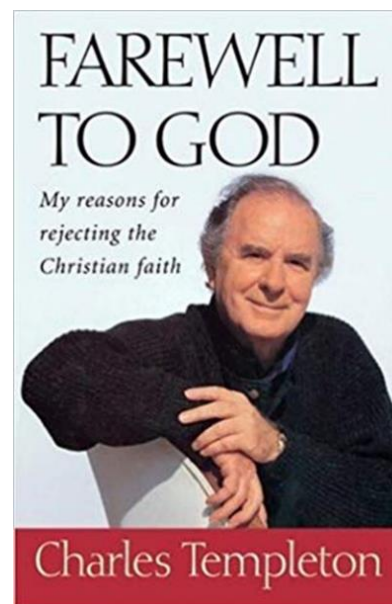


Christians, Apostasy, and Apostates

(According to Free Grace Teaching, Reformed Theology, and Biblical Truth)

Pastor Kelly Sensenig

For more than twenty years, Charles Templeton was a major figure in the church in Canada and the United States. During the 1950s, he and Billy Graham were the most well-known evangelists in North America. Templeton spoke nightly to stadium crowds of up to thirty thousand people. Many people were saved. In 1946, the National Association of Evangelicals listed Templeton as the “best used of God” superseding even Billy Graham. However, by this time Charles was having major doubts as to the validity of the Bible and those doubts increased as he read infamous works of famous skeptics.



He wrote in “Charles Templeton: An Anecdotal Memoir,” these words: “I picked up Thomas Paine’s *The Age of Reason*. In a few hours, nearly everything I knew or believed about the Christian religion was challenged and in large part demolished.” In the next ten days, he read Francois Voltaire’s “*The Bible Explained at Last*,” Bertrand Russell’s “*Why I am Not a Christian*,” the speeches of the atheist Robert Ingersoll, including “*The Mistakes of Moses*,” and some of the writings of David Hume and Thomas Huxley. His increasing doubts about the trustworthiness of the Old Testament and the teachings of the Christian church finally brought about a crisis in his faith and in 1957 he resigned from the ministry. Chuck was now doubting his beliefs and believing his doubts! Eventually he walked away into the blackness of apostasy.

In his book “*Farewell to God*,” Templeton speaks about his reasons for the abandonment of his faith and renouncing his ties to Christianity. His purpose for writing the book was to justify his rejection of faith in Christ and the Bible. In straightforward language, Templeton deals with such subjects as the Creation fable, racial prejudice in the Bible, the identity of Jesus of Nazareth, Jesus’

alienation from his family, the second-class status of women in the church, the mystery of evil, the illusion that prayer works, why there is suffering and death, and the loss of faith in God. Templeton wrote, "How could a loving and omnipotent God create such horrors as we have been contemplating?" He says that Jesus "was the greatest human being who has ever lived. He was a moral genius. His ethical sense was unique." But Templeton stops short of recognizing Jesus as the Son of God. On the last page of his book he states: "I believe there is no supreme being with human attributes, no God in the biblical sense but that all life is the result of timeless evolutionary forces...I believe there is no Father in heaven...." Templeton, as his own story makes plain, never truly reached a point where he was intellectually convicted of the truthfulness of Christ and Christianity.

Was Templeton saved? Was he a child of God or a child of the devil? While doubts can be part of the Christian life, his outward denial of God, along with his abandonment and repudiation of the Christian faith, gives substantial evidence that he was never a genuine Christian. Templeton would fit into the category of an apostate who knows the faith and yet abandons it for intellectual and humanistic reasons. He was an example of an unbeliever who remained an unbeliever. He was like the man Jesus spoke about, whose life was represented as stony soil (Matt. 13:20-22). What appeared to be true life sprung up very quickly, but in the end it withered away and bore no lasting fruit, since there was no root of repentance and genuine faith. Luke 8:13 records it in this way: "They on the rock *are they*, which, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, which for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away" (into apostasy and the old way of life, manifesting an unrepentant heart and unregenerate life).

