RESTING IN CHRIST

A DEVOTIONAL ON ASSURANCE AND THE HARD PASSAGES OF SCRIPTURE

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Unless otherwise noted, references are from the Authorized Version (KJV) of the Bible.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Resting in Christ: A Devotional on Assurance and the Hard Passages of Scripture

Few things trouble the heart of a believer more than uncertainty about salvation. You may know the gospel, trust in Christ, and desire to follow Him, yet certain passages of Scripture still unsettle you.

Have I truly repented?

Am I bearing enough fruit?

What if I hear, "Depart from me, I never knew you"?

These are real and weighty concerns, and if you have wrestled with them, you are not alone.

Assurance is not a marginal issue—it is at the heart of our relationship with Christ. The Apostle John tells us that his purpose in writing

was that we “may know that ye have eternal life” (1 John 5:13). Yet, many Christians live in a state of fear, uncertain whether they will endure to the end, confused by warnings in Scripture, and burdened by the thought that they must prove themselves worthy of salvation.

If that describes you, this book is for you. The hard passages of Scripture are not meant to lead us into despair but to direct us to Christ. The law exposes our sin, but the gospel assures us that Jesus has done what we could never do. It is not our perseverance, our repentance, or our works that save us—it is Christ alone. And yet, those who are saved will endure, repent, and bear fruit, not as a way to earn salvation but as a result of it.

This devotional is designed to walk you through some of the most commonly misunderstood

verses about assurance. We will examine them in their biblical and theological context, distinguishing between law and gospel, warning, and promise. My prayer is that, as you read, you will find your confidence not in your faithfulness but in Christ's faithfulness to you.

As you work through these pages, may you be reminded of the words of Jesus:

"*Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*" (*Matthew* 11:28)

In Christ,
Jeffrey Perry

MUST I ENDURE TO THE END TO BE SAVED?

"*But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.*" *Matthew 24:13*

Matthew 24:13 states, "*But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.*"

Many take this verse as a conditional warning, suggesting that salvation ultimately depends on our ability to persevere. However, such an interpretation not only disregards the immediate context but also undermines the biblical teaching on perseverance as a gracious gift from God.

The Context of Matthew 24:13

Matthew 24 is part of Jesus' Olivet Discourse, where He addresses the impending destruction

of the Jerusalem temple (Matt. 24:1-3). The trials described in this passage, including persecution and deception, are tied to the events leading up to A.D. 70. Jesus is not speaking broadly about every Christian's spiritual journey but about the tribulation that His followers would face in that historical moment.

Historical accounts confirm that the early Christians heeded Christ's warnings and were preserved from the destruction of Jerusalem. The church historian Eusebius records that before the siege of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, Christians fled to Pella, a city beyond the Jordan.[1] This migration spared them from the horrors of the Roman onslaught. Jesus' words were fulfilled in a literal sense—the ones who

[1] Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History 3.5.

endured to the end of this tribulation were saved from death and destruction.

Understanding this passage in its historical context helps us see that it is not a universal statement about individual perseverance unto final salvation, but a promise of deliverance for those who remained faithful and heeded Christ's warnings during that time.

Perseverance: A Promise, Not a Condition

The doctrine of perseverance is not a threat but a promise. It is not something we accomplish by sheer willpower, but something given to us in Christ. The consistent testimony of Scripture is that God preserves His people:

"*He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.*" (Phil. 1:6)

"*Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation.*" (1 Pet. 1:5)

"*I give unto them eternal life*; *and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.*" (John 10:28)

The 1689 London Baptist Confession affirms this beautifully:

"As *the providence of God doth in general reach to all creatures, so after a more special manner it taketh care of his church, and disposeth of all things to the good thereof.*" (1689 LBCF 5.7)

Believers may stumble, fall into grievous sin, and experience seasons of doubt. 2 Peter 1:9 warns that some may even forget that they have been cleansed from their sins. Yet, Scripture is clear that Christ will bring all who belong to Him safely home (John 6:39).

This is why Paul can write with confidence in Romans 8:30, “Whom he justified, them he also glorified.” There is no uncertainty in this statement—those whom God has justified will certainly be glorified. This golden chain of redemption ensures that perseverance is not left in our weak and failing hands but is secured by the power and faithfulness of God Himself.

Enduring by Grace

Matthew 24:13 is not a call to rely on our strength to endure, but a reassurance that those who truly belong to Christ will persevere because He preserves them. Though trials will come, though love may grow cold in many, God’s elect will endure not because they are stronger, but because God is faithful.

This truth should bring deep comfort to the believer. The Christian life is not about maintaining a perfect track record of

faithfulness but trusting in the One who remains faithful even when we falter. "*If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself.*" (2 Tim. 2:13)

Let us not read this verse as a warning meant to instill fear, but as a reminder of the promise that bolsters our assurance. Our endurance is not the cause of our salvation but the evidence of it, and it is God Himself who ensures that we will remain in His grace until the very end.

As Jude 24 declares, "*Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy.*"

This is our hope and our confidence in Christ.

HAVE I SINNED TOO MUCH TO BE FORGIVEN?

For if we sin willfully after having received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins – Hebrews 10:26

Hebrews 10:26-27 is one of the more sobering passages in Scripture.

It confronts us with a warning: if we sin willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there is no longer a sacrifice for sins, and for many believers, this text raises serious questions.

