

Paths to Apostasy

Heeding the real danger of apostasy of the genuine believer (Heb. 12:25)

I have long been aware that many Scriptures seem to warn of the real danger of falling away from saving faith. As a former Calvinist and holder to the doctrine of Perseverance and Preservation of the Saints, I assumed these warnings to be directed at the false professor and not the genuine believer. I have since come to question that assumption. Other Calvinists would argue the warnings are the means of God's perseverance even though we know that the thing we are warned of is presumably an impossibility. But why should we presume it is impossible to stop believing in Christ or to abandon our faith in Christ? Besides the numerous passages that speak of the assurance of the believer, the supporting Calvinist doctrines of Total Depravity (inability until regeneration), Unconditional Election and Irresistible Grace render this doctrine a necessary conclusion. If we are unable to believe in the first place and God unconditionally chooses who will be made to believe and irresistibly causes them to believe, and actively preserves and protects them from unbelief, then how could they ever cease to believe? It's not up to us, but God alone! Monergism and determinism, hallmarks of Calvinist Theology, leaves no room for possibility, only inevitability for what God causes to come to pass.

But rather than challenge these foundational doctrines and philosophies, I would like to focus on perhaps the most practical of the "Doctrines of Grace", namely Perseverance of the Saints. I affirm that perseverance is essential but I challenge the notion that it is inevitable. Thus, in the interest of precision, I will refer to our subject as the doctrine of Inevitable Perseverance. Calvinists may object to this term, perhaps preferring "Effectual", "Certain" or even "Irresistible" Perseverance, but I chose it because it speaks to my fundamental objection to the doctrine, that it can breed complacency. And if something is effectual, certain or irresistible, then it is also inevitable. To be sure, godly Calvinists, of which I know many, can effectively guard themselves against this pitfall by the grace of God made available to them. But if the Scriptures do not teach Inevitable Perseverance, we not only violate God's Word but undermine its force to warn us of the real and full danger of apostasy (i.e., a complete falling away from saving faith), when we teach this doctrine to others and ourselves.

To be clear, salvation is by faith, not works. Therefore, apostasy is by unbelief (lack of faith), not sinful acts (works). Some texts do not distinguish between the sinful acts which are evidence of unbelief and the unbelief itself (e.g., Gal. 5:21). I believe a genuine believer can struggle with these same sins yet remain saved. The determining factor is not how many sins we commit but whether we have a living (abiding) relationship with Christ. The key question we are considering is whether a true believer can cease to believe and if so, how? I am persuaded that the Scriptures describe many potential paths to unbelief or apostasy that we do well to avoid. Many of these Scriptures could apply to those who profess faith but are not

actually saved, which according to Jesus is a reality for many (Matt. 7:22). But just because they can apply to this condition does not mean they apply exclusively to this condition. Some of these Scriptures clearly imply the reader is genuinely saved, yet is still warned to avoid falling away. This is seen most comprehensively in the book of Hebrews but the concept is repeated consistently throughout the New Testament as this paper will demonstrate.

If it is impossible for one truly saved to fall away permanently, then the warnings lose much of their force and motivation for the informed believer. They become merely hypothetical scenarios or academic thought experiments because we “know” that we can’t actually fall away. If the warnings are to false believers, the warnings are unnecessary and confusing. A warning to a false believer is an unnecessary warning because they do not actually possess the thing which they are warned against forfeiting. It is confusing because it wrongly gives the false professor the impression they do possess something which they do not actually possess.

Certainly, believers should examine their faith to see if it is genuine. Peter exhorts us in 2 Peter 1:10 “make your calling and election sure.” To be sure the Scriptures warn professing people to make sure they are really saved. But I believe the Scriptures also warn genuine believers to avoid becoming unbelievers (apostate). But as we will see, the Scriptures often address this issue as a warning of something to avoid rather than a doctrine to believe.

The wise disciple of Jesus will both examine himself to see if he is really in the faith and even as he is assured of the genuineness of his present faith will nonetheless continue to heed the warnings of Scripture (cf. Heb. 12:25) regarding the real danger of falling away from that faith in the future. This sober reality is of course balanced by the encouraging promises of Scripture that no outside force can remove us from faith against our will (John 10:28-30; Rom. 8:38-39).

Since faith is the only condition for salvation and I believe that faith is a grace enabled freewill choice, so too is our choice to persevere in faith a freewill choice. God does not remove our freewill after we believe. And just as the Christian is given the ability to resist temptation (1 Cor. 10:13) yet is not guaranteed that they will resist every temptation, so too God gives us the ability to continue in faith yet warns us of the possibility that we may not continue if we neglect the means of perseverance prescribed and provided by the Word and indwelling Spirit. It is true that upon our glorification in heaven we are changed in such a way that we will not be able to sin anymore. But since that is not the reality now, while we are alive in this life, why should we think our ability to choose unbelief is taken away before our ability to sin is taken away?

Rest assured; God gives us all we need to avoid apostasy. No one becomes apostate apart from their will. Only those who want to reject Christ will do so. To be clear, we do not rely upon our own will power or resources to persevere. Rather just as when we first believed, we continue

to trust in Christ by diligently pursuing the one who alone can preserve us. But if we choose to walk away from that one who preserves, there no longer remains any power to persevere.

The warnings in Scripture are indeed one of the means by which God preserves us, but to take them as infallible means robs them of their import. Based on the following texts I conclude there are many “paths to apostasy” which we believers must guard ourselves against. This would truly be an impossible task if not for the aid of the Holy Spirit. We are kept by the power of God yet warned of the real danger of apostasy. Here is a list of some of the paths to apostasy we find in Scripture (listed in order of the NT books):

1) **Losing your taste** and becoming worthless.

Matt. 5:13 “You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has **lost its taste**, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet.”

Jesus is speaking to His followers in the Sermon on the Mount. He warns them not to lose their saltiness. Jesus does not elaborate as to what he means by this loss of taste, but it is clearly not good. It is not clear what Jesus means by calling us salt of the earth. It seems to apply uniquely to believers. Perhaps the flavor speaks to our ability to rejoice in persecution from the previous verse. Many think it speaks of our preserving influence through preaching the gospel. This fits with the following text on being lights and examples to others. But whatever is meant, it seems to describe the life and ministry of a believer. So, a believer can lose his joy or effectiveness, but what is the result? The result also seems more definitive and destructive than simply the loss of reward. This text is not definitive but the most natural reading is that the one who loses his taste suffers a consequence of harsh judgement (trampled) not just loss of reward.

This text does not address how one loses their taste as salt but the greater context of the sermon suggests that failing to build your house on the words of Christ by believing and receiving them by faith will result in a sandy foundation that eventually falls (cf. Matt. 7:24-27). This is not just something we do at the moment of salvation but something we must continue to do throughout our life as a believer.

2) **Not removing temptations to sin.**

Matt. 5:29 ²⁹ If your right eye causes you to **sin**, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into **hell**.

Jesus in speaking to His followers in the Sermon on the Mount, warns them of the dangers of sin. The end result is **hell**. Jesus does not warn them they are already bound for hell unless they repent. He warns them to avoid sin lest the end result is damnation. As I

have said, we do not fall away because we commit sin. We fall away because of unbelief. Sin is the evidence of unbelief just as spiritual fruit is the evidence of new life in Christ. A Christian who “struggles” with sin can still have assurance of salvation because of the struggle. The apostate on the other hand, no longer considers sin a struggle. Their previous discomfort with sin was evidence of belief and their present comfort with sin is likewise evidence of unbelief. But we must not take comfort in the fact that we struggle with sin or that our conscience convicts us, for sin which persists leads to hardening of our heart and ultimately unbelief.

3) Being **unwilling to forgive** others.

Matt. 6:14-15 ¹⁴ For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, ¹⁵ but if you do **not forgive** others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

On its face, this passage appears to teach that our continued salvation (forgiveness of sins) is conditioned upon our ongoing willingness to forgive others. This would undermine our Protestant doctrine of salvation by faith alone. The solution is understanding the heart motive behind unforgiveness. Why would a forgiven person be unwilling to forgive others of a relative lesser debt? This is the very scenario described by Jesus in the Parable of the Wicked (or Unforgiving) Servant in Matt. 18:23-35 (see below). Unforgiveness is incompatible with salvation. The one who will not forgive proves they are not presently submitting to Christ by faith.

To be clear, this text does not prove that the one who is not forgiven was previously forgiven. It could be that Jesus is speaking of unbelievers who pray for forgiveness but are unwilling to forgive their neighbor. Such prayers will not be heard by God. However, Jesus is speaking to His followers in this Sermon on the Mount. It is likely that some of His followers were not yet saved by faith, but surely some of them were. Are we to think that Jesus has only the false followers in mind here?

4) **Not responding in obedience to the words of Christ** and thus not building your life upon a firm foundation.

Matt. 7:26-27 ²⁶ And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. ²⁷ And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it.”

Jesus concludes his sermon on the mount with this summary warning. If we don't listen to Jesus and apply his teaching to our lives then even if we initially believe in Christ, when the storms of adversity come, we will not have the requisite foundation to withstand the

trial. Our house will fall, and great will be that fall. The result does not appear to be merely superficial or the loss of rewards but is catastrophic (great).