Jesus was teaching that not everyone that appears to be part of His followers is really a genuine disciple and born again believer (John 8:31). Sometimes they come forth as a giant of the faith, sincere and effective, but in the end, like Judas, they are seen to be of the devil and his children (Matt. 26:21-25; John 6:64-71). When people leave Christianity and from the depths of their soul totally repudiate Jesus Christ and God, no matter what they have previously done, they are identified as never being part of the true band of Christ followers.

1 John 2:19

“They (*the unsaved who commit apostasy*) went out from us (*Christ’s true followers who continue to possess faith and believe in Christological doctrine*), but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would *no doubt* have continued with us; but *they went out*, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us.”

This is the sad story of Charles Templeton. He was never “of us” or part of Christ’s true followers. Templeton’s shipwrecked faith stands out as a glaring example of apostasy. He accepted man’s word over God’s Word. Templeton is a classic example of someone (an unbeliever) who knows the truth about Jesus Christ, salvation, and the Christian faith but eventually repudiates it for humanism and man’s intellectual reasoning. Apparently Charles Templeton only knew about Jesus but he never knew Jesus as his own personal Savior. There are people who believe in Jesus superficially but Jesus does not believe in them! Templeton was similar to the people who attended the Passover.

John 2:23-24

“Now when he was in Jerusalem at the passover, in the feast *day*, many believed in his name (superficially but not genuinely), when they saw the miracles which he did. But Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all *men*.”

Jesus knew who Charles Templeton was all along. He was not one of His own children. “But there are some of you that believe not. For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were that believed not, and who should betray him” (John 6:64). Templeton was a very gifted man who never visited Calvary himself and experienced forgiveness of sins. Many people were saved under his preaching. Thousands of people heard him preach the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (even though he did not believe it). In an interview with journalist Lee Strobel before Chuck’s death, Strobel asked whether he would like to believe, and Chuck responded, “Of course! If I could, I would. I’m eighty-three years old. I’ve got Alzheimer’s. I’m dying, for goodness sake.” I am afraid that there are many like Templeton who are going through the motions but have never come to personal faith in Jesus Christ. They are actively religious but are not true believers.

Cable television star Ted Turner criticized conservative Christianity and said, "Jesus probably would be sick at his stomach" over the way his ideas have been "twisted" by today's preachers, the Atlanta Journal-Constitution reported. Turner made his remarks at a banquet in Orlando, Fla., where he was given an award by the American Humanist Association for his work on behalf of the environment and world peace. Turner said he had a strict Christian upbringing and at one time even seriously considered becoming a missionary. He laughed and said, "I was saved seven or eight times," the newspaper quoted him as saying. But he said he became disenchanted with Christianity after his sister died, despite his prayers. Turner said the more he strayed from his faith, "the better I felt."

Apostasy and Its Deceptive Nature



Templeton and Turner fit the apostate description found in Peter's epistle. 2 Peter 2:1 identifies them as "false teachers among you" and then Peter describes them as having a superficial experience that was not genuine salvation. It was a religious experience of some kind that showed potential but it was not real. For a time, Templeton was a masked man hiding his true identity but what was underneath and in his heart eventually came out. He played Christianity but in the end gave up Christ and Christianity for secular reasoning instead of God's truth.

2 Peter 2:20 describes these people and apostates in this way:

"For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning."

We must explain how these apostates can experience what appears to be a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ and also escape from the immoral vices of this world, which is the same promise that was given to all genuine believers ("having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust" - 2 Peter 1:4). Apparently at one time in their lives these false teachers made a false profession of faith in Christ that

was designed to get them into the local churches. Jude says they had crept into the churches unnoticed (“For there are certain men crept in unawares” – Jude 4).

Paul speaks of these same apostates and false teachers “who came in privily (secretly) to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage” – Gal. 2:4). These false teachers had to make a false profession of faith in Christ and initially portray to others a false expression of outward deliverance from sin’s power. This is how they got into the local churches. However, what they said and showed before others was all sham and counterfeit experience.

Warren Wiersbe observes:

“But these apostates did have a ‘religious experience!’ And they would boldly claim that their experience brought them into fellowship with the Lord. They would be able to explain ‘the way of righteousness,’ and would use the Word of God to support their teachings. If they had not experienced some kind of ‘religious conversion,’ they would never have been able to get into the fellowship of the local assemblies.”