Can a Christian lose their salvation? Does willful or habitual sin after conversion place someone beyond the reach of Christ's atoning work? How are we to understand this passage in light of the gospel?

A Warning to Unbelievers

We must first keep in mind that the book of Hebrews was written to a Jewish audience. Many of them had been drawn to the gospel, had seen its truth, and had even participated in the life of the church; however, they had not believed or trusted in Christ. The author describes them as those who had "*received the knowledge of the truth.*" This refers not to faith, but to an intellectual understanding and exposure to the truth of the gospel.

In Hebrews 6:4-6, the apostle likewise describes them as those who had been "*enlightened*" and had "*tasted of the heavenly gift*" but had then fallen away.

To be clear, tasting of Christ is not the same as trusting in Him. Many in Israel had seen Christ's miracles, heard His teaching, and even experienced some of the blessings of His

presence, but they had not placed their trust in Him.

The "*willful sin*" described in Hebrews 10:26 is not the struggle with sin that every believer faces (Romans 7:15-25). It is the deliberate and willful rejection of Christ after having heard and understood the gospel. It is the sin of knowingly and willingly turning away from the only means of salvation.

Why Is There No More Sacrifice for Sins?

When the apostle writes that "*there remains no more sacrifice for sins*," he is not saying that Christ's atonement is insufficient. Rather, he is stating that Jesus is the only sacrifice that God will accept.

The unbelieving Jewish readers of Hebrews were tempted to return to the Old Covenant sacrificial system. They were facing pressure to

abandon their profession of Christ and go back to the temple sacrifices. But the author of Hebrews makes clear that those sacrifices are now obsolete. Christ's once-for-all sacrifice has fulfilled and replaced them:

"*But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down on the right hand of God.*" (Hebrews 10:12)

To reject Christ's atonement and return to the temple sacrifices was to reject the only true means of forgiveness. Under the Old Covenant, the sacrifices pointed forward to Christ, but now that Christ had come, to reject Him was to cut oneself off from the only means of salvation. Outside of Jesus, there is no other sacrifice that could take away sins.

This is why the Bible speaks of God "*winking at*" or "*overlooking*" sin under the Old Covenant:

"*And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent.*" (Acts 17:30)

Under the Old Covenant, the sacrificial system temporarily covered sin, but it never took it away (Hebrews 10:4). Those sacrifices were shadows of the true sacrifice to come in Christ. To reject Him is to be left without atonement, because there is no other atonement for sin available.

This is why the warning in Hebrews 10:27 is so severe:

"*But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries.*"

To reject Christ is to align oneself with the enemies of God. It is to side with those who crucified the Lord of Glory. Without Christ's

sacrifice, there is no hope, only a fearful expectation of judgment.

Be sure that this passage is not aimed at struggling believers who fall into sin. It is aimed at those who, after hearing and understanding the gospel, willfully reject it.

Assurance for Believers

Does this mean that a Christian who struggles with sin should live in fear? Not at all. The message of Hebrews is that Christ's sacrifice is sufficient for all who trust in Him. The call is not to sinless living, but to hold fast to Christ:

"*Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised).*" (Hebrews 10:23)

The danger lies not in struggling with sin, but in abandoning Christ as the only source of forgiveness.

The warning of Hebrews 10:26-27 is ultimately a call to faith. God is not asking for perfection; He is calling us to trust in the perfect sacrifice of Christ. The Old Covenant sacrifices are gone. There is no other way of salvation, no other atonement.

To reject Christ is to face judgment, but to rest in Him is to receive full forgiveness and eternal life. This is why Hebrews follows this severe warning with a reminder of hope:

"*Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him.* ***But we are not of them who draw back*** *unto perdition*; ***but of them that believe*** *to the saving of the soul.*" (Hebrews 10:38-39)

AM I HOLY ENOUGH TO BE SAVED?

"*Without holiness, no one will see the Lord.*"
Hebrews 12:14

At first glance, this verse might seem like a warning meant to instill fear, or worse, it may make you think that you must be holy to be ultimately saved.

But in reality, it is a promise meant to encourage and strengthen believers. It does not set an impossible standard that we must achieve on our own; rather, it assures us that God is at work in us, and shaping us into His likeness.

Holiness in the Covenant

Holiness is deeply embedded in the covenant relationship between God and His people. It is not merely an obligation to fulfill, but a part of the sanctification process, where God fulfills His promise to transform us into the image of Christ. John Owen emphasizes this transformation when he explains that:

"*Holiness is nothing but the implanting, writing, and realizing of the gospel in our souls.*"[2]

In this covenantal framework, holiness is the fruit of the gospel, not its root. It is the law of God written on our hearts, as promised in the New Covenant (Jer. 31:33.

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[2] John Owen, *The Holy Spirit* (London: N.p., 1674), 123.

Here, the law-gospel distinction becomes crucial. The law shows us our sinfulness and our inability to achieve holiness on our own. It is like a mirror that reveals our need for a Savior.

On the other hand, the gospel is the good news of Christ's perfect obedience and atoning death, which fulfills the law on our behalf. Through faith in this gospel, we are justified, sanctified, and will be glorified.

Holiness is not a threat; it is a promise.

This promise is not conditional upon our adherence to the law but on the grace of the gospel. The law points out our inability, leading us to the cross where the gospel promises not only forgiveness but the power to live.

Hebrews 12:1-2 sets the scene for us to understand the author's point:

"Therefore, seeing we also are compassed about by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith."