- 5) **Being unwilling to show mercy and forgive** your brother from your heart.

Matt. 18:32-35 ³² Then his master summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. ³³ And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?' ³⁴ And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt. ³⁵ So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you **do not forgive your brother from your heart.**"

This parable was told in response to Peter's question about forgiveness. The point is that mercy and forgiveness toward others is the appropriate response from those who have been forgiven by God. Denying that same mercy and forgiveness to others is totally unacceptable. The king's outrage was justified because his servant had in fact been forgiven. If the servant was not really forgiven, the king would not have responded as he did. Clearly the one forgiven was saved (truly forgiven), yet in the end he was judged as an unbeliever because he did not bear the proper fruit of one forgiven. His unwillingness to forgive others showed he was not continuing in a restored relationship with the king but had turned away from the king and forgotten the mercy he received.

Once again, Jesus is directing this warning to Peter and the disciples who were saved and forgiven by faith in Christ. He is not directing this warning in v.35 to false professors. And the consequences of this unbelief characterized by unforgiveness is more than loss of reward. The servant's forgiveness was revoked because it was conditioned upon a continued restored relationship with the king based on faithful reception of the king's mercy.

If you acknowledge this warning is to believers and we are to take it seriously, but at the same time you believe you are already saved and cannot possibly become like the wicked servant who would not forgive, then how can this knowledge not undermine the urgency of the warning?

- 6) Falling away in **time of testing** or allowing the **cares and riches and pleasures** of life to choke us spiritually.

Luke 8:13-14 ¹³ And the ones on the rock are those who, when they **hear** the word, **receive** it with joy. But these have no root; they **believe for a while**, and in **time of testing fall away.** ¹⁴ And as for what fell among the thorns, they are those who **hear**, but as they go on their way they are **choked** by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their **fruit does not mature.**

The deficiency described here was not in the quality of faith (believing) but its longevity and maturity (lack of perseverance). The lack of fruit at the harvest time was a failure to mature, not a failure to hear and believe initially. Ultimately the only fruit that matters to the farm is that which can be harvested and used. Fruit that looks good on the vine but never makes it into the belly is useless. Thus, the fruit of this analogy is best seen as a harvest at the day of judgement rather than progressive good works along the path of our sanctification.

Some disagree that the 2nd and 3rd soils produce any fruit. They argue that a faith based on emotion (joy) alone lacks the roots provided only by a regenerate heart (good soil) and thus this type of “fruit” is best described as a false faith, like the demons who believe (James 2:19). And likewise, the lack of fruit of maturity is an indication of false faith since maturity is a necessary result of genuine faith, not an optional progression. Yet the text says these people do have fruit. The problem is not the lack of any fruit but the lack of maturing.

Can an unbeliever bear fruit? I don't think so. Can a believer bear fruit yet never mature? This is a critical question in the debate. I believe many of these texts warn that such a scenario is descriptive of unbelief, not just a lack of maturity. If we equate maturity with perseverance, the problem is compounded: If maturity is an inevitable result of genuine faith then there is no need to pursue it. It will happen whether we cooperate or not. We might call this monergistic sanctification. Yet many Calvinists acknowledge that our sanctification after salvation is in fact a synergistic process. We must cooperate with the Holy Spirit in order to mature. They claim if we do not mature, we will lose our rewards (though not our eternal life). But other texts which use this farming analogy make it clear that unfruitful plants are destroyed by fire, they are useless to the farmer (e.g. John 15:6; Heb. 6:7-8).

Here's the point of the parable as I see it: Jesus is explaining to his disciples why they see different results in evangelism and discipleship. He is not merely explaining the cause of a phenomenon. He is equipping us to strategically prepare for the obstacles we will face in ministry. The take away from his parable seems to be, “root your faith and avoid the thorns” rather than “hope you are given roots and someone else weeds out the thorns because there is nothing you can do about it.” To be fair, a Calvinist would not phrase it that way. They would say, “root your faith and avoid the thorns knowing it is God who wills and works in you.” But essentially, the Calvinist is also saying, “do your part to avoid falling away even though you know that it is impossible.” This seems intellectually problematic.

- 7) **Looking back** to your old life with an intent to return to it.

Luke 9:61-62 ⁶¹Yet another said, "I will follow you, Lord, but let me first say farewell to those at my home." ⁶²Jesus said to him, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and **looks back** is fit for the kingdom of God."

Jesus' expression 'hand to the plow' seems to mean faithful obedience to Him. To be clear, Jesus is speaking to one who had not yet put his hand to the plow, not yet saved. Jesus is speaking hypothetically in the sense that if the man is to follow him, it must involve a lifelong commitment, not just a temporary one. We must not think of our salvation as a commitment at a moment in time but rather an ongoing commitment. It could be argued that looking back does not forfeit the kingdom but is simply inappropriate for those in the kingdom, but the sense seems stronger to me. This is not a definitive text but it suggests a serious consequence for the one who has put his hand to the plow, if he looks back. And again, if this is just a hypothetical scenario with no actual potentiality, then how is it useful?

- 8) **Not continuing to abide** in Christ.

John 15:6 ⁶If anyone does not **abide** in me he is **thrown away** like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.

The verb tense for abide (present participle) describes an ongoing action as perseverance requires. The ultimate consequence is final and eternal fire, not loss of reward. How can one with false faith be characterized as ever abiding in Christ? To continue abiding, we must have been abiding. Jesus is speaking specifically to the 11 apostles (not Judas). If Jesus thinks they need to hear this warning, then shouldn't we be warning all followers of Jesus, not just the false ones like Judas? You might say, "yes, because we can't infallibly discern between the true and false believers". But Jesus could, yet he also warned those who were genuinely saved.

- 9) Being drawn away by **false teachers**.

Acts 20:29-30 ²⁹I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock;³⁰ and from **among your own selves** will arise men speaking twisted things, to **draw away** the **disciples** after them.

These certainly could include false disciples, but only a presumed position would limit it to such a category. The natural reading is that disciples (both true and false) are at least potentially being drawn away. But in reality, false disciples are already away and only revealing their true colors. Only true disciples can be truly drawn away, positionally speaking. This text does not say these wolves will be successful but if it is impossible to draw away a genuine believer, and false believers are already away, what is the purpose

of this statement? Why should we be concerned? Yet the choice of metaphor (fierce wolves) suggest we should indeed be concerned.

Sadly, some may quickly label me and others who question the doctrine of inevitable perseverance as one of these wolves without first carefully considering what the Scriptures say. They trust the interpretation of those who taught them the doctrine rather than studying the Scripture for themselves. Not only do they risk complacency by this approach but they wrongly condemn their fellow brothers in Christ as an unbeliever. For surely these wolves are not saved. To be fair, I also believe those who teach Inevitable Perseverance are wrong and thus teaching something false, but I do not consider them wolves. This is a debate among believers. My concern is that the doctrine of Inevitable Perseverance may lead to complacency but if my brothers who believe this are careful, they can avoid the pitfall. But the best way to avoid the pitfall in my opinion is to leave the doctrine entirely.

- 10) **Ignoring revelation** by failing to honor God or give thanks but instead **indulging in futile and unwise thinking** which leads to a darkened heart, rejection of God, sexual immorality, perversion and idolatry. God in turn responds in judgment by giving us over to the impure lusts of our heart.

Rom. 1:21-25 ²¹ For although they **knew** God, they did not **honor** him as God or give **thanks** to him, but they became **futile** in their **thinking**, and their foolish hearts were **darkened**. ²² Claiming to be wise, they became **fools**, ²³ and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. ²⁴ Therefore God **gave them up** in the **lusts of their hearts to impurity**, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, ²⁵ because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.

This is not a warning in the strictest sense, but certainly a cautionary tale! I am not suggesting that these folks were saved initially, but this text lays out a principle that no matter your position, things will get worse if you ignore your creator. Are we to think believers are exempt from this consequence? While Calvinists might concede that hypothetically this principle could apply to believers, they yet insist practically it is impossible. How then does this position foster urgency in the believer? Does it not dismiss the principle as irrelevant?

- 11) Earning the **wages** (consequences) **of ongoing, unrepentant sin** in a believer's life is death.

Rom. 6:23a ²³ For the wages of **sin** is death...

The context of chapters 6-8 is sanctification, not salvation. This death could refer to chastisement, as in the sin unto death (1 John 5:16), but the plainer sense is spiritual death (i.e., eternal damnation). Calvinists agree this is the sense, but change the context from sanctification to salvation, applying it to those who never knew Christ. But if you are already dead, your sin can't make you more dead. But if you are alive (born again) then sin can lead to death. Only those living are concerned with dying.

The context here is also primarily pastoral not doctrinal. Paul is exhorting believers in Rome to avoid sin, why? Because the wages of sin is death. Paul is not primarily concerned with establishing the fact that there are two types of people in the world (believers who have life and unbelievers who are dead) such that physical death is merely the final evidence of our true spiritual condition. No, Paul is presenting spiritual death as the ultimate motivator for believers to avoid sin. Sin leads to unbelief which results in separation from Christ which results in eternal death. We should be cautious about explaining way through mere intellectual theology, that which Paul intends to motivate pastorally.