It would seem that at one point the genuine Christians may have accepted these false teachers as orthodox Christians because of the outward show and pious impression they made upon many people. The terminology of “having escaped the pollutions of the world” (2 Pet. 2:20) suggests that these apostate at one time experienced some type of outward *reformation* in relation to their personal lives. They actually professed to be Christians. This is understood in the phrase “through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.” In other words, they made the outward claim that they had a relationship with Jesus Christ and called themselves a Christian. They seemingly got started on the right track. Others were impressed with some of their new behavior patterns and lifestyle changes.

Yes, the Bible states the apostates had “knowledge” (vs. 20) and that they knew the righteous way (“know” - vs. 21). However, we must remember that UNSAVED people can possess a superficial knowledge about Jesus Christ, the Gospel and His delivering power, but NEVER embrace its message and receive of the new life and delivering power that Christ wants to give to them. They are described elsewhere as “Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth” (2 Timothy

3:7). Although it initially appeared they had a saving knowledge about Jesus Christ, they NEVER did come to personally embrace the truth as their own. This description fits Charles Templeton. Apostates possess a *head* knowledge about Christ and the Gospel but not a *heart* knowledge of the truthfulness and reality of the delivering message of the Gospel. The Bible reminds us that “For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness” (Rom. 10:10).

All of the previously revealed facts demonstrate that the false teachers did not embrace the truth that Jesus Christ offered to them (2 Pet. 2:1-2). We must remember that just because somebody has “knowledge” or knows the truth about Jesus Christ and His delivering power does not mean they possess true saving knowledge and faith in Christ. So what kind of “knowledge” did these apostates have? What did they know? We can be sure that they knew about the Gospel, salvation through Jesus Christ and His delivering power over sin, but nothing in the text says they embraced Christ as Savior and received His delivering power over sin. Knowing about something and receiving it are two different things (John 1:12). People might “know” what to do but then reject it and turn away from it (John 3:36; 5:40).

The experience of the apostates is brought out when they are said to have “escaped the pollutions of the world” (2 Pet. 2:20). In the case of the apostate or sham and counterfeit Christian, this is called *reformation*, which is man’s futile efforts and attempts to try and improve himself morally and ethically. The experience of the apostates was not *regeneration* or a new way of life given through the supernatural new birth that Jesus promised (John 3:7). Instead, it was a superficial experience and pseudo faith that was not expressed in Christ.

2 Peter 2:21 goes on to say that these false teachers or apostates actually knew the truth but turned away from it and were never saved (“known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known *it*, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them”). Again, they knew about the Gospel and promise of God’s delivering power which results in a righteous life, but nothing in the text says they personally embraced the saving and delivering message of the Gospel in their own hearts and lives.

To “turn” as stated in 2 Peter 2:21 or turn back (Heb. 10:38-39) means to depart from key doctrinal truths (1 Tim. 4:1) and go back into a committed lifestyle of sin without possessing any signs of regenerating life (Titus 1:16; 1 John 3:8,10; Matt. 7:20) is the mark of all apostasy. This too is reflected in the life of Charles Templeton. The apostate forsakes the truth, defects from God’s standard, and does not embrace it as his own. This verse describes the perversion and defection of the false teachers. They professed the Christian experience (the way of righteousness) but the unchanged nature of their lives demonstrate that they ultimately had chosen to reject Christ (Heb. 10:26–31).

All of their superficial efforts to reform themselves (“escape the pollutions of the world” – 2 Pet. 2:20) ultimately result in nothing more than temporary and superficial moral reform through religion, the religion of nominal Christianity, which is devoid of genuine repentance and faith. Again, Charles Templeton fits the template of the apostate description in 2 Peter. Like Judas, he lived among God’s people, appeared to be blessed by God, but eventually demonstrated his true person as “the son of perdition” (John 17:2).

Sometimes the deception of apostates is not detectable at the beginning of their experience and experiment with Christianity. But in time, the true nature of the apostate surfaces. He takes off his mask and is revealed for what and whom he really is – “men of corrupt minds, reprobate concerning the faith” (2 Tim. 3:8).