Our race in holiness is assured because it is grounded not in our performance but in Christ's. Our perseverance is a gift of grace, enabled by the Holy Spirit, who applies the benefits of the covenant to us.

For this reason, our understanding of holiness must be Christocentric. Jesus, as the Mediator of the New Covenant, is both the source and the goal of our sanctification. By fixing our eyes on Him, we are not looking at a moral example but at the One who has fulfilled all righteousness for us.

Through the lens of the covenant:

- We see our **justification** - Christ's righteousness imputed to us.
- We experience our **sanctification** - Christ's righteousness worked out in us by the Spirit.
- We anticipate our **glorification** - Seeing Christ face to face.

Embracing Holiness

Every stumble is an opportunity to return to the gospel, the source of our strength. And every victory is a testament to the faithfulness of God.

So, walk this path with confidence, knowing that holiness is not an uncertain pursuit but a sure promise within the covenant of grace. Keep your eyes on Jesus, for in His light, we live

out the covenantal call to holiness, assured that through His faithful keeping of us, we will indeed see the Lord.

CAN I LOSE MY SALVATION?

"*For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame.*" *Hebrews* 6:4-6

At first glance, this passage can be troubling. It speaks of individuals who have experienced something of the goodness of the Gospel yet have fallen away in such a way that a renewal to repentance is described as "*impossible*."

Does this mean a true believer can lose their salvation?

Does it mean that those who have repented can never do so again?

Tasting vs. Receiving

The key to understanding this passage lies in the language of "*tasting*." These individuals have "*tasted of the heavenly gift*" but have not truly received it. They have experienced something of the goodness of the Gospel and the work of the Spirit, but their experience was not one of saving faith.

Imagine someone walking into an ice cream shop. The shopkeeper offers them a sample, they taste it, consider it, and even acknowledge its quality, but then set the spoon down and walk away. This is what had happened with those described in Hebrews 6:4-6. They had sampled the blessings of the Gospel but had ultimately rejected them.

This "*tasting*" is not the reception of the gospel. It was a test of the gospel to see how

they liked it. The Gospel is indeed wonderful, but these individuals never fully embraced it.

Falling Away from a Profession

The text does not speak of those who were truly regenerated and then lost their salvation, but of those who outwardly professed faith and later abandoned it. This was a complete renunciation of the Christian faith, not merely struggling with sin or backsliding. Those who belong to Christ are kept by His hand (John 10:28-29), and nothing can separate them from His love (Rom. 8:38-39). But those who only superficially connect with Christianity and later reject it demonstrate that they were never truly part of Christ's flock.

The apostates in Hebrews 6 had not fallen from true salvation but from their former profession. They participated in the visible church, heard the Gospel, and perhaps even experienced its

power in some way, but they never truly believed.

Why, then, does the author of Hebrews say that it is "*impossible*" to renew such people to repentance? Because they have rejected the only means of salvation—Christ Himself.

This does not mean they can never be saved, but rather that they cannot be restored to something they never truly possessed. The writer is saying that they cannot be renewed to repentance, because they never actually had it.

This passage should serve as both a warning and an encouragement. Believers, whom Christ has redeemed, will not fall away. Though you may struggle, stumble, and even experience seasons of doubt, the Lord is faithful. He preserves His own, and He will bring to completion the good work He has begun (Phil. 1:6).

WILL JESUS SAY, "DEPART FROM ME"?

"Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity." Matthew 7:21-23

Matthew 7:21-23 is a passage often misunderstood and misapplied, leading many sincere believers to fear that they may be mistaken, and hear these works.

It is true that at first glance, this passage is terrifying. It appears to suggest that even those who profess Christ might ultimately be rejected and sent to hell. However, when we examine

the context of Jesus' teaching and the consistent message of Scripture, it becomes clear that this text is not a call to fear judgment but rather an invitation to rest solely in Christ.

The Danger of Misplaced Trust

The key to understanding Matthew 7:21-23 lies in recognizing to whom Jesus is speaking. The people described in this passage are those who stand before Christ on the last day, but who are pointing to their works as the basis for their acceptance.

They say, "*Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?*"

Their confidence is misplaced. Instead of trusting in Christ and His finished work, they trust in their works done in His name.

This misunderstanding is common. Many people believe their standing before God hinges on their performance. They live as though their righteousness, church attendance, or good works are what ultimately secure God's favor. But Scripture teaches the opposite: our acceptance is rooted entirely in Christ's work for us, not in anything we do.

Matthew 7:21-23 describes people who are self-deceived and who do not acknowledge their spiritual poverty. Instead, they approach Christ with a resume of religious accomplishments, expecting these to earn His favor.

Jesus' chilling response—"*I never knew you*"—reveals that their confidence was misplaced. They trusted their works instead of placing their faith in Him.

Resting in the Gospel

This passage is not meant to drive true believers to despair. It is a warning to those who refuse to trust and rest in Christ and instead rely on their own efforts. For the weary saint who knows they fall short, this text is not a call to fear judgment but a reminder that salvation has never depended on their worthiness.

The person who approaches God saying, "I have nothing to offer—I need Christ," will never be turned away. God delights to save those who trust in His Son.

Matthew 7:21-23 is a sobering passage, but it is not meant to lead believers to fear judgment. Instead, it calls us to examine where we place our confidence. If we look at ourselves and our works, we will have reason to fear. But if we look to Christ, His perfect life, atoning death,

and glorious resurrection, we can rest assured that He will never fail us.