12) **Living according to the flesh**

Rom. 8:12-13 ¹² Therefore, brethren, we are debtors—not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. ¹³ For **if you live according to the flesh you will die**; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

Paul is speaking to believers warning them not to live according to the flesh. A lifestyle of continual indulgence of the flesh leads to bondage to sin (cf. Rom. 6) and ultimately death. It is not that one sinful choice means you die spiritually. But if you don't cooperate with the Spirit to put to death the sinful desires of your flesh, it will eventually destroy you. Paul offers no assurance to his readers that they will certainly do this. Rather he exhorts them of their obligation to do so.

13) **Not enduring suffering** with Christ.

Rom. 8:16-17 The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs -- heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, **if indeed we suffer with Him**, that we may also be glorified together.

We are heirs, but we will not share in that eternal inheritance of glory if we wither like the plant from the seed in stony soil when trouble comes. Our glorification is conditioned upon our perseverance through suffering. Glorification is not a reward, it is the final result of our salvation (see v. 30). If we are not glorified then we are not saved in the end. Are you willing to suffer with Him? If not, it suggests your faith is not genuine. Perhaps it was never genuine, but what if you were willing to suffer at one time but no longer? Why

must we conclude that your prior faith which did endure suffering was a false faith? This text offers no such indication. On the contrary, it establishes a way for confirming the genuineness of past faith without offering a guarantee against apostasy. Moreover, we should note the context is an exhortation to believers who are presumed to have the Spirit.

14) **Unbelief**, **not fearing** the danger of apostasy, **not continuing** in God's kindness.

Romans 11:20-23 They were broken off because of their **unbelief**, but you stand fast through faith. So do not become proud, but **fear**.²¹ For if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will he spare you.²² Note then the kindness and the severity of God: severity toward those who have fallen, but God's kindness to you, provided you **continue** in his kindness. Otherwise you too will be cut off.²³ And even they, if they do not **continue** in their **unbelief**, will be grafted in, for God has the power to graft them in again.

Jews were broken off from God's promise of salvation because of unbelief. Gentiles were grafted in and stand by faith. It could be argued that those Jews broken off were not truly saved, only part of God's physical covenant with Israel. But those grafted in must be genuine believers (they stand by faith), yet they are clearly warned to fear and continue in God's kindness lest they too be cut off. And unbelieving Jews can be grafted in again, despite their previous unbelief.

15) **Not holding fast** to the gospel, believing in vain.

1 Cor. 15:1-2 Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you **received** and in which you stand, by which also you are **saved, if you hold fast** that word which I preached to you -- unless you **believed in vain**.

Notice they received (believed) the gospel, they stand in the gospel truth, but they do not necessarily hold fast (persevere). If so, Paul says their initial belief (faith) was in vain because it did not last. Is Paul speaking of a hypothetical impossibility? Why would he do that? Would their failure to hold fast imply that their receiving, standing, being saved and believing were not genuine? I understand the idea of a false faith, but what about a false salvation? That is a contradiction in terms. Therefore, I conclude these brethren are saved but they need to hold fast lest their genuine faith become vain because they fail to persevere.

16) Becoming **disqualified** because of sin, the **test** of being **in Christ**.

2 Cor. 13:5 **Examine** yourselves as to whether you are **in the faith**. **Test** yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you? -- unless indeed you are **disqualified**.

Paul is speaking to those who think they are already saved but have been struggling with sin. He wants them to make sure they are presently in Christ and calls them to examine and test themselves. He does not elaborate how to do that, but implies they should know – perhaps by the inward testimony of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:16). Paul qualifies his confidence that they know with the possibility that they are in fact disqualified (disapproved, or fail the test). The purpose of the test is to evaluate present salvation not to judge whether they were previously in Christ. From a practical standpoint, their past condition is irrelevant. All that matters is their present condition.

And if they are in fact disqualified because of sin which is the test of unbelief, does this mean there is no hope for them? No, later in the chapter Paul explains his desire is for their restoration, to build them up again. But he acknowledges that their sin may have led them to a place of unbelief (apostasy or disqualification). It is a real possibility.

- 17) **Seeking justification through the law** is a rejection of Christ's work and grace so we become **severed** from Christ and fall away from his grace.

Gal. 5:4 ⁴You are **severed** from Christ, you who would be **justified by the law**; you have fallen away from grace.

This is phrased as a hypothetical, but it was a reality in Galatia. That's why Paul brings it up! To be severed from Christ requires that we be previously attached to him. To fall away from grace requires that we were previously in grace. Since we are saved by grace, to fall away from it is to reject grace and thus to fall away from the benefits of grace, salvation itself. To be severed from Christ implies the breaking of a substantial bond and union with Christ, previously enjoyed.

- 18) **Sowing to your flesh** and **growing weary in doing good**.

Gal. 6:7-9 ⁷Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. ⁸For he who **sows to his flesh** will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who **sows to the Spirit** will of the Spirit reap everlasting life. ⁹And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.

The context here is Paul's instructions to the church on how to deal with believers who have become "overtaken in any trespass." Paul warns that continuing to indulge in this trespass (i.e. sowing to the flesh) will ultimately lead to corruption. Is this corruption merely chastening or loss of reward? No. It is contrasted with those who sow to the Spirit who reap everlasting life. If we continually without repentance, sow to the flesh, we will eventually reap what we have sown, corruption, the opposite of everlasting life.

He also warns us not to grow weary in this sowing to the Spirit. Apparently, Paul believed one could sow to the Spirit for a while but then grow tired and give up. We will only reap everlasting life if we do not grow weary in doing good. This does not mean we earn our salvation by good works. It means we persevere in faith which produces good works.

19) **Not continuing in the faith.**

Col. 1:21-23 ²¹ And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, ²² he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, ²³ **if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting** from the hope of the gospel that you heard...

Notice those who are saved are encouraged with a future hope that is conditioned upon their continuing in the faith. If it is guaranteed that they will continue in the faith, why include this qualifier? We should note that the “if” is a first class condition which can be translated “since”. It is assuming the condition to be true. But it could also be rendered, “assuming you continue in the faith.” The fact that it is a first class condition does not change that fact that it is a conditional statement. Even if we concede that this is a statement of confident certainty, “since you certainly will continue in the faith”, there is still an implied warning. Some of the Colossians certainly will persevere. The question is, are you one of them? This is more than a curiosity. It is a call to persevere considering the dreadful alternative.

20) **Rejecting faith and conscience** making shipwreck of your faith. In this text we have specific examples of men who fell away.

1 Tim. 1:19-20 ¹⁹ holding **faith** and a good **conscience**. By **rejecting** this, some have made **shipwreck** of their faith, ²⁰ among whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan that they **may** learn not to blaspheme.

It could be that this was only temporary, but we have no record of their restoration. If ultimate restoration is assured, Paul makes no mention of it. He does imply they may yet learn to not blaspheme but this is hardly an assurance. There is inherent uncertainty in the phrase. If they were false professors, then in what sense was their false faith shipwrecked? It seems irrelevant. Of course their false faith is shipwrecked. It was never seaworthy to begin with! I hope these two are in heaven today, but the text does not give us much confidence. It does offer a serious warning however that we do well to heed.

21) Becoming **devoted to deceitful spirits and demonic teaching.**

1 Tim. 4:1 Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will **depart from the faith** by devoting themselves to **deceitful spirits** and **teachings of demons**

Again, we see that some will depart from the faith, this time with absolute certainty. This could be false professing people, but you would only draw that conclusion if you came to the text with the assumption that those with true faith can never depart from it ultimately. The text does not suggest this departing is only temporary. To depart from the faith implies that they were previously in the faith. Can you be in the faith yet unsaved?

22) **Denying Christ** because of **faithlessness**.

2 Timothy 2:11b-13 If we have died with him, we will also live with him; ¹²if we endure, we will also reign with him; if we **deny him**, he also will deny us; ¹³if we are **faithless**, he remains faithful—for he cannot deny himself.

This is more of a description of unbelief than an actual path to apostasy. Paul calls this a trustworthy saying and addresses it to his believing audience (Timothy) and himself by the pronoun “we”. Paul acknowledges that if he (or Timothy) denies Christ, then Christ will deny him. Is Paul merely speaking hypothetically? Does he believe that it is actually an impossibility for that to occur? Some point to verse 13 as evidence that even if we no longer believe (are faithless) God will still save us because He is faithful. But in what sense then is God denying us yet saving us? And notice that the one God is faithful to is Himself not the one who denies Him. No, the only faithful interpretation here is that Paul wants Timothy to understand that God denies those who deny Him. So don’t deny Him! Don’t renounce your faith. Persevere to the end and you will not be denied.

23) **Not paying close attention** to true teaching/doctrine. Hebrews is full of warnings, one of the main themes of the book.

Heb. 2:1 Therefore we must pay much **closer** attention to what we have heard, lest we **drift away** from it.

A Calvinist might explain this text by saying, “If God did not irresistibly cause us to pay close attention, we would drift away.” But the text is much more conditional than that. In fact, the writer says we have not been paying close enough attention. We need to do better. Apostasy is often a slow process almost unnoticed by the individual. When you are drifting you don’t even realize you are moving. That’s why we need to pay closer attention! Some paths to apostasy are subtle and take time to manifest the full effect.

24) **Lack of self-examination** and **brotherly accountability** resulting in **unchecked sin** which deceptively leads to a hardened heart and ultimately an evil unbelieving heart.