This true story of Charles Templeton, as revealed above, brings up some important questions. Can an alleged “born again” Christian who denies God and the Christian faith be saved? Can someone who influences others to become atheists be saved? Are Christians called apostates in the Bible? Can they commit various acts of apostasy? Who are the real

apostates? Are you an apostate? Can a Christian totally abandon God, truth, and live a rebellious life without any evidence of being a Christian? Apostasy within Christianity is the rejection of Christian doctrine and conduct by someone who claims to be a Christian.

The term apostasy comes from the Greek word “apostasia” (“falling away” – 2 Thess. 2:3) which means defection, departure, revolt or rebellion from the faith (what the Bible says and Christians believe, embrace, and practice). It can be described as a willful falling away from, or rebellion against Christianity and the truth. It’s the abandonment and renunciation of the beliefs and practices of Christianity (Christian doctrine and conduct).

In this study, I want to share some thoughts that revolve around these questions, since many Christians have been addressing them in their books, magazines, and theological discussions. One of the segments within “The Free Grace Movement” teaches a modernized form of “free grace” thinking which was not espoused by previous generations of “free-grace” thinkers like Arno C. Gaebelein, C. I. Scofield, Harry Ironside, William Newell, William Pettingill, Alva McClain, Dwight Pentecost, John Walvoord, Charles Ryrie, Warren Wiersbe and many others.

Apostasy and Free Grace

I am certainly not against free grace teaching as supported by Scripture. Let me summarize the free grace teaching. Free grace teaches that the grace related to salvation is absolutely free (Rom. 3:24). It means that the grace of salvation can be received only through faith (Eph. 2:8).



Since sinners can do nothing to earn God's grace, it has to be given as a gift (Rom. 6:23) which can only be received through faith in Christ alone (Rom. 5:1; Gal. 3:24). Free grace means the object of faith is the Lord Jesus Christ (Gal. 2:16; 3:26). Faith must always have an object, because faith itself is not the effective cause of our salvation (We are saved "by grace"), but the instrumental means through which we are saved ("through faith").

Free grace only looks to the finished work of Christ for salvation. Grace is free because Jesus Christ did all the work on our behalf to provide us with salvation (Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:25). His proclamation "It is finished" (John 19:30) on the cross means that He made the final and full payment for the penalty for our sins (1 Cor.

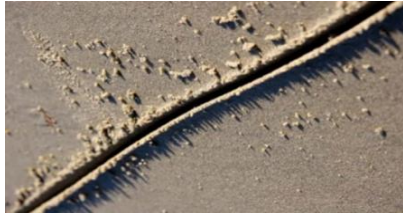
15:3-4; Gal. 3:13). Free grace also means we cannot add anything to what Jesus accomplished (Titus 3:5). We cannot do anything to earn our salvation or to keep our salvation since it is all of grace (Rom. 11:6; 2 Tim. 1:9). As a result, free grace therefore teaches eternal security for the believer (John 6:47; 10:28-29) and provides the only basis and complete assurance of salvation for individual believers (Heb. 7:25).

Any system or belief that actually *requires* performance (good works) for salvation and to obtain the primary assurance of one's salvation cannot produce real assurance. This is because human performance is subjective, variable, unpredictable, and always imperfect (Gal. 3:10). Faith must rest in Jesus Christ and His promise of eternal life as revealed in the Word of God (John 3:15-16; 6:47). The person and work of Christ and the Word of God are objective truths that cannot change. Therefore, free grace, through Christ's death, resurrection, and promise of eternal life, offers the only basis for full assurance of salvation (Heb. 10:22).

Free grace also distinguishes between salvation and discipleship. In other words, the message of discipleship is not included with faith and salvation. While Reformed Theology teaches that a person must declare their commitment to discipleship in order to be saved, free grace understands that the condition for eternal salvation, which is to believe, is distinct from the many conditions related to discipleship (deny oneself, take up your cross, follow Christ, abide in His Word, love Christ more than your family, etc.). Since grace is absolutely free, it cannot demand these conditions or it ceases to be grace. Free grace teaches that the commitments of discipleship should be the *result* of salvation, not the *requirement* for salvation. To make discipleship/mastery/Lordship conditions of salvation inserts works and human merit (legalism) into the Gospel of grace (Acts 20:24). According to free grace, the believer is set free from any demands of the law or works as a basis for salvation and eternal life (Rom. 7:4; 8:2; 10:4; Gal. 2:19; 3:5-6).

