NRSV)

Many commentators have found this phrase disturbing to the flow of the argument, contending that it can be no more than a parenthetical thought, with the emphasis on unity before God (verses 6-8a) carried on smoothly in verse 9a: “for we are God’s servants, workers together.” Others find it at best surprising or obscure in its relation to the context. However, these views miss the dynamic at work in Paul’s argument, which must stress not only the leader’s relative *unimportance* and *equality* before God (against the divisive Corinthian boasting), but likewise their individual *accountability* to God alone for the legitimate *diversity* of task.¹⁷ This individuality and diversity of the workers, which forms the basis of the Corinthians’ quarrels, must be somehow sustained by the apostle if he is to defend his unique position as founder (3:6-7) and father (4:14-17) of the church, yet without allowing it to remain a basis for human comparison and division.

Perhaps the place of verse 8b in the argument can be better seen if the verses are arranged chiasmically. Verses 5a and 9a are not part of this structure, but function as an opening and conclusion to the subsection:

¹⁷ Fn. 13 reads: “This stress on individual accountability is further confirmed by the five occurrences of [*hekastos*, ‘to each’] (3:5, 8, 13 [2x]; 4:5)” (*Paul, Judaism, and Judgment According to Deeds*, 208).

- (Opening question) What then is Apollos? What is Paul? (verse 5a)
 A Servants through whom you came to believe, as the Lord assigned to *each*.
 (verse 5b)
 B I *planted*, Apollos *watered*, but *God* gave the *growth*. (verse 6)
 B' So neither the one who plants nor the one who *waters* is anything, but only *God*
 who gives the *growth*. (verse 7)
 A' The one who plants and the one who waters have a common purpose, and *each* will
 receive wages according to the labor of each. (verse 8)
 (Conclusion) For we are God's servants, working together; you are God's field.
 (verse 9a)

The clearly-paralleled central lines (B–B') express the main points of Paul's argument; diverse gifts among the laborers are no cause for division or boasting since all that really counts comes ultimately from God alone. The lines A–A' do not exhibit the same degree of terminological linkage (only "each"–"each"), but one can discern a thematic echo. In both verse 5b and 8, the first line recognizes their sharing in a common task, while the second line stresses their individual accountability for the diverse tasks assigned to them:

Verse 5b	Verse 8
Servants through whom you came to believe to each as the Lord assigned	The one who plants and the one who waters have a common purpose, and each will receive wages according to the labor of each.

Thus, while Paul's primary concern in this passage is to eliminate diverse abilities as a grounds for fleshly comparison and boasting (B–B'), he cannot eliminate such recognizable diversity altogether. Instead he must set it within the context of accountability to the Lord (A–A'), and thereby take it out of the realm of fleshly comparisons. Viewed in this manner, the motif of recompense according to labor is not an interruption, but is the structurally expected thematic echo of verse 5b.

Furthermore, this connection with verse 5b helps clarify the *function* of the motif in this passage. Just as the diverse assignments of Paul and Apollos are traced to the prerogative of the [*kurios*, Lord] in verse 5b, thereby providing the bulwark against fleshly assessments; so likewise in verse 8b their diverse wages will have to await the future pay-day according to individual labor, the payment of which belongs to the same Lord. Although the master's prerogative to determine and distribute appropriate wages is only implicit in the motif itself, this point is made explicit in verse 9a ("For we are *God's* servants, working together"). [*Theou*, God] is in the leading, emphatic position, laying stress on the fact that the servants *belong to God*; i.e., he alone can determine and distribute individually appropriate wages.

This also explains the unusual two-fold use of [*idion*] ("one's own"), something the NRSV translation obscures. Literally one would have to render the motif here: each will receive *his/her* wage according to *his/her* own labor. Rather than an equal or common [*koinos*] wage, each receives [*ton idion mishon*, one's own reward], meaning a wage peculiar to that individual or according to his/her particular effort. This two fold [*idion*]

appears to be Paul's own addition to the motif tradition and indicates his particular concern at this point – the determination of the recompense (or status in the Corinthian situation) appropriate to the diverse assignments and labors of leaders like Paul and Apollos must be reserved for God. Thus, the motif serves to restrain intra-community judgment, a function found elsewhere in Paul and in second temple Judaism. . . .

Paul's use of the term "reward/wage" [*misthon*] deserves special attention at this juncture, since it testifies to his belief in a *positive* reward to the righteous according to their deeds, and may hint at a belief in *varying* rewards. . . . Paul's readiness to speak of believers' *reward(s)* according to their deeds may be taken as evidence that this rabbinic tendency was present already in the first century.

But what of the idea that rewards are seen here to vary as appropriate to the varied work of each? I have argued above that Paul's two-fold addition of [*idion*, one's own] is testimony to his concern to stress the diversity of tasks and of appropriate rewards. The reward of each is individually appropriate to one's labor [*kata ton idion kopon*]. Paul's argument at this stage hinges upon the belief that the meting out of appropriate, individually diverse, wages lies within the prerogative of God alone. . . . However, apart from the bare *fact* of differing rewards [according to one's own labor], we learn little here as to their precise nature. . . .

While it is likely that Paul envisioned this varied recompense as being granted at the eschatological judgment, this notion remains entirely in the background in this particular text. Paul's sole concern here is to stress the divine prerogative in determining and distributing varied wages to his servants, and thereby to deny to the Corinthians this right.

1 Corinthians 3:9b-15

This text has played a central role in a number of different Christian debates over issues of Soteriology. In certain traditions of popular piety it is the key passage demonstrating that "how I build my own Christian life on Christ" cannot affect ultimate salvation (only the degree of reward). Closely related are Calvinist-Arminian debate over eternal security. Finally, Roman Catholics have in the past found proof of purgatory here.