Heb. 3:12-13 ¹²Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, **unbelieving** heart, leading you to **fall away** from the living God. ¹³But exhort one another every day,

as long as it is called “today,” that none of you may be **hardened** by the **deceitfulness of sin**.

Notice the writer is addressing his brothers in Christ. We need each other in this struggle with sin. Accountability and brotherly exhortation are some of the means by which God preserves us, but it is not framed here as an inevitable outcome but as rather a real danger. That is why we take the exhortation seriously. As a former Calvinist I had to suspend or compartmentalize my “knowledge” of the doctrine of inevitable perseverance in order to take the threat seriously and avail myself of the means of perseverance (like accountability) despite the logical contradiction.

- 25) Not responding to the good news in faith and therefore **not striving to enter His rest** which the good news provides but rather **hardening your heart** in **disobedience** to God’s voice.

Heb. 4:2,6,7,11 ²For good news came to us just as to them, but the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united by faith with those who listened...⁶Since therefore it remains for some to **enter** it, and those who formerly received the good news **failed to enter** because of **disobedience**,⁷ again he appoints a certain day, “Today,” saying through David so long afterward, in the words already quoted, “Today, if you hear his voice, do not **harden your hearts**.”...¹¹Let us therefore **strive** to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of **disobedience**.

Most believe the rest spoken of is trusting in the finished work of Christ rather than working to earn your salvation through law keeping. This is why believing cannot be considered a work in which to boast, even if we are exercising free will in our believing. What better antonym for work is there than rest? Some argue that those who fell in the wilderness were not saved (united by faith) while others argue they were saved and just lost rewards. I suspect it was a mixture of both. Moses died in the wilderness too, but surely he was saved. But in any case, the wilderness generation is a cautionary tale to us who are saved. We must strive lest we fall by the same sort of disobedience. What was a danger for the Jews is also a danger for the believer. It is possible that this danger is just loss of reward, but that is a dangerous assumption not supported by the text. The clear exhortation to believers is “do not harden your hearts...strive to enter that rest...so that no one may fall.” The exhortation implies that believers can harden their hearts, stop striving to enter that rest and as a result fall. Nothing in this text suggests these things are impossible for a true believer. It is special pleading and eisegesis to assume so.

- 26) **Not maturing** in faith but rather becoming **dull of hearing** because you are **not submitting to the constant practice of discernment training**.

Heb. 5:11-14 ¹¹ About this we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become **dull of hearing**. ¹² For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, ¹³ for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. ¹⁴ But solid food is for the **mature**, for those who have their powers of **discernment trained by constant practice** to distinguish good from evil.

We can't coast as Christians. We have to grow or it shows we are no longer alive. The audience was already in danger! This is not merely hypothetical. This text does not specifically say that the results of dull hearing is spiritual death, but this is the pretext for our next text in Chapter 6.

- 27) Being **sluggish** and **not earnest in our work** of love since (or while) we crucify the Son of God once again to our own harm and hold Him up to contempt, making it impossible for us to repent (while in this state of rejection).

Heb. 6:4-6, 11-12 ⁴ For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, ⁵ and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, ⁶ and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt... ¹¹ And we desire each one of you to show the same **earnestness** to have the full assurance of hope until the end, ¹² so that you may not be **sluggish**, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

We do not work to earn or maintain salvation, but it does take effort to avoid the dangers of apostasy. It is not the effort that secures our salvation but rather it is the proof that we still believe. As long as we remain in the state of unbelief, fallen away from the faith that saves, it is indeed impossible to repent. We must first return in simple faith (rest), then we can repent and be restored in Christ. I don't think this speaks of a "no second chance salvation." But if it does, talk about a serious warning! Yet even still the author is confident of better things in their case, and so should we be both cautious and confident in our faith. We don't need a doctrine of impossibility to have confidence in our salvation.

The writer goes on to use a farming analogy to explain what the farmer (God) does with land that accepts his grace (rain) yet bears no fruit. That land is cursed and burned because it is worthless. Some argue that this speaks of our works which will be burned, though we are personally saved from the fire (cf. 1 Cor. 3:15). But the analogy speaks of a curse, not just burning of the thorns and thistles. And it is the land itself which is burned and cursed, not just the thorns. Furthermore, the author offers no assurance that they will be saved despite their thorns and thistles. He does speak confidently of their

salvation, but this is because he believes they will persevere and bear fruit useful to the farmer, not that they will fail to mature but be saved anyway. That concept is foreign to the Scriptures. In 1 Corinthians 3:15, the ones whose works are burned up are the spiritual leaders who unlike Paul unwisely build on the foundation of Christ with inferior flammable materials. That text does not describe believers whose lives are void of any spiritual fruit but rather a mixture of good and bad building materials. This farming analogy is different. The thorns are not weeded out to save the good fruit, the entire field is burned because the harvest is completely destroyed and worthless.

At the end of the chapter the author encourages his readers to hold fast to the hope which is a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul. But even this strong encouragement is tied to the need for us to hold fast. The anchor (the promise of God) never moves, but will we hold fast? That is the question. The author was “confident” God would do His part but not complacent regarding their part.

- 28) **Deliberate ongoing sin** which rejects and **profanes** the blood which sanctified us.

Heb. 10:26-29 ²⁶ For if we go on **sinning deliberately** after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, ²⁷ but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries. ²⁸ Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses. ²⁹ How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has **profaned** the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace?

Unrepentant sin is the problem, not confessed sin we mourn over. If we are trampling the blood, we are not repenting, we are defiant. It does not describe the blood as that which would sanctify them but rather it did sanctify them (past tense). Those who believe in Universal atonement draw a distinction between the blood which is provided and the blood which is applied. For these hypothetical persons, the blood had already been applied (they were saved). But are we to understand this as just a hypothetical thought experiment which is actually an impossibility? Dangerous!

- 29) **Throwing away your confidence** and **failing to endure**. **Shrinking back** from living by faith.

Heb. 10:35-38 ³⁵ Therefore do not **throw away your confidence**, which has a great reward. ³⁶ For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised. ³⁷ For, “Yet a little while, and the coming one will come and will not delay; ³⁸ but my righteous one shall live by faith, and if he **shrinks back**, my soul has no pleasure in him.”

Israel shrunk back and died in the wilderness. By God's grace we can avoid this fate, but we can also throw away our confidence. These phrases don't necessarily mean falling away from genuine faith, but in the context of Hebrews, it is the safest conclusion. Would the Lord say of a saved person, "my soul has no pleasure in him."? Sure, this could speak of simply a loss of reward, but again, the overall context leads me to a more serious and sobering conclusion.

- 30) **Not exerting effort to strive** for peace and holiness; **not obtaining the grace** (unmerited assistance) of God because of a **defiling root of bitterness; sexual immorality and ungodliness** which keeps us from repentance even though we may regret our past choices.

Heb. 12:12-17 ¹²Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees,¹³ and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed. ¹⁴**Strive** for peace with everyone, and for the **holiness** without which no one will see the Lord.¹⁵ See to it that no one **fails to obtain the grace of God**; that no "**root of bitterness**" springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become **defiled**; ¹⁶that no one is **sexually immoral** or **unholy** like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal. ¹⁷For you know that afterward, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no chance to repent, though he sought it with tears.

Again, it is not the sinful actions that cause us to end up like Esau, but rather the lack of repentance, which is a fruit of genuine faith. This could be simply a loss of reward (grace and blessing) but Esau is described as unholy not just lacking blessing. Esau is a cautionary tale for the elect. He was entitled to blessing and birthright but forfeited them in favor of his temporal fleshly desires. As believers, we are entitled to blessing and birthright through the merits of Christ, but if we reject Christ in favor of our flesh, we will find no chance (or room) for repentance.

- 31) **Refusing to heed God's warnings** in scripture.

Heb. 12:25 ²⁵See that you do not **refuse** him who is speaking. For if they did not escape when they refused him who **warned** them on earth, much less will we escape if we reject him who **warns** from heaven.

I chose this verse as the theme verse for this paper. I fear we undercut the warnings and expose Christians to this danger when we teach the doctrine of Inevitable Perseverance. Some Calvinists invert this lesser to greater argument suggesting that the believer only suffers loss of reward. But whether we were previously saved or not, if we reject him who warns from heaven, we will certainly not escape judgment for our rejection. Paul's

warning is to believers that if they refuse and reject, the result will be the same as that for an unbeliever.

- 32) **Forgetting your leaders and the Word of God** and thus being **led away** by diverse and strange teachings.

Heb. 13:7-9 ⁷ **Remember** your **leaders**, those who spoke to you the **word** of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith. ⁸ Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. ⁹ Do not be **led away** by diverse and strange teachings, for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by foods, which have not benefited those devoted to them.

It's not the leaders but the Word which they teach that preserves us. The text does not specifically describe the consequence as eternal judgement, but in the context of Hebrews it is the most logical implication. Choosing food over grace is ultimately an issue of faith vs. unbelief.

- 33) **Returning to the sinful lifestyle** that once entangled you but from which you had escaped.

2 Peter 2:20 ²⁰ For if, after they have **escaped** the **defilements** of the world through the **knowledge** of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are **again entangled** in them and overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first.