The gospel is good news for the weary and the weak. It reminds us that our hope is not in what we bring to God but in what He has done for us in Christ.

HOW DO I KNOW IF I HAVE REPENTED?

"*Repentance toward God*," Acts 20:21

Repentance is often misunderstood. Many think of it primarily as turning away from sin (as if the Christian life is primarily about not sinning).

While repentance certainly involves a rejection of sin, its true and primary focus is not *what* we leave behind but *Whom* we are turning toward.

We must understand that at its core, repentance is a return to God. This is why Paul speaks of "*repentance toward God*" in Acts 20:21. The call to repent is not a command to clean ourselves up but an invitation to come back to God.

The Weight of Sin

When we sin, we often experience an initial response of shame, guilt, or even fear. We may feel exposed, much like Adam and Eve in the garden, hiding from the presence of God. If left unchecked, this can drive us into despair or worse, into self-reliance. Either avoiding God out of fear or trying to compensate for our failure by renewing our efforts.

However, when the Spirit convicts (or convinces) us, He does not leave us in our sorrow. Instead, He humbles us under the mighty hand of God (1 Pet. 5:6) and produces a godly grief that leads us back to God in repentance (2 Cor. 7:11).

To be clear, this conviction is not just a feeling of regret, nor is it a feeling of terror; it is an awareness that we have turned from the One who loves us. The weight of sin is not just in its

consequences but in the separation it creates between us and God.

When we cling to sin, we are, in effect, turning our backs on Him. And yet, repentance is not simply about turning from our sin. If we think of it only as rejecting sin, we miss the point. What matters most is not what we are turning from, but to whom we are turning.

Turning to God

This is where many Christians struggle. We see our sin, we feel its weight, and we want to change. But where do we go?

If we imagine God as only being mad at us over sin, we may be hesitant to turn to Him. Instead of repentance drawing us closer to God, it can become a source of spiritual paralysis, where we remain stuck in shame, afraid that He will not receive us. Or it places us into a spiritual

'penalty box' where we must spend time in penance for what we have done.

But Scripture teaches the opposite. Romans 2:4 tells us that it is the goodness of God that leads us to repentance. He does not merely call us to turn away from sin; He calls us to *Himself*. The goal of repentance is reconciliation. It is not merely about putting away sin but about returning to our Father.

This is why repentance can never be separated from Christ. We do not come back to God through our works, hoping to be accepted based on our doing better. We return through the Son, who has already reconciled us.

Colossians 1:20 reminds us that Christ has made peace through the blood of His cross. He is the way back to the Father.

A Lifelong Process

If repentance is turning to God, then it is not a one-time event but a lifelong practice.

Every day, we are drawn back to Him. And every day, we find that His mercy is new. We may throw down our sins in disgust, only to pick them up again, as Paul laments in Romans 7. But it is not about how many times we stumble. It is about how many times we run back to our Father.

So, when we hear the call to repent, let us not think of it as a demand to fix ourselves or reject sin. Let us hear it as an invitation to return to the God who loves us, the Father who runs to meet us, and the Savior who has already made the way home.

DO I HAVE TO WORK FOR MY SALVATION?

"Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." Philippians 2:12

Many misunderstand this verse as a call to work *for* salvation, but the larger context of Philippians makes it clear—Paul is exhorting believers to live in obedience, demonstrating the reality of their salvation.

Understanding the Context

Paul is writing to the church at Philippi, encouraging them to live in a manner worthy of the gospel. Just before this verse, he speaks of Christ's humility and obedience, even unto death (Phil. 2:5-11).

The "*wherefore*" at the beginning of verse twelve connects our obedience to Christ's obedience for us. Because Christ humbled Himself and was exalted, we too are to walk in humble, reverent obedience. The apostle explains this again in verse thirteen:

"*For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.*"

Believers are called to *work out* their salvation, not *work for* it. Salvation is entirely of grace (Eph. 2:8-9), and this grace produces in us good works, not to earn favor with God, but to display the work He is already doing in us.

The phrase "*fear and trembling*" does not mean a terror before God, but a reverence and awe. It reflects the seriousness of living as God's people. Just as one would handle a priceless treasure with great care, we are to approach

our Christian walk with humility and dependence.

Paul is urging the Philippians to be mindful of their witness and responsibility as followers of Christ. He encourages them by acknowledging that they have walked in obedience both in his presence and in his absence. Now, he exhorts them to continue working out what God is working within them.

Working Out Our Salvation

Working out our salvation does not mean figuring it out like a math problem or making it stronger through some type of effort. Rather, it means displaying outwardly what God has worked inwardly. Paul is not calling believers to achieve salvation but to live in a way that visibly expresses the hope and grace that has been received. Simply put, we are to show

others, through love and submission, the salvation that God has put in us.

This salvation is entirely a gift of grace (Eph. 2:8-9), given to them in Christ. Paul's exhortation is not about earning or proving salvation but about making it evident in daily life. Growing in Christlikeness through the means of grace displays this salvation to the world. Yet, we do this not in our strength but by God's enabling power. Philippians 2:13 reminds us that God is actively at work within us, shaping our desires and empowering our obedience.

Philippians 2:12 is not a call to work for or work on our salvation but to work out its implications in our lives.

IS MY FAITH REAL?