The change from an agricultural to an architectural metaphor is syntactically abrupt, but such a linking of the two metaphors was fairly common in antiquity and would probably not have occasioned much surprise among the Corinthian hearers. This new subsection is a continuation of Paul's attempt to stop their boasting in human leaders begun in verse 5. However between verses 5-9a and 9b-15 carry a much sharper tone of warning – "let each beware how he/she builds" (verse 10c, my translation).¹⁸ Likewise verses 13-15 mention not only the promise of reward (as in verse 8b) but threaten with loss as well. Further, while the text certainly carries implications for the whole congregation's view of their leaders, Paul is now addressing a warning more specifically

¹⁸ Fn. 43 reads: "The NRSV ('Each builder must choose with care how to build on it') loses this sharp tone of Paul's 'Let each beware' [*hekastos de blepetō*] (cf. 1 Cor. 8:9; 10:12; 16:10; Gal. 5:15; Phil. 3:2; Col. 2:8; also Eph. 5:15)" (Ibid., 215).

to the Corinthian leaders and wisdom teachers.¹⁹ The rather detailed judgment imagery of verses 12-15 leads weight to Paul's warning, stressing that "how" one builds the church carries with it eschatological reward or loss. Although the architectural metaphor is, to a certain extent, carried forward in verses 16-17, the introduction of "temple" terminology, as well as the heightened sharpness of the warning ("God will destroy that person"), signal some degree of disjunction with what follows (see below).

Our attention will focus on verse 12-15 where Paul expands upon his warning (verses 10c) by describing in terms of eschatological judgment the consequences for those who are building upon his foundation in Corinth.

(12) Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw – (13) the work of each builder will become visible, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each has done. (14) If what has been built on the foundation survives, the builder will receive a reward. (15) If the work is burned up, the builder will suffer loss; the builder will be saved, but only as through fire.

Six different building materials are listed whose only significance as the metaphor progresses will be their resistance to fire (verse 14-15). "Take care how one builds" now means "Take care that one is building with imperishable materials," i.e., that one's work will survive the judgment.

What then is the criterion by which their work of edifying the church will be deemed perishable or imperishable? The answer, according to verse 11, is consistency with the sole possible foundation of the church, Jesus Christ. Paul's message of Christ crucified operates as a yardstick for all further builders (and by implication for the congregation's evaluation of its leaders). This all harks back to Paul's earlier discussion pitting God's wisdom in the message of Christ crucified over against all forms of human wisdom. That such was in his mind is confirmed by his reference to himself as a "wise master builder" [*sophos architekton*], that is, as the one who had begun the work in accordance with wisdom [*sophos*] of God.

In verse 13, through a series of phrases, Paul stresses that each builder's choice of materials will be revealed at the eschatological judgment day [*hē hemēra*, "the Day"]. Thus each builder's work will become known, being tested by the fire that accompanies the day of judgment in order to determine "what sort of work" [*to ergon hopoion*] one has done. As consistently throughout the metaphor this "work" [*ergon*, sg.] refers to both the *process* of building (i.e., their choice of perishable or imperishable building materials) and the *product* resulting from this activity. This strongly revelatory function of the judgment day is brought out by the verbs "disclose" [*dēlōsei*] and "reveal" [*apokaluptetai*]. Both judgment *qua* disclosure and the unitary understanding of one's work (sg.) are central features of judgment in second temple Judaism, and point up once again that Paul is not thinking of weighing of individual deeds.

Verses 14-15 detail the consequences for those who built well or poorly. At this fiery judgment their work will either remain (*[menei]* = survive the fire) or will be burned up.

¹⁹ Fn. 44 reads: Whereas verses 9 and 16 explicitly address the whole congregation, verses 9b-15 clearly address those in the congregation (*[allos*, 'another,' *hekastos*, 'each' [3x], *tis*, 'anyone' [3x]) engaged in 'building upon' Paul's foundation of Christ crucified" (Ibid., 216).

Those who have taught and ministered in a manner compatible with the Pauline keryma, and thus whose “gold, silver, and precious stones” survive the test by fire, “will receive a reward” [*misthon lēmpsetai*]. This echoes what was already said at 3:8 about recompense for faithful service, but here without the stress of differentiation. The nature of this promised eschatological wage is left unspecified (though on its relation to “salvation,” see below). Attempts have been made to fill out the meaning of this reward by importing ideas found elsewhere in Paul. These include *praise, union with converts at the parousia, superior privileges, and the fact that the work abides*. However, beyond establishing the eschatological nature of the reward in this text, any attempt to specify what the apostle leaves vague will have to remain uncertain. In line with the character of a *warning*, it is not the promise, much less the nature, of the reward, but the consequences of failure that are uppermost in Paul’s interest here.

The consequence for those whose work is consumed (verse 15), who taught and ministered on a basis of human wisdom rather than Christ, is termed [*zēmioōthēsetai*] [“will suffer loss,” NRSV]. This word carries the sense of “suffering damage, injury or loss” and has led to two differing translations:

- (a) “the builder will suffer damage,” i.e., punishment,
- (b) “the builder will suffer loss,” i.e., of reward.

Option (a) assumes some sort of post-mortem chastisement for believers, an idea not found elsewhere in Paul. The other NT occurrences of [*zēmioō*] favor (b) “suffer loss.” Further, the antithetical parallelism with “receive reward” (verse 14) expects the loss of reward as its counterpart in verse 15.

The final phrase of verse 15 has long played a critical role in the attempt to understand Paul’s perspective on the judgment of believers – [*autos de sōthēsetai, houtōs de hōs dia puros*, himself but saved, so but as through fire]. For many interpreters this is an afterthought, a correction added by the apostle to guard against equating, or in any way connecting, one’s reward with one’s salvation. In this case, the text “stresses that the salvation of the Christian preacher is not affected in spite of the destructive judgment upon his labor. Thus, the concluding proverbial utterance is a qualification or correction of the preceding idea of judgment which brought only reward or punishment (i.e., loss) into its purview.” This would testify to a sense of theological tension in Paul. These same commentators, however, consistently fail to see that immediately following this Paul explicitly connects the Corinthian teachers’ activity with their salvation (see below on verse 16-17). If Paul meant to say “take care how you build, for it will affect your eschatological reward, though, of course, not your eternal salvation,” he would hardly have followed it with verse 16 and its threat of eternal destruction.