How can it be said that an unbeliever has escaped the defilements of the world? Is there a temporal benefit to pure head knowledge? That's highly unlikely. No, the only escape is through saving knowledge, a relationship with Christ. The Greek word translated "knowledge", *epignosis* means more than just a superficial or searching knowledge but rather a full knowledge (cf. 2 Peter 1:3). The NET bible translates it "rich knowledge". Furthermore, 2 Peter 1:4 describes believers as those who have "escaped from the corruption that is in the world." How can this describe a believer in chapter 1 and a false believer in chapter 2? How can one making this claim avoid the charge of special pleading? It is a sobering reality that those who become again entangled in a lifestyle of unbelief will be held more accountable for they knew better.

- 34) Carried away with the **error of lawless people** and thus becoming unstable.

2 Peter 3:17 ⁷ You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, **take care** that you are not **carried away** with the **error of lawless people** and lose your own **stability**.

Be careful who you hang out with! Peter speaks to the beloved. Sure, Peter could be concerned there are false believers among them, but his concern seems more pastoral toward the true sheep. This text may not describe loss of eternal life, but if I say you are unstable, what assurance do you have? This is the biblical context of assurance: we

remain secure as long as we remain in Christ by faith. In Christ we find stability. Outside of Christ we return to instability. So stay connected to Christ with sound doctrine!

35) **Taking away** from the words of this book [Revelation] and by implication any Scripture.

Revelation 22:19 ¹⁹ and if anyone **takes away** from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will **take away** his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.

John warns that to do so will result in loss in our share of the tree of life and the holy city. How can it be said that something is taken away if you did not previously possess it? Perhaps this describes merely a loss of reward, but a plainer reading of the text suggests loss of life and heavenly citizenship, not just loss of reward. Does this mean that the work of taking away from this book of prophecy produces a loss of life? I understand this to mean that taking away from the book of prophesy is a fruit of unbelief, similar to the fruit of unforgiveness (cf. Matt. 6:14-15).

What about the security texts?

One could fairly argue that so far this paper has been one-sided. While there are undeniably many warning texts in Scripture, there are also many promise texts that are intended to give the genuine believer great assurance and confidence in their perseverance unto final salvation. I do not deny or discount these precious promises of God's Word. The following text are often pointed to as evidence of Inevitable Perseverance, but as we will see, this conclusion is only inevitable if we approach these texts already convinced that the doctrine is true.

1) Luke 15:3-7

³ So he told them this parable: ⁴ "What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country, and go after the one that is lost, until he finds it?"

Some use a lesser to greater argument here saying, since even human shepherd do not give up on their sheep, how much more will God, the perfect Shepherd, effectually find every one of his lost sheep? But this parable like the two that accompany it (lost coin and lost son) is not so much about the lengths God goes to find that which is lost but rather the lengths God goes to rejoice when the lost is found. But if we were to apply our human perspective, we would understand that the reason for greater rejoicing is because it was not a foregone conclusion that the sheep would be found. If the shepherd knew that it was just a matter of time before he found the sheep, he might still rejoice but not with the same enthusiasm. Perhaps God's rejoicing works differently than ours, but the

parable is given to us so that we can relate to God. Certainly, God is different than us in his knowledge. He knows with certainty who will be found while we do not, but if our being found was not a necessity than God can appreciate and rejoice in a manner similar to our own when we find something that was not otherwise assured to be found. Of course Calvinism has no room in its theology for a distinction between certainty (foreknowledge) and necessity (determinism) while Arminianism does.

2) John 3:16

¹⁶ “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

Though this text is often cited by Arminians to affirm God’s universal love and desire for all to be saved, supporters of Inevitable Perseverance point to the fact that eternal life requires an impossibility of death. If one can fall away from saving faith and die eternally, how can it be said that they presently possess eternal life? First, the text does not say that we presently have eternal life. It says that we “should not perish” which an aorist subjunctive. This means eternal life will be ours, not that it is already ours. To be clear, there is a sense in which salvation is ours at the moment of initial faith, but the verb tense here suggests a more eschatological (future) focus.

Secondly, the verb “believes” is a present participle. It describes a present ongoing action of believing. Therefore, those who are presently believing are assured that they will not perish but have a future eternal life. But does this imply an inevitable perseverance or does it suggest that our present faith guarantees our future perseverance? No. If that were the case then only a past faith would be needed to assure us of our future eternal life. The text could simply read, “Whoever once believed will not perish...” But consistently the scripture speaks of our present, ongoing believing as the evidence that we are headed (destined) for a future life eternal. As long as we continue to believe we continue on that path.

The concept of eternal life should be understood in the “already...not yet” tension often found in Scripture. We are already saved in some sense yet not finally saved in another sense. Until we are glorified in heaven, our salvation is not finalized.

Lastly, we should remember that Christ Himself is the embodiment of eternal life. Eternal life is not primarily an impersonal benefit imputed to believers, it is a living, breathing person who is “The Way, The Truth and The Life.” To possess eternal life is to possess Christ and vice versa. Be careful not to downgrade eternal life as a thing and neglect its relational aspect.

3) John 4:14

¹⁴ but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”

Unlike our previous text, this one describes eternal life as something experienced at the moment of initial faith (symbolized by drinking water). So there is a sense of eternal life that we enjoy in the present which refreshes the believer continually like a spring of perpetual life-giving water. Does this imply that our perseverance is inevitable? Does the availability of water make it impossible to thirst? Perhaps, since the water springs up from within suggesting it is passively received. But could it not also imply that we need never thirst again, that water will be continually available to the follower of Christ to thrive in service to Him?

Does it speak to the water's permanency or availability? Which better fits the context? To be fair to my counterpart brethren, one could argue that Jesus is contrasting physical water which requires continual returning to the well to spiritual living water which so completely satisfies that you need never return to refill your pots. So perhaps Jesus is implying this water is like Willy Wonka's everlasting gobstopper: one drink is all you will ever need. But if drinking symbolizes believing, wouldn't that lead to the conclusion that perseverance in faith is unnecessary? If only a past experience of faith is required to never thirst again, why continue to believe? Of course, this is absurd question. Just as Paul dismisses the idea of sinning so that grace may increase in Romans 6:1, a similar response could be offered here. The adherent to inevitable perseverance would argue that the person will certainly continue to drink because the water transforms their heart and desire to continually thirst for this water. But is that our experience? Do we continually thirst for God? O that this were true! No, we believers at times thirst when we need not thirst. The woman at the well had been seeking water that does not satisfy and Jesus points her to the only true solution to her spiritual need, receiving Him by faith. Jesus is not teaching her that once she believes she will never want to go back, that she will inevitably persevere in faith. He is teaching her that once she believes, she need never go back for she will finally have found what she was looking for all along! Once saved, we need never seek another form of salvation. But would it make sense for Jesus to offer assurance of inevitable perseverance to one who has yet to believe?

If you are a 4-point Arminian who believes in inevitable perseverance, then Jesus is saying, "If you drink of your own free-will, I will make sure that you never stop wanting to keep drinking." On the other hand, if you are a Calvinists, then Jesus is saying, "When I cause you to want to drink, I will also make sure that you never stop wanting to keep drinking."

Do we come to Jesus because he offers us an inevitable guarantee or because we realize there is no other water that can satisfy our thirst? I realize that is not necessarily an either/or question, but the question is, what is Jesus most likely intending to emphasize to this woman at the well – inevitability or availability? I believe the latter makes more sense in context of an evangelistic encounter with an unbeliever.

4) John 5:24

²⁴ Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.

Again, as with our last text, eternal life is described as a present reality, not just a future hope. But like John 3:16, the faith verbs (hearing and believing) are present participles describing a present ongoing faith. Whoever is presently hearing and believing has (present tense) eternal life, will not (future) come into judgment, but has already (past tense) passed from death to life. This hope is not for those who at one time were believing, but only those who are presently believing. It is said of these ones that they presently have eternal life and they will not come into judgement because they have already passed from death to life. So, is Jesus saying that a present faith, which is evidence of a present possession (eternal life), which was obtained by a past completed action (regeneration – death to life), inevitably secures a future result (no judgement)? This interpretation is possible and would be consistent with the inevitable perseverance view. But what are other possible interpretations and which best fits the context?

The above interpretation is not preferable because Jesus is not speaking to believers. Jesus is now speaking to Jews who do not believe in him and want to kill him because he called God his Father. Jesus explains that he is doing the works of his Father which include judgement. If they believe his words, they are believing the Father who sent him and will escape this judgement. But if they do not, they will be judged. These Jews thought they were safe from judgement but they were wrong. Jesus is not offering assurance to these Jews that if they believe his words then God will make sure they never stop believing. He is warning them that the present path they are on is headed for judgment.

Of course, this does not mean that these Jews are vessels of wrath chosen for destruction before the foundation of the world. As Jesus will say later in verse 34, “I say these things so that you may be saved.” There is an evangelistic side to this warning. He is not offering assurance of inevitable perseverance but rather he is offering a way of escape from the path they are presently on. Those who are believing have [the promise of]

eternal life because when a person believes, they are given new life (regeneration) so that they are able to persevere and ultimately avoid the coming judgement.

5) John 6:37

³⁷ All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out.