"*Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.*" *James 2:14-26*

James 2:17 is often quoted but frequently misunderstood. "*Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.*" Many take this verse as a call for believers to examine their faith to see if it is truly alive.

However, when we consider the context of James 2, we see that the apostle is not calling for introspection regarding salvation but exhorting believers to display the reality of their faith through love and good works toward others.

Context Matters

James writes to believers who were struggling with favoritism and a lack of practical love

toward their brothers and sisters. Earlier in the chapter, he rebukes them for showing partiality to the rich while neglecting the poor (James 2:1-7). He then moves to emphasize what he calls the royal law: "*Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself*" (James 2:8). The immediate context of James 2:17 makes it clear that James is concerned with how faith is perceived and even experienced by others. To make sure that he is driving his point home, James gives this example of faith that is dead, or useless to others.

"*If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit?*" James 2:15-16

The issue is not whether the person speaking has true faith before God, but rather the usefulness of that faith in the lives of others. A faith that does not move us to love and care for those in need is a faith that is functionally dead—lifeless in its impact on the world.

James is not teaching that works are necessary to prove faith before God, and he is surely not saying that they are necessary for our justification. We know from Scripture that faith itself is a gift from God (Eph. 2:8-9) and comes by hearing the Word of Christ (Rom. 10:17). Our faith is not made alive, nor kept alive, by works; rather, our works demonstrate the reality of our faith to those around us.

This is the same principle that Jesus taught in Matthew 5:16:

"*Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.*"

And by the Apostle Peter in 1 Peter 2:12:

"*Whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation.*"

The purpose of good works is not necessarily to assure ourselves of our standing before God (although they can bolster our assurance), but to serve as a visible testimony of the power of the gospel. Our neighbors cannot see our faith, but they can see our love, generosity, and good works.

A Living and Useful Faith

Faith without works is dead—not in the sense that it is nonexistent before God, but that it is

fruitless and useless in the world. Our actions should testify to the reality of our faith.

James 2:17 calls us not to question the genuineness of our faith before God but to consider whether our faith is active and useful in the lives of those around us. As those who have received the gift of faith by God's grace, we are now called to love our neighbors, meet the needs of the hurting, and show the world the beauty of the gospel.

The logic of James' argument here can be summarized in one sentence, attributed to Martin Luther.

"*God does not need your good works, but your neighbor does.*"

DOES FRUIT-BEARING PROVE MY SALVATION?

"*Even so, every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.*" Matthew 7:15-20

Many believers interpret this passage as a means to examine the fruit of their own lives or even to discern the legitimacy of others who claim to be Christians. However, a closer look at the context reveals that Jesus is speaking about false teachers, not individual self-assessment or judging the salvation of others.

Identifying False Teachers

This passage is part of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, specifically in the section where He warns against false prophets: "*Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves*" (Matt. 7:15).

The warning is clear: these individuals present themselves as trustworthy and godly, yet their motives and teachings are destructive. The "fruits" mentioned in verses 17-20 are the outward manifestations of their teachings and influence, not the behavior that they display.

The "fruits" are not merely their actions but the results of their doctrine. Jesus warns His hearers that they will not be able to identify a false prophet simply by their actions and appearance. A false teacher may appear outwardly pious and morally upright, but their

teaching will ultimately lead people away from the good news. Jesus uses the analogy of a tree to explain how to identify a false teacher.

A good tree produces good fruit, meaning the teaching or the fruit that comes from this tree will be teaching that points people to Christ. A corrupt tree produces evil fruit, meaning the teaching or the fruit that comes from this tree will be drawing attention away from the sufficiency of Christ and placing the burden back on the hearer and their righteousness.

False teachers often subtly shift the focus from God's grace to human effort.

This is evident in Jesus' warning that follows these verses: "*Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy*

name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity" (Matthew 7:21-23).

Focusing on the Good Fruit

Rather than using this passage as a call for self-doubt or judgment of others' salvation, Christians should heed its original intent: to be vigilant against false teachers. These are individuals who distort the gospel, whether by adding to it, subtracting from it, or redirecting its focus. Just as Paul writes in Galatians 1:8-9, "*But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed.*"

A good teacher will consistently point believers to Christ alone for salvation. Their “fruit” is the clear proclamation of the gospel.

Matthew 7:17-20 is not a text about self-evaluation or scrutinizing others to determine their salvation. It is a sober warning to discern the teachings we hear and follow. False teachers, though they may appear genuine, are revealed by their corrupt fruit, teaching that undermines the gospel and leads people away from Christ. As believers, our focus must remain fixed on the good tree, Jesus Christ, and the life-giving fruit of His gospel. Only in Him can we find the nourishment and growth that lead to eternal life.

SHOULD I CONSTANTLY QUESTION MY SALVATION?

"*Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith*"
2 Corinthians 13:5

This verse is well-known because it is often used as a call to introspection, urging the "nominal" believer to search their lives for evidence of salvation. However, isolating 2 Corinthians 13:5 from its context distorts its intent and can harm those who may hear well-intentioned preachers call their salvation into question.

A closer look reveals that Paul is not asking the Corinthians to question their salvation based on their assumptions. Instead, he challenges them to evaluate the authenticity of the gospel

they have received, lest they be found reprobate (2 Cor. 13:5).