I would suggest that verse 15b is not a correction or afterthought, not some form of reassurance to the erring Corinthian leaders that they will be saved in spite of their erroneous teaching, but instead intensifies the warning of verse 15a.²⁰ Thus the emphasis lies on the final “as through fire” which is in some measure a modification of the Corinthians’ expectations that “the builder will be saved.” “As through fire” was an

²⁰ Fn. 62 reads: “Paul did not write this passage to reassure those who feared their salvation was in jeopardy, but he wrote to unnerve those who believed their salvation was assured” (Roetzel, *Judgement in the Community*, 169) (Ibid., 220).

idiomatic way of saying “just barely,” by the skin of one’s teeth.” Paul is not reassuring the one who built poorly (i.e., though you lose your reward you will still be saved) but warning – though you may attain salvation, it will be by the skin of your teeth as it were. The point here is to stress the risk being entertained by those who may be building in a manner incompatible with the teaching of Christ. That risk will be amplified in verses 16-17 where Paul warns that improper building can, in fact, edge over into actual destruction of the church, resulting in the eternal destruction of the builder. To teach human wisdom instead of Christ carries with it the gravest of risks; at best the loss of any recompense for all one’s labor, at worst the loss of eschatological life itself. The dividing line between poor building and destruction is not clearly marked out, making Paul’s initial warning to “beware how you are building” all the more potent.

Nevertheless, in verses 9b-15 “reward” is clearly distinct from “salvation.” Paul does seem to assume here that it is possible to enjoy salvation plus reward (verse 14) or salvation stripped of reward (verse 15). . . .

Most exegetes of a Reformed or Lutheran persuasion find in this passage a first line of defense against allowing the works of believers any *salvific* significance.

Obviously the idea has to be understood in the wider context of the doctrine of justification. The loss of faith means the loss of salvation. On the other hand, unsatisfactory works performed by the Christian as a Christian do not cause his damnation. This is the reverse side of the fact that works do not bring about salvation. But we remain responsible for our works before God ...; for the life of believers is service. [Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 77]

Besides the fact that this text is not about Christians’ works in general, but about the specific work of teaching/leading, my interpretation turns this interpretation on its head. Rather than assurance that their poor work will not affect their salvation, one finds in fact a warning that they are putting that very salvation at risk. Thus, having admonished the Corinthians against judging one leader at the expense of another in verse 5-9, Paul switches metaphors and tone in verses 10-15 and warns the leaders themselves (and implicitly the congregation) that the preceding does not render the “how” of their effort superfluous. The fact is, only those who build in line with the message of Christ rather than human wisdom will receive the reward mentioned in verse 8. Those who disregard this warning risk finding all their labor eternally worthless; and, in fact, could be endangering their salvation. In order to drive home this ultimate danger, Paul now turns in verses 16-17 to a new metaphor, that of the temple.

1 Corinthians 3:16-17

As noted above, the relation of these verses to the preceding is crucial to a proper understanding of judgment in Paul. The introduction (“Do you not know?”), the shift in metaphor (from architecture in general to “temple” specifically) and the heightened form of warning (*lex talionis*) suggest that verses 16-17 constitute to some degree a new thought. This has led a large body of interpreters to stress a logical disjunction between verses 15 and 16. While generally acknowledging a certain logical progression through three metaphors (promise of reward to leaders – warning of loss of reward to poor leaders – threat of destruction to destroyers of the church), such interpreters stress the

discontinuity rather than the continuity with the foregoing. . . . Stressing the disjunction leads, then, to a crucial theological observation. The judgment on believing leaders resulting in (loss of) reward (verses 10-15) has little to do with a judgment as to their salvation (verses 16-17). The intent here is usually to safeguard the doctrine of justification by faith lest works somehow sneak in to play a determinative role. Without this disjunction, not only reward but equally salvation itself seems to become dependent on “how one builds.”

The a priori assumption behind this approach (i.e., unsatisfactory works cannot be a cause or condition of a Christian’s salvation/damnation) will be examined later. Here I wish to concentrate on the exegetical evidence for a relationship of *continuity* rather than discontinuity flowing from verse 15 to verse 16-17.

The abrupt [*ouk oidate*, Do you not know] which opens verse 16 is a rhetorical device used heavily in this letter, perhaps meant ironically in the light of the Corinthians’ boast in knowledge. Rather than signaling a logical disjunction, it always introduces a further argument on a subject already opened in the material immediately preceding its appearance. In some of these cases it introduces a strong warning which serves to intensify the risk involved in the wrong behavior Paul wishes to restrain. Thus in speaking against intra-community lawsuits we read,

Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be defrauded? But you yourselves wrong and defraud – and believers at that. *Do you not know* that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? (1 Cor. 6:7-8)

And against sexual immorality,

Should I therefore take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! *Do you not know* that whoever is united to a prostitute becomes one body with her? (1 Cor. 6:15-16)

The use of [*ouk oidate*] in 3:16 follows this same pattern. Following the warning (not reassurance! see above) of verses 10-15, verse 16-17 serve to intensify the risk involved in building upon human wisdom rather than Christ.

As throughout 3:5-17, these verses are directed both at the whole congregation and to its teachers and leaders.²¹ Those who “destroy God’s temple” are not a different group (e.g., enemies of the gospel; nonbelievers) from those in view in verses 14-15. Rather this new description highlights the risk entertained by any teacher who builds with human wisdom. Harming the church shades imperceptibly into destroying the church, magnifying the risk for any who dare build with “wood, hay, and stubble.” These same hearers are in view in Paul’s continued admonition in verses 18-20 addressed to those in the church who consider themselves to be “wise in this age.”

In verse 16 Paul reminds the congregation of who they are, and hence of the seriousness of building poorly or even destroying the church. They are collectively God’s

²¹ Fn. 75 reads: “The second person plural verbs and pronouns in verse 9 and 16 clearly have the whole community in view, while the indefinite singular pronouns used in the warnings ([tis, ‘anyone,’ *hekastos*, ‘each’; verses 8b, 10b, 12, 13, 14-15, 17) targets the teachers and leaders” (Ibid., p. 224).

sanctuary, the dwelling place of God's Spirit, making them holy. This sacrosanct character of the divine sanctuary is the reason [*gar*, for] that destruction of the same is such a heinous act and will be repaid in kind by destruction at the hands of God himself.