Anyone who studies the Bible faithfully must agree that salvation is absolutely free because it is based solely upon the finished work of Christ from start to finish. The problems that I have with the present Free Grace Movement have nothing to do with free grace as it relates to salvation, assurance, and eternal life through Christ alone. It has to do with what happens after we receive the gift of free grace

(salvation). In order to maintain what many perceive as “free grace” after salvation, and free grace regarding the assurance of salvation, they deny that Christians must possess some type of transformation in their lifestyle.



In other words, grace cannot be free if a person must give some proof of their salvation through transformation of living. In fact, some who embrace this free grace position make outlandish claims that Christians can totally denounce and deny the Biblical and historic faith of Christianity, renounce and reject Christ, join an atheist club, live like the devil their entire life, and still go to Heaven when they die, based on the teaching of free grace. This means that in order to defend free grace, it must be applied even to the realm of apostates and apostasy, which concludes that genuine Christians can become “Christian apostates,” totally denying Christ and Christianity and still be saved. This is where I draw a line in the sand and depart from the Free Grace Movement teaching.

Apostasy and Grace Gone Wild

Free Grace Theology teaches there is no repentance that takes place in the conversion response, claiming it is works-oriented. It teaches that genuine faith in Christ does not need to reveal itself by works or transformation of living after a person is saved. It claims there is nothing in the Bible that states there must be fruitfulness or a change of life after someone is saved. Some free gracers actually claim that Christians can become God-denying, Bible bashing, Christ-rejecting apostates, atheistic evolutionists, and abortion doctors so free grace without works and faith alone in Christ can be defended. In other words, people can live like hell raisers on earth and still be saved by free grace, through faith alone in Christ, since this is the sole condition that God requires for salvation.



The kind of reasoning turns grace into lasciviousness (Jude 4). It is grace gone wild! It is what Paul condemned in Romans 6:1 when echoing these words: “Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid.” Let it never be! Sadly, in trying

to defend the message of free grace and faith alone in Christ, some have undermined the message of free grace, since this message also applies to the realm of Christian living (Titus 2:11-12). Yes, faith in Christ is the only condition for salvation (Rom. 4:5; Eph. 2:8-9). And yes, a person does not base his assurance on good works but on Christ alone (2 Tim. 1:12) and His promise of eternal life (John 6:47). Therefore, any change that occurs in a person's life after salvation serves as a reminder of the salvation he already possesses through grace alone and by faith alone in Christ. In the Bible, transformation of living, which follows salvation, is never to be viewed and understood as a legalistic requirement for salvation and assurance. This type of flawed reasoning goes way beyond the realm and revelation of Scripture.

A growing segment within the Free Grace Movement of today make the false assessment that grace can no longer be considered "free grace" if there must be some transformation in a person's life that follows salvation. This transformation or perseverance in good works is viewed as something a person must do to know that he is saved. As a result, any perseverance in transformed living is viewed as a requirement for a person's salvation and assurance. And there can be no requirements attached to faith alone in Christ.

As we will confirm throughout this study, a natural and general transformation of living that is observed in one's life as a Christian does not invalidate free grace, when a person realizes that his salvation and assurance stems from Christ alone, and that any change in one's life is only a secondary blessing of assurance (2 Cor. 13:5; 2 Pet. 1:10; 1 John 3:14) that complements a person's faith and assurance he already possesses in Christ. The transformation wonder of God's grace in an individual's life does not take away from faith alone, in Christ alone, by grace alone. It is a beautiful complement to it, providing a secondary confirmation of one's salvation, which is something they should already know they possess through their expression of faith in Christ.