The Context of 2 Corinthians

The church at Corinth faced troubles from all sides, from external attacks and internal problems. It had been attacked by factions, false teachers, and even challenges to Paul's apostleship. Some questioned whether Paul was a legitimate apostle or just a weak and useless wannabe apostle (2 Cor. 10:10). Throughout the letter, Paul defends his ministry, pointing to the fruit of his labors as evidence that Christ is working through him (2 Cor. 3:2-3).

In 2 Corinthians 13:3, Paul addresses those demanding "proof of Christ speaking" in him. But in verse five, he shifts the focus. Instead of continuing his defense, Paul challenges the Corinthians:

"*Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?*"

This rhetorical approach echoes his argumentation used elsewhere. If the gospel message Paul preached were false, then their faith would be in vain, and they would still be in their sins. Paul invites those scrutinizing his apostleship—and by implication, his message—to examine the message they believe. If their faith rests on the true gospel, then Paul's apostleship is vindicated.

Far from questioning their salvation, Paul reassures them that they already know Christ is in them, and this proves the legitimacy of his ministry.

What It Means to Be "In the Faith"

The phrase "in the faith" refers not to personal faith or belief but to the gospel itself — to ***the faith*** once delivered to the saints (Jude 3). Paul urges the Corinthians to evaluate whether their belief aligns with the gospel he preached. If Christ is indeed in them, it validates Paul's message because they came to faith through his ministry (1 Cor. 3:5-6).

This is not a call to question the genuineness of their salvation. Instead, it is a call to evaluate the foundation of their faith. If their faith rests on the gospel Paul proclaimed, they have no reason to doubt his apostolic authority or their salvation.

Misunderstanding the Verse

When we interpret 2 Corinthians 13:5 as a standalone command to prove our salvation

through works, it fosters unnecessary doubt. Worse, it can shift our focus from Christ's finished work to our performance, tempting us to place faith in our faith rather than in Christ's work on our behalf.

Paul's intent is not to turn the Corinthians inward but to redirect them to the objective truth of the gospel. He calls them to ask:

1. Is the message we believe consistent with the gospel taught by the apostles?

2. Does our faith rest on Christ crucified and risen, or on another foundation?

By testing what they believed in this way, the Corinthians could not only affirm their salvation but also confirm Paul's apostleship.

Examine Yourselves

Ultimately, this passage challenges us to consider what we believe and why. The faith Paul refers to is not a subjective but a belief in the objective message of Christ crucified for sinners. This apostolic gospel is the standard by which we evaluate both our beliefs and those who teach us.

Rather than using 2 Corinthians 13:5 to spark self-doubt, let it remind us to anchor our faith in the gospel of grace. Examine what you believe: Is it the faith of the apostles, the gospel of Jesus Christ? If so, you can rest assured, you are in the faith.

Make your calling and election sure.

HOW DO I CONFIRM MY ELECTION?

"Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall" 2 Peter 1:10-11

At first glance, this verse might seem to suggest that we are being tasked with proving or ensuring that we are called and elected by God.

However, a closer examination of the text within its context reveals something profoundly different. This passage is not about generating evidence for our calling and election, nor is it about testing the evidence, but about strengthening our assurance in gospel realities.

Context

To understand this verse, we must begin with its immediate context. Earlier in the chapter, Peter calls believers to live virtuous lives, adding to their faith: virtue, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love (2 Pet. 1:5-7). These qualities, Peter explains, flow from a life rooted in the gospel. He writes in verse 9: "*But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins.*"

Peter's argument here is critical. The person who fails to live, strengthening their faith, has not lost their salvation but has lost sight of the gospel. They have forgotten the cleansing power of Christ's atoning work and the grace that set them free from sin.

This forgetfulness leads to spiritual stagnation, doubt, and even sinful living.

The Call to Make It Sure

In light of this, Peter's command to "*make your calling and election sure*" is not about working to secure our status as one of God's elect but about anchoring our hearts in the certainty of what God has already done. The Greek word for "sure" (*bebaios*) carries the sense of something being firm, steadfast, and unshakable. Simply put, the apostle Peter is calling us to reinforce our assurance.

This understanding aligns perfectly with Peter's warning in verse nine. The key to living a holy life is not to strive harder in our own strength but to "sure up" our confidence in the gospel. As we meditate on and rest in the truths of our cleansing and reconciliation through Christ, the fruit of godliness naturally

follows. Strengthening our assurance in the finished work of Christ is the key to walking in holiness. As we rehearse the gospel, recalling that we have been cleansed, called, and chosen by God, our faith is fortified, and the virtues Peter lists become the natural outflow of a heart resting in grace.

A Gospel-Centered Cycle

Peter's teaching reveals a beautiful cycle: as we grow in the assurance of our calling and election (sure it up), we bear the fruit of godliness. And as we see this fruit in our lives, it further reinforces our assurance. This cycle is not about self-effort but about living in the light of the gospel. Reminding ourselves so that we do not forget.

To "*make your calling and election sure*" is to daily rest in the truths of God's grace in Christ. It is to remind yourself of the cleansing, calling,

and choosing that God has accomplished on your behalf. As you sure up your assurance in the gospel, you will find the power to live a life that reflects His glory.

In doing so, you will see the truth of Peter's promise: "*for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall.*"

IS OBEDIENCE THE TEST OF SALVATION?

"*If you love me, keep my commandments*" John 14:15

At first glance, this verse can seem like a conditional demand: "Prove your love for me by keeping my commandments." However, a closer look at the language reveals something much deeper and more comforting.