In a striking chiasmic formulation of the OT *lex talionis*²² Paul threatens future divine destruction upon any potential destroyer of the congregation:

- A [*ei tis*, if anyone]
- B [*ton naon tou theou*, the temple of God]
- C [*phtheirei*, destroy]
- C' [*phtherei*, destroy]
- B' [*touton*, this]
- A' [*ho theos*, the God]

The exact meaning of *phtheirein* in this particular context is disputed. . . . The verb, however, was most commonly used to indicate the ruin or destruction of things, structures, animals or persons. . . . In 1 Corinthians 3:16-17 the threat is related directly to the church's nature as the divine temple in which God's Spirit dwells, thus making it sacrosanct [i.e., most sacred or holy]. The violation of holy objects and places was widely held to be a capital offense in ancient society, with the sentence often executed by the deity directly. The presence of the *lex talionis* ("ruin for ruin") likewise points to divine judgment. Thus it matters little whether we take the protasis to refer to profanation, damage, the actual demolition of a building, or as a known Greek rhetorical *topos* [type] for the destruction of group unity through factionalism. Regardless of the exact manner, the ruining of God's holy temple will inevitably bring ruin at God's own hand in return, a sentiment not unlike the inscription found in Herod's temple prohibiting Gentiles in the forecourt: "Whosoever is caught [in the sacred precincts] is alone responsible for the death[-penalty] which follows."

Thus Paul is continuing the warning of verse 15. Those who lead and minister in the congregation on the basis of human wisdom rather than Christ crucified imperil their own salvation. The sanctity of the congregation in Corinth spells ruin for anyone who would dare to ruin the church by replacing the cross with human wisdom and banishing the Spirit through boasting and division. Paul's switch to the future tense in the apodosis ("God *will* destroy that person") suggests that *eschatological* destruction is in view. As an intensification of the warning about imperiling one's *salvation* (verse 15), this is nothing less than the final destruction of those excluded from such salvation.

. . . 1 Cor 3:16-17 constitutes one of Paul's most straightforward statements that one's "work" (here specifically the "work" of edifying [*oikodomein*] the church) is directly related not only to one's level of reward (as distinct from salvation), but also to "being saved" [*sōthēsetai*]. Those who build so poorly that the church herself is destroyed are threatened themselves with sure and eternal destruction at God's judgment. Attempts to circumvent this exegetical conclusion by defining those in view as nonbelievers or enemies of the gospel are implausible.²³

²² *Lex Talionis* is the law of retaliation that a punishment inflicted should correspond in degree and kind to the offense of the wrong doer (see Lev 24:19-21; Exod 21:22-25; Deut 19:21).

²³ *Paul, Judaism, and Judgment According to Deeds*, 204-227.

1 Corinthians 10:13

B. J. Oropeza:

3. Perseverance: God Will Not Allow You to Be Tempted beyond Your Capabilities (1 Corinthians 10:13)

In the final verse of our periscope (1 Cor. 10:13), Paul assures the Corinthian congregation that every temptation has its limits. The Corinthians could overcome temptation because they serve a faithful God who will not permit them to be enticed above their ability to endure it. Here it seems that Paul is stressing perseverance rather than apostasy. We will therefore examine what he intends to accomplish by this apparent turn in his argument.

3.1 Human Temptation

The difficult phrase “no temptation has seized hold of you except what is human” . . . in 1 Corinthians 10:13a is often interpreted as a statement of comfort. . . . The source of the temptation in 10:13 seems revealed as a current problem in 10:14: “Therefore . . . flee idolatry!” The problem with idol meats is occurring in the eschatological present.

It would be a plausible step for Paul to comfort the Corinthians after a stern warning in 10:1-12. . . . In case they become overwhelmed by the fear of falling away, Paul gives them a word of assurance. The temptations are bearable because no matter how severe they are, they will not go beyond the human capability to endure them. . . .

For Paul, the idea of succumbing to temptation is in reference to something believers face. It normally indicates a fall into sin or apostasy (1 Cor. 7:5; 1 Thes. 3:5; Gal. 6:1), but successful perseverance is always possible. . . .

3.2 Bearing up under Temptation with the Help of a Faithful God

3.2.1 The Faithful God Provides a Way of Escape

Paul comforts the Corinthian congregation members by assuring them that they are able to endure temptation. He adds to this a second reason why they need not be anxious: God is faithful Earlier in the letter Paul also affirmed the faithfulness of God (1 Cor. 1:9). Although Paul wishes to encourage his readers that God’s divine grace and divine assistance are always available to them, he did not intend [the phrase “God is faithful”] to be understood as some guarantee for final individual perseverance. Marshall rightly claims, “The faithfulness of God does not rule out the possibility of the faithlessness of men [sic!].” . . .

Paul’s use of the phrase “God is faithful” . . . likely arises from Hebrew and Jewish traditions. In Deuteronomy 7:9 the faithful God keeps his covenant with those who love him and destroys those who hate him. God’s faithfulness to his covenant suggests that God will not tolerate his own elect if they violate the covenant, and this is vividly spelled out in the blessings and cursings of Deuteronomy 28-30. God is seen as faithful even when judging elect Israel. More precisely, in 1 Corinthians 10:1-13, Paul appears to adopt

[the phrase “God is faithful”] straight from the wilderness traditions. The metaphor of God as the “Rock” implied the covenantal faithfulness of God in the Deuteronomic tradition. Both 1 Corinthians 10:1-13 and the Deuteronomic tradition are concerned with a new eschatological journey

It is not by coincidence that the Song of Moses (Deut. 32) – the song about Israel’s apostasy – emphasises the faithfulness of God as the “rock” in the wilderness. Hays rightly argues that Christ as “the rock” in 1 Corinthians 10:4 comes from Deuteronomy 32. (The clearest echo of Deuteronomy 32 in 1 Corinthians 10 is the phrase in 10:20: [but that the things which they sacrifice, to demons and not to God], which follows Deut. 32:17 LXX.) . . .

I will mention several other reasons for entertaining the Song of Moses in Deuteronomy 32 as a backdrop to 1 Corinthians 10:1-22. First both the Deuteronomic and 1 Corinthians 10 texts are concerned with God’s elect offering sacrifices to idols/demons (cf. 32:16-17, 21, 37-39; cf. 1 Cor. 10:20f). The Song of Moses is concerned with defending the monotheistic nature of God who is provoked to jealousy by foreign gods who are really “no gods” (Deut. 32:16, 21; 31:29; Psa. 105[106]:37; 1 Cor. 10:22; cf. Psa. 95[96]:5; 113[115]:4-7; 134[135]:15-18; 1 Chron. 16:26). . . .