Something else must be said about apostasy and free grace. The message of free grace does not apply to those who have never received God's grace, who are the enemies of grace (Matt. 7:15; Acts 15:1; 20:29), and who are therefore unregenerate apostates that have "turned the grace of our God into lasciviousness,

and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ” (Jude 4). We should not try and protect these type of people with free grace! We don’t have to integrate Free Grace Theology into their lives. To force “free grace” on those who have outwardly denied the faith, repudiated the claims of Christ, and who make a mockery out of Christ and Christianity actually makes a mockery out of grace! The message of free grace does not apply to “A man that is an heretick” (Tit. 3:10). He does not want grace and His theology and life confirms this.

Some free grace teachers reason like this: “Nobody must make any changes in their life, in order to give proof or verification of their salvation, since this would no longer allow salvation’s grace to be received and experienced freely in a person’s life. In other words, if we place any necessary acts of transformation upon a person’s life, as proof of one’s salvation, this means they must do something, live in a certain way, in order to know they are saved. This takes the freedom out of the grace message which is related to a person’s salvation. If salvation is really free, then a person does not have to change and give proof that he is one of God’s children. Any necessary change steals away the message of free grace and faith alone in Christ.”

Of course, if we follow this line of reasoning, this means that apostates and lunatics like Jim Jones could have been saved. It means that cult leaders and atheistic evolutionists who mock God and Christianity can be saved. It means that demonized serial killers could be saved. How far should we take this? Perhaps even Adolph Hitler could have been saved. No, I’m not trying to mock free grace and those who hold this doctrine dear to their hearts, including myself. I believe salvation is absolutely free! Mercy there was great and grace was free! I’m simply making a valid point at this part of my discussion on how some have taken free grace beyond what the Bible teaches. In defending this precious grace truth related to salvation (Eph. 2:8-9), they actually undermine another important grace truth related to sanctification (Rom. 6:1-15).

The freedom of grace that relates to salvation means that a person must only express faith in Christ to be saved. This is true from start to finish. The proof of one’s salvation, which is evidenced by some fruit and transformation of living (Eph. 2:10), should not be viewed as a necessary legalistic requirement for salvation and

assurance, but as a natural transformation that occurs in one's life which gives evidence that one has been born again (1 John 4:7-8). The true message of free grace is that salvation with eternal is free to receive (Rom. 6:23) and that a Christian can know that he possesses salvation only through Christ (John 14:6; Acts 4:12).

At the same time, free grace is not a message that theologically concludes, "You can actually become an apostate and still be saved, you can live a totally godless life after you are saved, one that is in total rebellion against God, and still be saved. You can be a member of MS-13, a military jihadist, or a witchdoctor and still be saved, since God's saving grace is free." Of course, there is no free grace in such a message as this, since grace frees us from slavery to sin in view of our victorious union with Christ (Rom. 6: 6-7, 12-13, 17), and since those who hate God and Christianity, and who want to behead people in the name of Allah, want nothing to do with free grace!

We should all be "free gracers" when we correctly understand the place of God's grace in salvation and in relation to Christian living. However, in the current free-grace climate, there are those who argue against Biblical repentance as being a necessary part of conversion and no change of living (sanctification) as the proof of one's salvation, while at the same time they strangely teach there is no entrance into the Millennial Kingdom for carnal Christians. This seems like an oddity. Carnal Christians are, for lack of better words, held in some kind of "Protestant Purgatory" awaiting the ending of the earthly kingdom or Millennium. All these teachings actually infringe or undermine the true nature of free grace.

The more recent "free grace" thinking is actually a departure from Biblical free grace teaching. It is grace gone wild! The Bible teaches we receive God's grace freely for justification (Rom. 3:24), we have the assurance of salvation and eternal life through grace (Eph. 2:8-9; 2 Tim. 1:9), while at the same time we are also changed by God's grace, so we can experience the freedom that grace brings into our lives (Titus 2:11-12). We also enter the Millennium because of the new birth (John 3:5; 1 Cor. 6:9-11) and through being joint-heirs with Christ (Rom. 8:17; Rev. 5:10) which are all expressions of God's free grace.