In the original, the word *keep* (*tērēsete*) is in the *future tense, indicative mood, and active voice.*

This means that instead of issuing a command, Jesus is making a promise. This verse is not about earning His love through obedience or proving our love by our obedience, but about

what naturally flows out of our union with Him.

Simply put, He is saying: "*Because you love me, when I am gone, you will keep my commandments.*"

Having clarified what Jesus meant by 'keep my commandments, let's consider what these commandments are.

What Are These Commandments?

A few verses earlier, Jesus defines the commandment He has in mind: "A *new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another*" (John 13:34).

Love for others is the central ethic of the Christian life. It would be, and is, the distinguishing mark of Jesus' followers: "*By this*

shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (John 13:35).

This love is not merely a sentiment but a reflection of the love Jesus has shown us. It's self-sacrificial, enduring, and unconditional. It is this love that sets us apart as God's holy people, as Peter writes: "*But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation*" (1 Peter 1:15). So how are we to do this?

How Will We Keep This Commandment?

If you're like me, you might wonder, *How can I live up to this calling*? Jesus anticipates our need for help and provides the answer: the Holy Spirit. Just after His promise that we will keep His commandments, He says, "*And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you forever; Even the Spirit of truth*" (John 14:16-17).

The Holy Spirit empowers us to love in ways that are beyond our natural ability. It is through His work in our hearts that we can live out the love Jesus calls us to embody. This is not a love we muster on our own but one that is poured into our hearts by the Spirit (Romans 5:5). According to the Apostle Paul, this love is actually fruit that the Spirit bears in us (Galatians 5).

Love as the Fruit of Grace

In this light, John 14:15 is not a weighty command to bear but a gracious promise to cling to. Because Jesus loves us, He enables us to love others. Our obedience is the fruit of His grace, not the condition for it. This love, empowered by the Spirit, is what sets us apart as holy and distinct in a world often marked by self-interest and self-preservation.

So, as we reflect on these words of Jesus, let us remember that His commandments are not burdensome (1 John 5:3). They are the natural outflow of a heart transformed by His love and sustained by His Spirit. Trust that His Spirit will empower us to love as He has loved us. "*We love him, because he first loved us*" (1 John 4:19).

WILL I HEAR "WELL DONE"?

"*Well done, good and faithful servant*," Matthew 25:21

The hope of hearing the words, "*Well done, good and faithful servant*," at the end of our life is something that drives many to work faithfully in the name of God.

This affirmation from the Lord represents for many the culmination of a life pleasing to God, but if we are honest with ourselves, it is easy to feel unworthy of this. We know the depths of our sin, the frailty of our obedience, and the inconsistency of our faith. How, then, can we hope that these words might be said to us, sinners who stumble daily?

The answer lies not in our efforts, but in the perfect and finished work of Jesus Christ, who has done all things well on our behalf.

The Source of Our Approval

In the parable of the Talents (Matt. 25:14–30), the faithful servants are commended for their stewardship. They multiplied what their master entrusted to them. At first glance, this might seem like a works-based affirmation—that God's approval hinges on how much we accomplish for Him, but the broader scope of Scripture reveals a deeper, gospel-centered truth.

Christ Himself is the ultimate faithful servant. He perfectly obeyed the will of His Father (John 6:38), fulfilled the law (Matt. 5:17), and accomplished the work of redemption (John 19:30). Through His obedience, righteousness, and sacrificial death, He heard the words of His

Father: "*This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased*" (Matt. 3:17).

Here's the astonishing truth of the gospel: all that Christ has accomplished is accounted to us. His righteousness is imputed to us by faith (2 Cor. 5:21). When God looks at us, He sees us clothed in the perfection of His Son. Therefore, the words "*Well done*" are not a result of our works, but the result of Christ's perfect work credited to our account.

Does this mean our good works or obedience don't matter? By no means! Christ's finished work secures our salvation, but it also transforms us. We are not saved by good works, but we are saved for good works (Eph. 2:10). Our obedience flows from gratitude and love for the One who has done everything for us. The Holy Spirit empowers us to live as faithful servants, not to earn approval but to

reflect the approval we have already received in Christ.

Hearing the Words "Well Done"

For every believer, the promise of hearing "*Well done*" is a certainty because it rests on Christ's unchanging faithfulness, not our wavering efforts. Jesus has fulfilled every command, borne every burden, and completed every task perfectly. In Him, we are declared faithful servants because He is the faithful servant.

When we stand before God, it will not be our achievements that secure His commendation. It will be the merits of Christ, freely given to us by grace through faith. And as we hear those blessed words, "*Well done*, *my good and faithful servant*," we will know that they are spoken not because of what we have done, but because of what Jesus has done for us.

This is the gospel—the good news that our salvation, our approval, and our reward are all of grace.

JESUS' MESSAGE FOR THE DOUBTING

Jesus saith unto her, Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God. – John 20:17

To be honest, this is one section of Scripture that has always confused me. Why did Jesus tell Mary not to touch Him? If we take a closer look at the text, we may be able to gain a clearer understanding of what is happening in this verse, as well as a more glorious comprehension of the gospel!

Earlier in John 20, we are given the account of Mary Magdalene and several other women early on Sunday morning, heading to the tomb where Jesus' body had been placed. From the

different parallel accounts, we can begin to piece together that when Mary Magdalene sees the stone rolled away, she immediately runs to tell Peter and John that someone has taken the body. However, the other women who were with her, continue to the tomb and find two angels who explain to them that Jesus has risen!