Second, a warning against apostasy in light of the spiritual provisions of God permeates both the Deuteronomic tradition and 1 Corinthians 10:1-13. The Song of Moses was written as a testimony against the Israelites when they entered the land of Canaan and turned away from God (Deut. 31:16-22; cf. 8:10-20). God tells Moses that the Israelites will turn to foreign gods and forsake him . . . and break his covenant (Deut. 31:16, 20; cf. Lev. 26:15, 44; Judges 2:1; Jer. 11:10). Though the Israelites were the elect of God (Deut. 32:8-14), and Moses affirms that God will never forsake them (31:8), God claims that he *will* forsake them when they turn to idols (Deut. 31:16-17; 32:18-20; cf. Isa. 8:17; Mic. 3:4; 2 Chron. 12:5).

Van Ruiten outlines the Song of Moses as follows: 31:1-6: Introduction and YHWH’s loyalty versus Israel’s disloyalty; 32:7-18: YHWH’s mercy in connection with Israel’s apostasy; 32:19-25: YHWH’s reaction and judgement against Israel; 32:26-36: complaint against Israel’s enemies; 32:37-42: results of recompense; and 32:43: a call to joy due to judgement. Although Paul develops a different outline in 1 Corinthians 10:1-13, similar motifs appear: 1) God is faithful despite the unfaithfulness of God’s people (10:13 cf. 7-10); 2) God gives gracious sustenance and gifts in the face of the people’s apostasy (10:1-10); and 3) God brings judgement on Israel (10:5, 7-10). Both the Song of Moses and Paul’s rhetoric in 1 Corinthians 8–10 serve to remind God’s people of the implications of breaking their covenant with God to serve idols.

Third, the Israelites are said to lack wisdom and understanding in the Song of Moses, and God wishes they would be wise enough to enact in a positive way on account of the song (Deut. 32:28-29). Likewise in 1 Corinthians, Paul deals with a situation in which many of the members of the congregation in Corinth lack proper wisdom and discernment (e.g., 1 Cor. 2:6ff; 3:1ff; 4:8ff; 12–14), and though they claim to have knowledge in the area of things offered to idols, they seem to lack wisdom from Paul’s perspective (8:1-3; 10:14-15).

Finally, Paul’s idea of the rock as Christ does not conflict with the Deuteronomic idea that the rock is God. If Paul is equating the rock with some sense of Christ’s pre-existence, he seems to affirm this idea in other letters (Gal. 4:4; Rom. 8:3-4; Phil. 2:6-11;

Col. 1:15-20). Moreover, in 10:9, he associates Christ with the Lord from heaven (cf. Rom. 10:6-13; 14:9; Phil 2:9-11).

In the Song of Moses, the theme of God's faithfulness and the unfaithfulness of God's people in reference to idolatry would seem to attract Paul to the conception of Christ and the Rock-Deity of the Israelites in 1 Corinthians 10:4. Peter Craigie suggest that the Israelite's conception of God as the rock . . . emphasises "the stability and permanence of the God Israel" (2 Sam. 23:3; Psa. 18:3, 31; 28:1; 61:2; 71:3; 89:26; 95:1; Isa. 17:10; 30:29; Hab. 1:12). The "rock" metaphor highlights the unchanging nature of the covenantal God in contrast with the fickle nature of God's covenant people. God as the rock is associated with perfection, justice, and faithfulness (Deut. 32:4). After God provides Israel with honey and oil from the rock, and other delights, Israel the upright one (Jeshurun) grew fat and deserted the Rock their Saviour (Deut. 32:13-15, 18). Hence, they were "sold out" by the Rock . . . in a kind of reverse redemption whereby the promise of putting their enemies to flight was now given to their enemies to put Israel to flight (Deut. 32:30; cf. Lev. 26:8). All this notwithstanding, the "rock" or gods of Israel's enemies cannot compare to the Rock of Israel; Yahweh will once again have compassion on his people and demonstrate that there is no god besides him (Deut. 32:31, 37-39; cf. Exod. 12:12). We can observe that the upshot in both 1 Corinthians 10 and Deuteronomy 32 is similar: "Even though God gave them 'spiritual food,' they rejected him for their idols."

Gundry Volf argues that Paul's mention of the faithfulness of God in 10:13 demonstrates a belief in the final perseverance of individual believers. But this does not appear to be what Paul meant. For Paul and the traditions he echoes in 10:1-13, the motif of God's faithfulness is *not* a guarantee against apostasy – in fact, the phrase often appears in the very context of the defection of God's people. God is faithful despite his people's unfaithfulness. We conclude that in 10:13, then, Paul uses [the phrase "God is faithful"] to encourage the Corinthians that God is on their side and will faithfully help them when they are tempted (cf. Heb. 10:23). He is not affirming that since God is faithful, God will never allow any individual Christian to fall away. That idea is contrary to the sources Paul is using, and we have observed that Paul holds to a sense of covenantal election and apostasy which is similar to that of the ancient Jews.

3.2.3 The Way of Escaping Temptation

Paul assures the Corinthians congregation that "with the temptation, [God] will make the way to escape so that you are able to bear up under it" He is not claiming that God is the author of the temptation; rather, he affirms that when the Corinthians face temptation, God will provide a way to escape it. For Paul temptation . . . normally indicates the work of Satan (cf. 1 Cor. 7:5; 1 Thes. 3:5; cf. Gal. 6:1), yet in 10:13, Satan does not appear to be the direct agent. The temptation refers to the vices Paul mentioned in 10:7-10, and it also anticipates the idolatry in 10:14. Hence, vices (especially idolatry) that lead to apostasy are the source of the temptation in 10:13.

Paul never specifies exactly what is "the way to escape" Perhaps he intended the escape route to be connected with the next sentence to "flee idolatry" (10:14ff). If so, this would suggest that escaping temptation is not a passive discipline, but the Corinthians must decide to flee temptation or avoid placing themselves in a tempting condition in the

first place. Paul's use of [the way to escape] may also have a wider application than running away from idol temples. The Corinthians were to flee from every form of temptation (1 Cor. 6:18; cf. 1 Thes. 5:22; 2 Tim. 2:22). Yet even this conception does not entirely capture Paul's meaning. Since God is the one who provides the way to escape, it is unlikely that the *only* thing the Corinthians had to do was make a self-determined effort to run away from temptation. Paul no doubt believed that the Corinthians would receive some form of unspecified divine assistance if they were resisting the temptation; he would affirm that God delivers the righteous out of temptation (2 Thes. 3:3; cf. 2 Tim. 3:11; 2 Pet. 2:9; Rev. 3:10). The result of this assistance is that the Corinthian Christians would be able to endure or "bear up under" the temptation Nevertheless, in this periscope, divine assistance does not preclude the dangers of apostasy. Paul's word on escaping temptation was not intended to comfort the Corinthian members who would choose to continue in their vices or remain presumptuous. Barrett astutely writes, "The *way out* [of temptation] is for those who seek it, not for those who (like the Corinthians) are, where idolatry is concerned, looking for the way in."