The Free Grace Movement should follow through with their emphasis on grace and confirm that grace is why we enter and rule in the Millennium. Our entrance into the earthly Kingdom is by the new birth (John 3:5) which is the free expression of God's grace. To deny the entrance of all God's children in the earthly kingdom is deny free grace. Our privilege to enter the Kingdom is the result of our judicial forgiveness before

God (1 Cor. 6:9-11 – "such were some of you"). Furthermore, our union with Christ and the blessings that flow from this union (Rom. 8:17; 2 Tim. 2:11-12) are also a free expression of grace. It's grace for salvation (ruling out legalism – Eph. 2:8-9), grace for sanctification (ruling out libertinism, apostasy and total abandonment from God, fruitlessness – Romans 6), and grace for the future (reassuring entrance into both the earthly Kingdom and Heaven – Luke 12:32; 1 Pet. 5:10). It's grace all the way!

I would like to comment on this further since this teaching is causing confusion among some of the brethren. Both the Kingdom and Heaven are granted to us on the basis of God's marvelous grace. I'm amazed how some teach that we enter Heaven because of God's saving grace, even though we will have varying amounts of reward (2 Cor. 5:10), but then turn around and proclaim that we do not enter the earthly Kingdom because of God's grace. The Bible teaches we are all overcomers in Christ (1 John 5:4-5) and therefore will enter the earthly Kingdom (Rev. 2:26-28; 3:7) and Heaven (Rev. 2:7, 11, 17; 3:5, 12, 21; 21:7) because of God's amazing grace. Just as we will receive different rewards at the Rapture and enter Heaven, so we will possess different ruling authorities and privileges at the Second Coming, when we enter the Millennium.

Revelation 2:26 declares:

"And he that overcometh (*positional victory through believing in Christ as revealed in 1 John 5:4-5 and similarly restated Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21*), **and keepeth my works unto the end** (*practice of the overcoming position – perseverance in Christian truth and living, in varying degrees and ways, which is separate from the*

actual position – an added proof of one’s salvation), to him will I give power over the nations” (personal reigning privileges in the Millennium which all saints will have - Rev. 5:10 - howbeit in varying degrees, according to their service and living for Christ – 2 Pet. 1:11; 2 Tim. 4:1; Heb. 12:28; Matt. 5:19; 18:4; 25:21, 23; 2 Cor. 5:10).

By the way, all New Testament saints will already be glorified and prepared for eternity (already in their eternal state) when the Millennium begins (1 John 3:2; Phil. 3:20-21; Rom. 8:18). It seems very strange that Jesus will ban His own glorified bride from entering the wedding feast on earth (Rev. 19:7). Why would Jesus take His Bride to Heaven (John 14:1-3) for the honeymoon (the consummation of the marriage) but fail to bring His Bride back to earth for the wedding feast? And why would Jesus ban some of His Church saints from entering the earthly Kingdom after some of them have lived with Him in Heaven for several thousand years, since the beginning of the Church Age?

Jesus promised that all of His children would return with Him to earth (Rev. 19) in that great event of “the manifestation of the sons of God” (Rom. 8:19). Every one of His saints would share in His glory which would include His Second Coming (1 Pet. 4:14; 5:1). All of the saints would rule with Him over the earth (Rev. 5:10). When you take grace away from entrance into the Kingdom, you create a slippery slope that promotes good works as the ground for entering the Kingdom, which is in stark contrast to what the Bible teaches and what the Grace Movement wants to promote – grace truth.

Here is the point. In the mad attempt to counter the extreme teaching of perseverance (Lordship Salvation, mixing works with faith, rejection of carnal Christians, all Christians persevering up to their point of death), some within the Free Grace Movement create a class of Christians that live in such a carnal and godless way, who can even commit full-blown apostasy, that they miss out on the earthly Kingdom and are caged in a Protestant Purgatory awaiting the end of the

Caged During the Kingdom



Millennium. Yes, caged for the Kingdom! Of course, the only ones that are caged during the Kingdom are the devil and his angels (Rev. 20:1-3). And to play the game of the free gracers, if those who are carnal miss out on the Kingdom, how much carnality qualifies this? Who sets the standard of carnality? How long must they live carnally and to what degree? Grace erases all of these straw man arguments and subjective questions for we enter both the earthly Kingdom and the Heavenly City on the basis of grace. This is because we are overcomers in Christ and these promises are based upon God's grace.