Consumed with joy, the three women (*remember that Mary Magdalene is not with them*) run to tell the disciples that Jesus has risen (Matt. 28:8), only to encounter Him on their way. The women fall and grab hold of Jesus' feet in worship (Matt. 28:9) and are told to go tell the brethren that He is going to be coming to them.

So, where does this leave Mary?

It seems that after relaying this, seemingly terrible news, Mary goes back to the tomb with

Peter and John, overcome by grief and tears. After conveying her fears to two angels, she comes in contact with her Savior!

Understand that Mary was in a different situation than the other women who had come to the tomb with her. Her grief had turned to fear and doubt at seeing the stone moved from the tomb, which was further magnified by Peter and John leaving her behind in their haste. Mary was alone, crippled with grief and doubt. But Jesus comes to her with a message of peace and hope! (John 20:16)

As Jesus reveals Himself to Mary, we are brought to the verse in question:

"*Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to My brothers and say to them, 'I ascend to My Father and your Father, to My God and your God'*" (John 20:17).

Now, to us, this sounds almost rude; but to Mary, this statement would have brought overwhelming comfort. As Strong's Greek dictionary sets forth, ἅπτω (*haptou*) means "to fasten to," "to adhere to," or "to cling to."

Warren Wiersbe points out that it is the account of Mary Magdalene in John 20 that emphasizes the love of Jesus for the doubting explaining that Jesus was, in essence, saying to Mary, "You don't have to continue holding on to Me. I'm here, and I have a job for you."[3]

Jesus uses the phrase "I have not ascended to My Father" to let Mary know that He is alive, and that this is not the last time she will see

[3] Warren Wiersbe, Be Transformed (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 2002), 151-152.

Him. Further, He instructed her to tell the brethren that He had ascended to the Father.

At first glance, this may seem like a contradiction, but it is, in reality, a proclamation of the gospel for Mary and all those who would believe. We can see this when we read the end of verse seventeen, as Jesus says, “To My Father and your Father, to My God and your God.”

Jesus uses a phrase here that He had not used before. He tells Mary that she and the other believers now have the same standing with God that He has. Why? Because the work of redemption is complete! Paul would later tell the church at Corinth that Christ was made sin for us so that we could be made the righteousness of God. Jesus sent Mary to tell the others that this is exactly what had happened.

Believer, if you are crippled with doubt, know that Jesus isn't waiting to scold you. In love, He wants you to see Him and the work that He accomplished in your place.

Look to Jesus, see the gospel for you, and go tell others what you have found!

RESTING IN THE ASSURANCE OF CHRIST

As we conclude, there is one truth stands above all others: our assurance of salvation rests entirely in the finished work of Jesus Christ.

It is not our striving, our performance, or our achievements that can offer us lasting peace, but the unshakable reality that Christ has accomplished all that is necessary for our salvation. His perfect life, sacrificial death, and victorious resurrection are the grounds upon which we stand, confidently knowing that we are saved—not because of what we can do, but because of what He has already done.

When doubts creep in, and when we look at our own failures or struggles, we must remember that our assurance is not rooted in

ourselves but in the finished work of Christ. The gospel reminds us repeatedly that Christ's atoning sacrifice on the cross is complete, and His resurrection assures us that the victory is secure. Our salvation, from start to finish, is a work of grace—grace that we did not earn and cannot lose.

It is so easy to look inward, to doubt, and to measure our worth by how well we are doing in our Christian walk. But the call for every believer is to look away from ourselves, from our own efforts, and to continually turn our eyes to Christ. The more we look to Him, the more our assurance grows. It is Christ's work, not ours, that sustains us. His righteousness, His faithfulness, and His grace are the only true grounds of assurance.

Furthermore, we must remember that all of Scripture, even the difficult and sobering texts,

is never meant to cause doubt or anxiety for the believer. God's Word does not seek to smoke out the nominal or make us question our salvation if we truly belong to Christ. Rather, those passages serve to warn the unrepentant, to call the wavering back to faith, and to strengthen the true believer in their walk of faith. They are meant to drive us to the gospel, to help us see our need for Christ's righteousness, and to remind us of His all-sufficient grace.

I exhort you to continually look outside of yourself to Christ. Whenever doubt arises, do not look at your works, your struggles, or your past mistakes. Look to Christ—the author and perfecter of our faith. He has already finished the work, and nothing can separate you from His love.

Further, it is vital that you engage with the means of grace God has provided in the church. Join a community where the gospel is faithfully preached, where you can partake in the sacraments, and where you can experience the mutual encouragement and accountability that comes from fellow believers.

The local church is where we are reminded of Christ's promises, where His grace is proclaimed, and where we are nurtured in our assurance through worship, fellowship, and the Word.

In Christ alone, we find our ultimate confidence. Our assurance is not grounded in the wavering and imperfect nature of our own faith, but in the unchanging, completed work of Christ. He is the rock of our salvation, and on Him alone can we stand, knowing that we are held secure in His grace. Let this truth be the

foundation of your life, a constant source of peace and confidence.

May you continually find rest in His finished work, looking to Him for assurance, and finding your hope and strength in the gospel. And as you walk in this assurance, may you be strengthened by the fellowship of believers, growing in grace and in the knowledge of Christ, until the day we behold Him face to face.