3.3 Warning and Encouragement in the Corinthian Situation

We therefore find Paul balancing the notions of apostasy and perseverance in 10:12-13. He warns the Corinthians not to fall away, but he refuses to end the discussion on an extremely negative note. He encourages the members not to despair; God will make a way to escape temptation. No one will fall away who is not careless and presumptuous, and God will never permit a person to fall away who really does not want to do so. That God provides a way to escape, however, does not release the Corinthians from their moral responsibility. Paul did not write an intense warning in 10:1-12 just to assure the congregation in 10:13 that, ultimately, they have nothing to be concerned about. There would be no reason to warn them so severely if he believed they were all going to persevere to the end anyway. Moreover, there is no indication that he believed his very message would somehow instill effectual grace so as to guarantee their perseverance. *Despite*, their election, the warning could either be accepted or rejected, obeyed or disobeyed with the real consequences of eternal life or death.²⁴

Ephesians 1:13; 4:30

Robert Shank:

God "has sealed [*sphragizō*, set an official mark upon] us and given the earnest of the Spirit [*ton arabōna tou pneumatos*, genitive of apposition: the Spirit is Himself the earnest] in our hearts" (2 Cor. 1:22).

"Ye were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit [*tōi pneumati*, instrumental case: The Spirit is the instrument of sealing] who is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession" (Eph. 1:13, 14).

²⁴ *Paul and Apostasy*, 212-18, 220-22.

“Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, in whom [*en hōi*, the Spirit is the element in which we are sealed] ye were sealed unto the day of redemption” (Eph. 4:30).

The Holy Spirit is the official seal of God’s ownership, and the believer’s God-given earnest of his promised inheritance as a son and heir of God. Wonderful! But there is more: the Spirit is continually at work in the believer to bring to consummation all that is within the perfect will of God for all His sons in Christ. The gracious Comforter, our Paraclete on earth even as is Christ in heaven, has been sent by the Father to dwell within us and to abide with us for ever, instructing, encouraging, and guiding us along our pilgrim way to the Father’s house. Blessed and manifold are His ministries in our behalf. . . . But the Holy Spirit can do nothing for those who refuse His ministry. Therefore, we are exhorted to “be filled with the Spirit” (Eph. 5:18); to walk after the Spirit rather than after the flesh (Gal. 5:16 ff.); to sow to the Spirit rather than to the flesh (6:7-9); to live after the Spirit rather than after the flesh (Rom. 8:13); and to be led of the Spirit, that we may be sons of God (v. 14). We are further warned against grieving the Spirit (Eph. 4:30), against quenching the Spirit (1 Thess. 5:19), and against ultimately doing despite unto the Spirit of grace (Heb. 10:29). All these solemn exhortations and warnings affirm that the believer has a definite personal responsibility with respect to the ministry of the Holy Spirit which he dare not ignore.²⁵

Philippians 1:6

Robert Shank:

Paul’s confidence for the Philippians that “he which hath begun a good work in you will go on perfecting it until the day of Jesus Christ” was not based on some inexorable divine law which must continue operative regardless of the conduct of the Philippians. Quite to the contrary, his confidence stemmed from his observation of the personal conduct of the Philippians themselves.

Many who have appealed to Philippians 1:6 in defense of the doctrine of unconditional security seem completely to have ignored the immediate context (and the larger context, as well). Consider verse 7: “It is right for me to think this of you all” (i.e., that God’s perfecting work in them would continue until the day of Christ) because they were standing fast with Paul in the defense and confirmation of the Gospel in the face of growing persecution which, even then, left Paul in bonds. . . .

God was at work in the Philippians to bring them to perfection in the day of Jesus Christ. But His work, far from obviating the necessity of effort on their part, demanded their cooperation and perseverance. This Paul urges upon them: “But whatever be the point that we have already reached, let us persevere in the same course” (3:16 Weymouth).

Paul, (3:3-17) bids them follow his example one who perseveres in simple faith in Christ alone, to the exclusion of all confidence in the flesh, “pressing onward toward the goal, to win the prize to which God through Jesus Christ is calling us upward” (3:14

²⁵ *Life in the Son*, 104-06.

Williams). He reminds them (vv. 18, 19) that he had repeatedly warned them against the example of apostates whose god was the satisfaction of carnal appetites, as indeed he now warns them, “even weeping” He exhorts them, in contrast to these sensual apostates, to continue to look heavenward in anticipation of the coming of the Savior (vv. 20, 21), in view of which certain prospect he warns them to “stand fast in the Lord” (4:1).²⁶

Hebrews 7:25

Grant Osborne:

As the eternal High Priest, Jesus had a “power” that no earthly high priest could imagine. Thus, he “is able to save completely those who come to God through him” through his eternal intercession for them (7:25 NIV). Here we are truly at the epicenter of assurance in the book. Attridge rightly argues that “to offer salvation ‘completely’ . . .” should be understood both modally and temporally, that is, Jesus saves both completely and continually. Lane says, “The present tense of [coming] reflects the current experience of the community and suggests that Jesus’ support is available at each critical moment. . . . The perfection and eternity of the salvation he mediates is guaranteed by the unassailable character of his priesthood.” There is no question that this teaches the security of the believer, seen in both the ongoing salvation he brings and the continual intercession he makes. Yet, is this security unconditional or conditional? Two factors favor the latter: (1) the two terms for “always” . . . have the idea more of “continual” than “eternal”; (2) the condition for experiencing the efficacy of Jesus’ powerful salvation is “coming to God through him.” Many would deny this is a condition, but in light of the strong warning passages throughout, there has to be the great emphasis on the necessity of perseverance in “coming to” (present tense . . .) God.²⁷

Hebrews 10:11-14

Robert Shank:

Many advocates of the doctrine of unconditional security have appealed to two verses in the tenth chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews: “By the which we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all . . . For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified” (Heb. 10:10, 14). A casual reading does seem to warrant the conclusion that the sanctification of the believer, once effected, is “once for all . . . for ever,” and therefore irrevocable. But let us examine the passage carefully.