This text is often used to support the complementary Calvinist doctrines of Unconditional Election and Irresistible Grace, but for the purpose of our discuss, we will focus on the phrase “never cast out.” Does this text teach that once a person comes (believes) it is impossible for them to later be rejected by God because of unbelief? No. First, we should note that the verb “come” is once again a present participle which means it is literally “whoever is coming to me” as it describes not a one-time faith but a continuing (persevering) faith. So, the one who continues coming will never be cast out while they are coming. But what if one stops coming (believing)? The text does not address this question so we should not presume.

Secondly, Jesus is speaking to unbelieving Jews and rebuking them for the fact that they are not coming to (believing in) Him. He is exposing the fact that they are putting their assurance of salvation in the wrong place (they thought they were saved). The key to salvation is a right relationship with the Father. These Jews thought they had the Father’s approval but they did not. Assurance comes from an abiding relationship with God, which they did not possess. As long as we are in a trusting, surrendering, abiding relationship with God, Jesus will never ever cast us out of that relationship against our desire to abide in it.

6) John 6:39-40

³⁹ And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. ⁴⁰ For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.”

Continuing on the subject of those who are in right relationship to the Father and are thus given by the Father to the Son, Jesus says he will not lose any of these true believers but will raise them up on the last day. This could be taken to mean that everyone who at one time believed in God and was thus given by the Father will inevitably persevere to the end. But the text does not say that none will be lost, only that it is the Father’s will (desire/wish) that none be lost. Just as God is not willing that any perish (2 Peter 3:9) He does not want any to perish but in fact some do perish. So God has competing desires.

While one on one hand, He doesn't want anyone to be lost, on the other hand he is willing to let them go if they refuse to receive His Son or abandon faith in His Son.

We should also note that the word "lose" speaks of the Son's actions. It literally means to destroy. In that sense it is absolutely true that the Son will never "destroy" someone while they are coming (believing) and abiding in Him by faith. The phrase does not necessarily mean that it is impossible for one to abandon their faith in God and deny Christ as their Savior having previously confessed Him as both Savior and Lord.

Furthermore, Jesus clarifies God's will in v. 40 where He again uses the present participle (believes) to describe a present ongoing action. The one who continues to believe in Jesus will never be cast out and will one day be raised unto final salvation. But this presumes that the person continues to believe rather than guaranteeing that they will persevere.

7) John 6:47

⁴⁷ Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life.

This text is sometimes used to argue that since the believer is presently enjoying the benefits of eternal life, it follows that they must continually enjoy this benefit without interruption, otherwise it is not eternal. But this thinking presumes a rigid understanding of eternal. While it is true that we enjoy an aspect of eternal life in the present, it will not be fully appreciated until the eternal state in glory. The fact that we enjoy now certain aspects of this future reality does not rule out conditions for continuing to enjoy these benefits and their ultimate fulfillment. Until that final harvest day, our enjoyment of our eternal life is partial and potential. Only when we are finally glorified will our eternal life be fully realized and finally set.

And again, the word "believes" is a present participle, which as I have consistently noted, describes a present ongoing action. So, Jesus is simply saying that those who are presently believing also have eternal life. If one ceases to believe, they no longer meet the condition for eternal life.

8) John 10:27-29

²⁷ My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. ²⁹ My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand.

Jesus uses sheep as a metaphor for present believers. Those who are presently believing (hearing his voice) are called "His sheep". Jesus describes a present sheep/shepherd

relationship of personal and mutual knowledge. As long as we remain (abide) in this saving relationship with Christ, we are safe. No one, including the devil or other spiritual forces of darkness, can forcefully remove us from this relationship against our will. This certainly is a wonderful promise of security in Christ. The question is whether it teaches that our perseverance is inevitable. It does not.

In fact, the strong double negative translated “will never perish” runs contrary to Calvinist meticulous divine determinism in which all things are equally determined by God. The fact that Jesus places emphasis on the security of eternal life in Him is because it is in contrast to the relative uncertainty of other things in God’s universe apart from Him. The point here is that as sheep (those actively trusting in Him) we are absolutely secure. But this does not mean it is impossible for us to stop believing and stop being His sheep.

9) Romans 8:28-30

²⁸ And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. ²⁹ For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. ³⁰ And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.

This text has been called “The Golden Chain of Salvation” because it links together 5 soteriological terms into a presumably unbreakable chain of causality. Once God foreknows an individual (presumably before the foundation of world) they will infallibly also be predestined, called, justified and glorified. The inevitability of their glorification is used to support the doctrine of Inevitable Perseverance. As a Calvinists, I found this to be a compelling argument. However, after further study, I am convinced that the perceived inevitability is a misunderstanding of the text.

First, we see from v. 28 that the subjects of this discussion are “those who love God.” The truth Paul relays applies only to those who believe and therefore continue to abide in a loving relationship with God. The certainty of the believer’s destiny is real but only if they continue to meet the condition of salvation, namely faith, which is manifest in a loving relationship with God.

Second, the 5 so called links of the chain are all in the aorist past tense, including glorification. This is a clue to the fact that Paul is not speaking about present believers but rather past believers who have already been glorified. To demonstrate the validity of his claim that God has good purposes for those who love Him, he points to those in the past who have already received their final salvation in glory. Some will point out that the

orist tense can also be used to describe a future event that is so certain it is “as good as done.” While this is a possible usage of the tense, it is a minority usage. Usually when the orist tense is used, it refers to a past completed action. So, we should not build a doctrine on a minority possible interpretation. Our interpretation should consider the context which as I have already noted, is to prove to present believers that God has good purposes for them too. Paul is not assuring these believers their future glorification is inevitable. He is encouraging them to continue to love God and trust that they too will one day be glorified like the saints of old if they continue in their faith union with Christ.

Third, there is a glaring omission from this “chain of salvation”. Did you notice? There is no mention of faith. Where does faith fit within this salvation sequence? Calvinists will tell you that it falls between our calling and our justification. This is because the Calvinist understands the word “called” as “summoned”. They see this as God’s effectual regenerating and drawing grace which produces faith in the individual who does not otherwise love God. But this is reading a lot into the word “called”. The word “called” can also mean “named” as a term of identification. When we believe in Christ, we are called “children of God” (v. 21) and “sons” (v. 23). I think faith could be before called, in that once we believe, we are called children of God. Or it could even be before predestined, as I will explain below.

Now let’s consider the first chain, foreknowledge. Calvinists will point to the fact that “foreknow” can refer to intimate loving relationship and not merely knowing facts about a person like if they will believe. I agree with this interpretation. Classically Arminians have preferred a “foreseen faith” understanding of election. God sees who will believe and then elects those individuals. But many Arminians today, like myself, embrace a corporate understanding of election. God chose to save a corporate group of believers. All who choose to receive His Son will be joined to the Elect One and thus enjoy the privileges of election that are found “in Christ.” Therefore, we become elect when we come to be “in Christ” rather than God pre-temporally choosing to place certain individuals “into” Christ. This is why Eph. 1:4 says that God choose “us” (the corporate body of Christ) “in Him.”

God does not choose individuals for salvation because He knows they will believe. Rather, He chose to save all who will believe without particular attention to their individuality. It is nice to think that God loved me personally before the foundation of the world but this can lead to unhealthy speculation over why He chose me and not another. Perhaps there was something about me that distinguished me personally from the non-elect ones? Calvinists are right to quickly reject this thinking but it seems, dare I say, “inevitable” to

me. In any case, we should be careful not to embrace a doctrine because it appeals to our fleshly need for personal affirmation. Is it not enough that God loves all humanity equally and unconditionally so as to offer salvation and provide sufficient means of salvation for everyone? Must God love you personally to the exclusion of other individuals for you to feel special? Is it not enough that you bear His image and He wants to redeem you just as He wants to redeem your neighbor?

To be clear, I am not saying that the foreknowledge spoken of in v. 29 is God's general love for all mankind. I am saying that it is not primarily individual in focus but corporate. God loves His children as a category of people. The context here is clearly speaking of the category of past believers who have been glorified. All those people were first foreknown or fore-loved by God. This does not contradict the fact that God loves the world (believers and unbelievers alike), but God has a special love for those who love Him and His Son. But God does know which individuals will ultimately comprise this corporate group and so He certainly knows and loves us individually as well. But beware of the temptation to personalize God's love beyond what the Scriptures present. I fear this temptation is rooted in self-love.

Regarding predestination, it is easy to see why Calvinists see in this phrase a sense of inevitability. If our destiny (glorification in heaven and conformance to the image of Christ) is a predetermined thing, then isn't that synonymous with inevitability? In a sense yes, but we need to let the text qualify the sense of this predetermined destiny. The context is to encourage those who presently love God, that is believers, as a corporate group rather than individuals. God has pre-temporally determined that those who persevere in faith to the end will be glorified in heaven. Their destination is inevitable so long as they meet the only qualification for entrance, that is a living, abiding faith union with Jesus Christ. Those who love God are predestined to conformance to the image of Christ.

Paul is not telling his readers that their perseverance is inevitable because God has predestined each one of them individually to be conformed to the image of Christ. Rather, Paul is telling his readers that God predestined believers to be called sons, to be justified and ultimately to be glorified if they continue in the faith. This condition of perseverance is not explicitly stated in the text but it is implied by the phrase "those who love God." If you love God then your destiny is glorification in heaven, conformity to the image of Christ. This text does not teach that our present love for God will inevitably continue.

10) Romans 8:35-39

³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? ³⁶ As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered."

³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

This text offers the present believer great comfort to know that no outside force can separate us from the love of Christ and by implication, the salvation found in Him. This text does not teach that it is impossible for us to remove ourselves from the love of Christ through the various paths to apostasy discussed in the first part of this paper.

Some argue that the phrase "nor anything else in all creation" is intended to include the individual's own will (which is a created thing) as likewise being incapable of separating oneself from a love previously received by a free will choice. Calvinists say that it is impossible for a regenerated heart to ever want to separate itself from the love of Christ. Yet most Calvinists would admit that often their hearts are divided and they do choose to stray from Christ's love temporarily. Yet they insist this must be only temporary for this text supposedly teaches that such straying is ultimately impossible since we are a created being, incapable of separating ourselves from God's love. This seems to me to be a strange and strained reading of the text. If Paul wanted to make clear that the believer is not capable of removing himself/herself from the love of Christ, he certainly could have stated that explicitly. In fact, after mounting such an impressive list of inclusions to the promise, it is odd that the greatest potential danger of all (our own will) is not listed specifically. Perhaps we should consider the possibility that the reason Paul does not mention this scenario specifically is because it is not true and he does not want to invite the same apathy toward perseverance that concerns me.

11) 1 Corinthians 1:8-9

⁸ who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹ God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Paul is writing to the church in Corinth after hearing of numerous problems, chief among them being a quarreling spirit (1:11) of jealousy and strife (3:3) regarding a disagreement over which apostle or teacher they should follow. Before addressing the issue, Paul begins by grounding his hope in the grace of God they have already received which was manifest in the Spirit's rich distribution of spiritual gifts to them. Since it is clear that the Spirit has gifted them, and since God is faithful (He will not fail in providing all they need),

Paul is confident that they will persevere and overcome this problem. Paul emphasizes their calling. Calvinists see this calling as an effectual, irresistible, inevitable drawing based on a prior unconditional election. But the term calling can simply mean their identification with Christ and the direction of their life in following Christ. Our calling is our vocation, that which motivates us with purposeful goal.

The question for our discussion is whether Paul here intends to convey an absolute guarantee that this problem will be resolved or a confident hope that it can be resolved if they cooperate with God. It seems to me that the overall tone of the letter fits better with the latter alternative. Paul does not know whether these particular believers will respond favorably to his admonishment. He grounds his hope in God's faithfulness and in their past reception of His grace, but throughout the letter, Paul is clearly concerned that their success is dependent on their ongoing cooperation with his exhortations. Study the book for yourself and decide whether Paul is focused on inevitability of their success or the potentiality of their success.

12) 1 Corinthians 3:15

¹⁵ If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.

This text is used by some to argue that even when believers fail to mature and grow in their faith they are nonetheless still saved "only as through fire". This text clearly suggests this is a possible scenario for a believer. But it is meant to warn not to comfort. I fear many Christians take this text as a comfort that even if they don't persevere as they ought they will still get to heaven. I don't think that is Paul's point. In 6:9-11, Paul warns that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God. Even though they have been washed, sanctified and justified from past sins, Paul is writing to them about their present sin of defrauding their brothers in court. The implication is that if they don't repent of this sin, even though they have been previously justified by faith, they may yet forfeit the kingdom through their sin which reveals a lack of persevering faith.

In chapter 3, Paul condemns the Corinthians as "infants in Christ" (3:1) since they are "behaving only in a human way" with "strife and jealousy" (3:3). Yes, he optimistically considers them believers (brethren) but he warns that they are headed down the wrong path. They are acting more like unbelievers than believers and that should not be a consolation. Paul does talk about loss of rewards for believers, but it is in the context of his and Apollos' rewards for their ministry; rewards the Corinthians may also receive but not necessarily. After humbling himself as a mere "servant" (v. 5) who is not "anything" (v. 7) he balances this with the reality that he and Apollos will receive rewards for their

faithful service by God's grace. It is in this context that he warns the immature believers in Corinth that their rewards can be forfeited if they build in the wrong manner.

So it is possible for a person to be saved yet suffer loss of reward, but that is not the extent of the warning. Paul goes on in vs. 16-17 to warn that those who defile the temple of God (their bodies) will be destroyed. Paul may have in view here false professors within the church who are leading the true believers astray as he transitions from second person to third person. But Paul does not assure these "infants in Christ" that they are exempt from this warning. While one can be saved despite a lack of growth and maturity, if one goes beyond this to actually defile God's temple through a lifestyle of unrepentant sexual immorality and other sins against their brothers (cf. 6:9) they should expect destruction not salvation "though as through fire."

13) 2 Corinthians 5:5

⁵ you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.

Again, some argue that believers can only suffer temporary consequence for their sins like the man in Corinth who was committing adultery with his father's wife. He can be handed over to Satan for the temporary destruction of his flesh, while his spirit remains saved. But the text says he "may" be saved. The sinning brother may be a false professor or a genuine believer who has fallen into serious sin. The distinction is not important to Paul. The temporary consequence of the potential destruction of his flesh will provide an opportunity for him to repent and renew his faith in Christ, if in fact he is a believer. But in either case, his future is conditioned upon his faith response to this act of church discipline. Paul implies no inevitability about this man's salvation or his damnation.

14) Ephesians 1:13-14; 4:30

¹³ In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, ¹⁴ who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

³⁰ And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

Here in Ephesians 1 Paul is listing the many blessings which believers enjoy in faith union with Jesus Christ. One of those blessings is that we are sealed with the Holy Spirit. The word "guarantee" sounds like an inevitability, a sure thing. But the word means down payment or literally "earnest". Just as a down payment provides assurance that the buyer will complete the transaction but does not guarantee the transaction, so it is with our

salvation. Likewise, a seal in those days was not an unbreakable bond but rather a symbolic ornament that identified the sender and carried with it consequences for violation. When the Roman's sealed Jesus' tomb, the seal itself did not prevent anyone from removing the stone. What it did was let everyone know that if they broke that seal, they would suffer the consequences of the Roman Empire's authority. As believers, we are sealed by the Holy Spirit and protected by God's authority. It's not that the seal can't be broken but that the seal can't be broken without consequence. We should take comfort in this promise but we should not relax and think we have a "guaranteed" spot in heaven whether we persevere in faith or not. That is certainly not Paul's point. Nor should we presume by this seal that our perseverance is inevitable. That was not the function of a seal.

15) Philippians 1:6

⁶ And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

As in his letter to the Corinthians, Paul begins his exhortation by first asserting his confidence in their positive response to his letter and the culmination of their salvation at the day of judgement. The question is whether Paul intends to convey an absolute guarantee or a confident hope. The word here translated "I am sure" is the same word Paul uses in v. 25 of the same chapter which is translated "convinced". Paul was not 100% sure whether he was going to live or die but he was "convinced" that he would live. He reasoned this by the fact that they still needed him to minister to them so it made sense that he would remain and visit them again. Interestingly, history indicates Paul never did visit Philippi despite the fact he was "convinced" he would minister to them again. No one insists that Paul's confidence was infallibly guaranteed when it comes to the future of his ministry, yet when it comes to his confidence in the continued work of God in the life of the Philippians, many want to take it as a guarantee. The context of this verse suggests we understand both usages of this word in similar ways. There is certainly no proof of inevitable perseverance here.

16) 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24

²³ Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴ He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.

One of Paul's purposes in writing this letter, was to correct wrong teaching they had received regarding the coming of the Lord. Some were teaching that Jesus had already come and they had missed it. Paul wants to assure them that is not the case. This letter comes on the heels of a visit from Timothy in which he returned with a good report of

their faithfulness to the Lord. In this context we can see why Paul was so confident in their perseverance until the coming of the Lord. God is faithful to keep blameless those who are faithfully looking for Christ's return. If Paul is concluding that their blameless preservation is inevitable, what is the point of exhorting them to walk as they ought and avoid impurity? Some say the exhortations are part of the means which God uses to accomplish his inevitable purposes. But a natural reading of Paul's exhortations sounds more like an appeal to potential than a revelation of the inevitable.

17) 2 Timothy 2:13

¹³ if we are faithless, he remains faithful—for he cannot deny himself.

Out of context, this sounds like a convincing proof for those who argue perseverance is an unnecessary component to our salvation. It is ironic that some would use this text as a proof for eternal security when the phrase that immediately precedes this verse says just the opposite. "If we deny him, he also will deny us;" God's faithfulness is not to save those who deny Christ and reject his atoning sacrifice. God is faithful to himself. He will deny those who deny Christ, regardless of their past professions.

Paul quotes this "faithful saying" in the context of his desire that the elect "may also obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory." (v. 10) Calvinist see the word "elect" in this context and assume that Paul is speaking about those chosen individuals who have not yet believed but inevitably will believe at some point. But to my knowledge, the New Testament never uses the noun "elect" to refer to those who do not yet believe. The term is used exclusively to refer to present believers as it is here. Paul wants those who are presently believing (elect) to persevere in their faith and thus obtain eternal salvation in the end.