²⁶ *Life in the Son*, 106-08.

²⁷ “Classical Arminian Response,” in *Four Views on the Warning Passages in Hebrews*, 226. So Gareth L. Cockerill: “The Son saves completely and forever those who continue (present tense) to come to God through him to receive the grace necessary for perseverance (4:16; 10:22)” (“Wesleyan Arminian Response,” in *Four Views on the Warning Passages in Hebrews*, 428).

Two great truths are in view in Hebrews 10:10-14 and context: Christ's offering of Himself as the eternally efficacious "one sacrifice for sins for ever," and the consequent sanctification and perfection of all who trust in Him. We shall establish two facts: (1) The circumstance, "once for all," is associated primarily with our Savior's offering of Himself as the eternal sacrifice for sin, and only secondarily with men; and (2) individual men participate in the benefit of Christ's once-for-all-atonement for the sins of mankind, not by virtue of a single once-for-all act of faith, but as they continually rely upon Him.

1. It is Christ's offering of Himself as the propitiatory sacrifice for sins of all men, rather the actual sanctification of specific persons, which is said to be "once for all . . . for ever." The contrast between the oft-repeated sacrifices of the old economy, which could "never take away sins," and Christ's effectual "one sacrifice for sins for ever" is a prominent theme of the Epistle to the Hebrews. Consider the following passages:

[Jesus] needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the people's: for this he did once, when he offered up himself (7:27).

Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us (9:12).

Nor yet that he should offer himself often, as the high priest entereth into the holy place every year with blood of others; For then must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world: but now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment: So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation (9:25-28).

And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins: But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God (10:11-12).

The sacrifice of Jesus on the Cross of Golgotha occurred at a specific time in a specific place. It was "once in the consumation of the ages . . . in the fullness of the time" that Jesus died on a hill outside Jerusalem. But what occurred at a precise time and place is independent of time and location. It is eternally contemporary. . . . What Jesus accomplished through the one offering of Himself is "once for all . . . for ever!"

While the circumstance, "once for all," has reference to Christ's offering of Himself as the one eternal sacrifice for sin, there is a secondary application to believers, as they trust in Him. It is secondary because it is a consequence of Christ's once-for-all act of sacrifice, and because it avails for me positively, as they meet necessary conditions. "The work is complete on the divine side . . . and gradually appropriated on man's side . . ." ²⁸

It may be objected that we are overlooking the significance of Hebrews 10:1, 2: "For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect. For then would they not have ceased to be offered? Because that the worshippers once purged should have had no more conscience of sins." Some

²⁸ Quoting B. F. Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, p. 345.

may wish to contend that, by contrast with the ineffectual Levitical sacrifices, it must be assumed that Christ's sacrifice does actually bestow an irrevocable once-for-all cleansing from all sins—past, present, and future—upon the man who once believes, whereby for him there shall be “no more conscience of sins.” This, indeed, many good men believe and teach. But the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews is not among them.

The writers point is not that, had one of the Levitical sacrifices somehow proved to be actually efficacious, the worshippers immediately would have experienced an irrevocable once-for-all cleansing from all sins—past, present, and future. His point is that, had a single sacrifice ever proved efficacious, for once²⁹ the worshippers would have been cleansed from sin—actually rather than merely ceremonially. Henceforth, instead of offering additional sacrifices, they would have appealed to the validity of the one sacrifice which had proved efficacious. The evidence of the efficacy of that particular sacrifice would have been the complete appeasement of the worshippers' “conscience of sins”—a circumstance which neither people nor high priest (9:9) ever experienced through the offering of the Levitical sacrifices, because of their lack of any intrinsic value (10:4). Far from removing their consciousness of sins and guilt, the sacrifices served rather to remind them of their sins (10:3).

The writer's point in Hebrews 10:1-4 is only that the Levitical sacrifices, being ineffectual and merely ceremonial, could accomplish no more than to anticipate a superior sacrifice which, by contrast, could actually expiate the sins of the people and remain perpetually efficacious. The “once-for-all” sacrifice of Jesus is the substance of which the Levitical sacrifices were but shadows.

2. That Hebrews 10:10-14 does not teach that men enter irrevocably into a state of sanctification before God through a single once-for-all experience of grace in Christ is indicated by two important considerations. First, it is implied through the use of the perfect participle *hēgiasmenoi* in v. 10 and the perfect passive participle *hagiazomenous* in v. 14, both of which possess a linear aspect and are concerned with the present moment. Their significance is fully apparent in Verkuyl's excellent rendering (italics mine): “By which divine will we are being made holy by means of the offering up once for all of the body of Jesus Christ. . . . For with a single offering He has forever perfected those who are being made holy.” Thus, while the efficacy of Christ's sacrifice stands eternally irrevocable, the benefit of His once-for-all sacrifice is progressively imparted to men as they draw near to God through Him and are thereby made holy before God, in Christ.

Consider Montgomery's translation of Hebrews 7:24, 25 (which properly reckons the verb tenses): “But [Christ], because of his abiding forever, hold his priesthood inviolable.

²⁹ Shank says in a footnote:

Numerous translators render *hapax* as “once for all” in Heb. 10:2. But they are in error, in the light of context. The word itself may mean either *once for all*, or *once, one time*. It is rendered simply as *once* in Heb. 9:7, 2 Cor. 11:25, Phil. 4:16, 1 Thess. 2:18, and Jude 5, in none of which instances could it retain any sensible meaning if rendered as *once for all*. Thus, *hapax* may sometimes be rendered *once for all*, and at other times must be rendered simply as *once*. Context must determine. The total message of Hebrews indicates that it must be rendered as *once* in 10:2. (*Life in the Son*, 124 fn. 3)

Hence he is able to continue saving to the uttermost those who are ever drawing near to God through him, seeing that he is ever living to intercede for them.” . . .