Paul is writing to Timothy who was one of the leaders of the church in Ephesus (1 Tim. 1:3). He is writing to encourage him as he preaches the word to the believers in Ephesus. It is certainly encouraging to know that an eternal glory awaits those who like Timothy endure and do not deny Christ.

18) 2 Timothy 4:18

¹⁸ The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

This statement of confidence is written to Timothy in the context of Paul's persecution and abandonment by other Christians. Demas loved this present world and deserted him (v. 10). No one came to support him at his trial (v. 16). But the Lord strengthened him and enabled him to persevere through his trials. Paul's confidence is not that the Lord will

bring him safe to heaven even if he fails to persevere. Rather Paul's confidence is in the fact that God has in the past given him sufficient grace to persevere and Paul knows that that will always be the case. Whether Paul avails himself of that grace is up to him, but the glory for his rescue belongs to God alone. Only a fool would receive a gift of help they do not deserve and turn around and brag that the credit belongs to them for choosing to receive the help. Yet Calvinists insist such boasting would be appropriate if our perseverance is not inevitable. It should be clear by now I disagree with that thinking.

19) Hebrews 7:25

²⁵ Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.

Jesus is able to save to the uttermost (completely to the end), but is this a guarantee that we will persevere to the end? No. One of the main themes of Hebrews are warnings to believers to not fall away. Again, Christ provides all we need to persevere but he does not guarantee our perseverance. To claim that from this text is presumptuous.

20) Hebrews 13:5

⁵ Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."

If we take the quoted phrase (Joshua 1:5) out of context we might wonder if this is intended as a promise to save regardless of whether we persevere. But a quick survey of the preceding verses reveals that this promise is for continued aid in the face of challenging tasks like "let brotherly love continue", "show hospitality to strangers", "remember those in prison", "honor marriage" as well as "keep yourself free from the love of money." These are not easy tasks but Christ promises to stay with us to help us accomplish what we could not do on our own. Just as the Lord promised to help Joshua in the conquest of the promise land, so we can likewise take comfort in God's promise to help us with our daily battles. But to take this as a guarantee of perseverance goes too far.

21) 1 Peter 1:3-5

³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, ⁵ who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

Our inheritance is indeed "imperishable, undefiled, unfading" and "kept in heaven" for those who are born again by faith in Christ. But does this mean that we are guaranteed to

receive this inheritance? The text says that we “are being guarded through faith”. The promise applies to those who have faith in God. It does not apply to those who reject the faith and deny Christ. Peter gives many exhortations to his believing audience in the hope that they will persevere in their faith. But the exhortations make the most sense when we understand Peter recognizes their perseverance is not inevitable. Nothing in this text demands an inevitable perseverance, only that those who have faith can certainly look forward to an inheritance that is guarded by God’s power. There is no chance that a believer perseveres to the end but finds that his inheritance did not. That can’t happen because it is God’s power ensuring it remains available for every believer who perseveres.

22) 1 Peter 1:23

²³ since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God;

This encouragement comes in response to Peter’s exhortation to “love one another earnestly from a pure heart”. Our new birth (regeneration) is what empowers and enables us to live obedient lives as believers. The imperishable seed is the word of God. Peter is not saying that they will inevitably love one another because their regeneration inevitably produces love. He is exhorting them to love because their regeneration enables them to love. Judge for yourself whether Peter speaks of ability or inevitability.

23) 1 John 2:19

¹⁹ They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us.

This text is offered by some not as a proof of inevitable perseverance but rather an explanation for those who appear to fall away from saving faith. John is speaking about false teachers who were once associated with the church but have since left. He does not indicate whether they were saved or not. He simply says the reason they left is that they were not of us. It could be that they were never of us or that they were no longer of us. Even if these individuals were in fact never saved (which seems probable) it does not prove that every time someone walks away from a profession of faith that they are necessarily in the same condition as these individuals John speaks of. There is no question that sometimes those who appear to fall away were never saved to begin with. But that does not mean it is the only explanation for their actions. To use this text for that argument is to make it say more than it claims.

24) 1 John 3:9

⁹ No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him; and he cannot keep on sinning, because he has been born of God.

This text is not focused on explaining what believers will inevitably do, but rather helping us distinguish who is a genuine believer based on the fruit we see in their lives. John makes bold statements in this epistle about the nature of true believers. His purpose is to equip us to discern the difference between true believers and pretenders and false prophets (anti-Christ). If you see someone who claims to be a Christian but they make a practice of sinning (a habitual lifestyle of continuously unrepentant sin) you can be sure that person is not a true believer (regenerated or born of God). Whether they were previously or not is not the issue. John is concerned with us staying away from those who are clearly not believers based on their lifestyle, regardless what they claim. Habitual sin and faith in Christ are incompatible worldviews that cannot logically coexist. This text does not prove that true believers will inevitably persevere. It is not a promise so much as a test for discernment.

25) 1 John 5:13

¹³ I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life.

This is a clear purpose statement of John's epistle. John wanted believers to have confidence in their salvation. It is clear from his epistle that our confidence does not come from a past decision to believe or receive Christ in an evangelistic setting. No, assurance comes from the ongoing evidence of perseverance, not a guarantee that we will persevere. We can know that we presently possess eternal life while acknowledging that we will only obtain final salvation in heaven if we persevere to the end. Like all writers of Scripture, John was concerned with exhorting us to persevere, not offer us assurance that it is inevitable or guaranteed. Such claims would inevitably lead to abuse by some through complacency, apathy and fatalistic attitudes. God forbid!

26) Jude 1:24

²⁴ Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy,

This text speaks about God's ability to keep us from stumbling, not the inevitability of our perseverance. We ought to take great comfort in the fact that God is able to keep us from falling without falling prey to the notion that our perseverance is inevitable. Instead, we should recognize the conditional nature of our salvation. If we persevere, we will be saved. Thus, as Jude exhorts us, we must keep ourselves in the love of God (v. 21) and wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads us to eternal life. When we think of our salvation as a done deal, a guarantee, an inevitable outcome, we contradict the

exhortations of Scripture. We must persevere lest we fall away. This requires cooperation with the grace of God, not trust in God's monergistic work while we remain passive and irresponsible. Again, God forbid!

The promises of assurance are certainly a great comfort to the present believer. I rely upon them for my confidence in my present and ultimate salvation. But I challenge you to look at each of these texts without presuming inevitable perseverance and ask yourself if you have perhaps been adding to what these texts actually say.

I am not afraid of apostasy in a paralyzing, unhealthy way, but I do have a healthy fear of the dangers of sin in my life. Just as I do not fear losing my marriage, but I recognize if I neglect my duties as a husband it is a possibility, so I acknowledge the possibility of apostasy in my life and this acknowledgment helps keep me grounded in reality (Ben Henshaw from arminianperspectives.wordpress.com pointed out this helpful marriage analogy to me).

The promises of Scripture are an assurance that 1) God will never fail in His part, 2) God provides us all the help we need to persevere, 3) no outside force can take away my hope, and 4) I can and will remain in Christ so long as I want to. Although I struggle with sin, I cannot conceive of reaching a point where I no longer want to believe. But I am aware of the deceitfulness of sin so I heed the warnings of Scripture.

I do not speak of 'losing' my salvation since that is not the language that the Bible uses. I do speak of the danger of 'falling away', 'drifting away', being 'cut off', 'severed', 'hardened', 'deceived', 'shipwrecked', becoming 'unstable', 'shrinking back', 'entangled' and 'blotted out', because the Bible warns of these possibilities. These warning texts should give us pause before concluding from the security texts that the dangers spoken of either do not apply to us or are a practical impossibility. As others have noted before me, it is better to look at the promise passages in light of the warning passages and understand these promises as assuming perseverance. (i.e., if you persevere, you are secure)

Conclusion:

The student of God's Word who holds to the doctrine of Inevitable Perseverance must deal with the persistent warnings of Scripture. I have attempted to provide some exegetical analysis but I do not intend this paper as a substitute for a full exegesis of each text. My intention is simply to show the breadth of Biblical data which points to the real danger of apostasy. At the very least it is not to be dismissed as trivial. If there were only 1 or 2 texts, perhaps it would be reasonable to search for a less literal way to harmonize them with contrasting texts on security. But I find the volume of evidence to be overwhelming in favor of a more literal and straightforward understanding of these warning passages, while the security texts work just as well with a presumed condition. While there are a great many texts on promise and assurance

of salvation, it is my opinion that those who adhere to the doctrine of Inevitable Perseverance take these texts further than the author intended because of their presupposition of inevitability. I leave it to the reader's own study to prove or disprove that assertion.

In my opinion, the doctrine of Inevitable Perseverance can logically lead to complacency and neglect of the very means of grace which God provides to enable us to persevere in the faith. God forbid! The fact that many who believe in Inevitable Perseverance guard themselves against this complacency does not mean that everyone will. It is my conviction that teaching that apostasy is impossible necessarily lessens the true believer's sense of urgency to guard against it. Why be concerned for what is impossible? Just as the Pharisees' traditions made the commandments of God "of no effect" (Matt. 15:3-6), so can the doctrine of inevitable perseverance have the same result, undoing what God intended. Let us not reject Him who warns from heaven (Heb. 12:25)! Rather, let us be careful to warn others and ourselves of the real paths to apostasy lest we fall way!