A second important evidence that Hebrews 10:10-14 does not teach that men enter irrevocably into a state of grace though a once-for-all act is the significance of immediate context. Having declared the fact of the perpetual efficacy of Christ’s once-for-all sacrifice, the writer immediately proceeds to exhort his readers “therefore” diligently to persevere: “Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus . . . [our] high priest over the house of God, let us keep on drawing near with a true heart in full assurance of faith. . . . Let us keep on holding fast the confession of hope without wavering, for he is faithful who promised. And let us keep on considering one another to incite to love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is, but encouraging one another; and so much the more as ye see the day [of His coming, v. 37] approaching. For if we sin willfully. . . .” The writer immediately launches one of the sternest of his numerous warnings against the peril of apostatizing—warnings which are addressed to “holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling,” for whom Jesus Christ is “the Apostle and High Priest of our confession” (3:1).

In view of the exhortations and warnings which immediately follow, it is obvious that the writer does not teach in Hebrews 10:10-14 that a single once-for-all act of faith ushers one into an irrevocable state of grace. Christ’s offering of Himself constitutes a once-for-all sacrifice for sin which remains eternally efficacious; but our participation in the benefit of His one sacrifice is progressive and wholly governed by our continuing in faith and submission to Him.³⁰

1 Peter 1:5

Robert Shank:

Peter writes of “an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you” (1 Peter 1:4). What a precious heritage! Nor is this the whole of the wondrous truth. Peter declares in the same sentence that we are “kept by the power of God unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time” (v. 5) What a glorious word! An everlasting heritage to be revealed in the last time, is now reserved in heaven for us who, by the mighty power of God, are kept for that heritage.

But did you notice that, in our quotation of 1 Peter 1:5, two words were omitted? Only two words; but quite essential. . . . The words? “Through faith!” Peter declares that we are “kept by the power of God *through faith!*” . . . We can ill afford to ignore the essential condition governing the keeping grace of God. . . .

Immediately following his reference to the necessity of faith as the condition whereby we are kept by the power of God unto final salvation, Peter encourages us to stand firm in our present trials and testings (vv. 6-9) and declares that it is on the basis of our *now believing* that we are *now receiving* the end of our faith, the salvation of our souls (vv.8-9). We can trust Christ to save us, and we can trust Christ to keep us all the way; but we

³⁰ *Life in the Son*, 121-26.

must trust Him—all the way. The necessity of keeping ourselves in the saving grace of Christ is quite as much a doctrine of the Holy Scriptures as the power and faithfulness of Christ to save and keep all who trust in him.³¹

1 John 2:19

Robert Shank:

“They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us” (1 John 2:19). Some have asserted that John’s statements indicates that all who are false professors will eventually withdraw from the company of true believers (which is contrary to many passages of Scripture) and that all who withdraw never were true believers (which is contrary to both the warning passages and the record of actual instances of apostasy). With respect to the antichrists cited by John, there are two possibilities. Their professions of faith may have been false from the beginning; or, they may have been actual apostates who abandoned faith and withdrew from Christ. Either circumstance could be true. John asserts only that, at the time they withdrew from the spiritual fellowship of true believers, “they were not of us;” otherwise they would have continued in fellowship with the faithful.

Let it be observed that, whatever may have been the circumstance of the antichrists in view, John was writing of specific instances, rather than stating a universal principle. Let us beware of the fallacy of assuming that all truth can and must be compressed into a single sentence of Scripture, and that the precise circumstance in one instance of defection necessarily governs the circumstance in all other instances. There are some whose professions of faith are false from the beginning, and there are others who abandon faith and withdraw from a saving relationship with Christ. The Scriptures recognize both circumstances, and the precise circumstance of the antichrists cited by John determines nothing with respect to the circumstances in other instances. Let us observe that, after citing the tragic record of the antichrists who denied that Jesus is the Christ (vv. 18-23), John urgently warns his children in the faith to beware the peril of succumbing to the seductions of the antichrists by embracing their fatal heresy, thus failing to retain the true saving Gospel and to remain in the Son and in the Father, sharing the eternal life in Him (vv. 24-28).³²

³¹ *Life in the Son*, 272, 279. Robert Picirilli:

While it is true that 1 Peter 1:5 expresses confidence in God’s power as a means of keeping, it also indicates in the same breath that faith is the condition the regenerate must meet for God’s keeping power to be effectively applied to them. In fact this verse is stronger for the Arminian position than for that of the Calvinist. (*Grace, Faith, Free Will*, 202)

³² *Life in the Son*, 261-62.

Jude 1, 24

I. Howard Marshall:

Although Jude envisages the possibility of apostasy as a serious threat to the spiritual life of his readers, he by no means believes that it is a danger into which Christians must necessarily fall, particularly if they take care to continue in the faith with all the help that God gives to them.

(1) He warns the Church against the possibility of false teaching taking them by surprise (Jude 16-19). . . . Jude appeals to apostolic teaching predicting the rise of apostasy [This suggests that] the simplest antidote to false teaching is to abide by the apostolic tradition.

(2) This is reinforced by Jude's encouragement to his readers to build themselves up on their most holy faith (Jude 20). . . .

(3) The readers are also exhorted to pray in the Holy Spirit (Jude 20b). We are to think here of guidance by the Spirit of God. . . .

(4) Through obedience to the two previous precepts, the readers are to keep themselves in the love of God (Jude 21). Although the readers are said to be kept by (or 'for') Jesus Christ (Jude 2), they must also keep themselves in the love of God, i.e. in the love which God shows; those who wander away from the faith can fall away from the sphere of divine love and protection.

(5) As they thus keep themselves in the sphere of divine love the readers will receive the mercy of Jesus Christ which leads to eternal life. Here the vocabulary undoubtedly suggests looking forward to the parousia when Christ will display His mercy and grant eternal life to believers. Once again, therefore, the need for perseverance is inculcated.

(6) Finally, in the concluding ascription of glory (Jude 24f.) all the emphasis is placed upon the keeping power of God. He is able to guard believers so that they do not stumble, and to cause them to stand blameless before His glorious presence on the day when those who have fallen short of His glory will be condemned. Thus the end of the Epistle stresses the fact of God's activity in preserving believers from falling in the same way as the beginning where the readers are addressed as those who are called, loved, and kept by God for Jesus Christ.

Perseverance accordingly is closely linked with the activity of God in believers. Edification takes place by means of faith, which is a gift of God; prayer is made in the Spirit; the readers are to remain in the love of God and await the mercy of Christ; and ultimately it is God who keeps them from falling. At the same time, perseverance depends upon specific *acts* of Christian discipline and devotion; a person who bestirs himself to do these things will not fall.³³

³³ *Kept by the Power of God: A Study of Perseverance and Falling Away*, 166-67.