“Someday the silver cord will break,
And I no more as now shall sing;
But, oh, the joy when I shall wake
Within the palace of the King!
And I shall see Him face to face,
And tell the story—Saved by grace.”



If we take away any of these grace teachings that are related to our salvation, sanctification, glorification, and kingdom entrance, we lose sight of the Biblical message of free grace. The free grace teaching in soteriology cannot be completely divorced from the grace teaching in sanctification. From start to finish, in both salvation and sanctification, it's grace all the way!

Yes, it's free grace when it comes to salvation, but it's also transforming grace which leads to a newfound liberty and freedom that only grace brings into our lives as born-again Christians. Grace not only saves us (Titus 2:11), it also teaches us to live "soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world" (Titus 2:12). This means grace does not lead a genuine Christian to live without any change in his character and conduct or with the absence of spiritual transformation and signs of regenerating life. Jesus taught we can be "free indeed" (John 8:36). To be free from sin's power and Satan's bondage means that transformation occurs in one's life when they receive Christ as Savior. They do not remain dormant, barren, and without fruit.

How can anyone embrace the message of free grace that concludes a Christian can be saved by grace but never live out the freedom that grace brings from the power and bondage of sin? A salvation that is the result of grace, without possessing any transformation by grace, is to say the least, an incompatible, incongruous and unbiblical view of grace. This is because grace is connected with all three aspects of our salvation (Acts 16:31; Phil. 2:12; Rom. 13:11). Grace is presented as being part of our *past* (Eph. 2:8-9; 1 Pet. 5:12), *present* (2 Pet. 3:18; Rom. 6:1-14; 2 Cor. 12:9), and *future* (1 Pet. 1:13) deliverance.

The free grace that results in salvation from the penalty of sin (positional sanctification before God) also results in salvation from the power of sin (progressive sanctification in the Christian life). The Bible repeatedly speaks of grace freeing us from sin's penalty through justification and eternal life (Rom. 3:24; 5:1-2; 6:23) and grace also freeing us from sin's power through sanctification (Romans 6:1-15, 8:1-2; Titus 2:11-12). "Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness" (Rom. 6:18). How can this be? It's because "ye are not under the law, but under grace" (Rom. 6:14).

Paul viewed the impossibility of someone continually practicing a sinful lifestyle (antinomianism or libertinism) while they live under the dispensational ministry of God's sanctifying grace (Rom. 6:1, 15). He concluded that it was an absurd type of reasoning. Perish the thought! The same is true regarding the matter of repentance at the time of one's conversion. We should totally disregard any thought that repentance is not necessary for a person to come to faith in Christ and be saved. This brings us to our next point.

Apostasy, Repentance, and Faith



The reason for apostasy, total abandonment of the Christian faith and living a life of debauchery, fruitlessness, or even possessing self-righteousness before God and refusing to express faith in Christ, is due to a lack of genuine repentance. When there is no ROOT (repentance) there is no FRUIT (Matt. 13:21-22).

Repentance at the time of one's conversion results in transformation of living within the Christian life. If one does not repent, it results in the same patterns of unbelief and rebellion in a person's life.

Some free gracers have dismissed the need for repentance as it relates to salvation. They do this to counter the extreme reformed teaching which wrongly asserts that repentance involves changing one's life, making promises to obey God, giving up all your sins, serve Him, reform your life, become His disciple, and allowing Him to become the Master of one's life at the time of conversion. However, without hijacking the true meaning of the repentance texts, as they relate to salvation from future judgment, we cannot conclude that Biblical repentance is not necessary for faith to occur which results in a person's salvation. Let me give you a four-point summary to confirm the truth that repentance is necessary for salvation.

First, in John's Gospel repentance is seen. John tells us that men love darkness rather than the light because of their evil deeds (John 3:19). This means they were not willing to repent of their wickedness and therefore were not ready to believe on God's Son.

Second, John was commissioned to preach repentance (Luke 24:47). This message was related to Christ's death and resurrection (Luke 24:46) in this context and pertains to salvation and eternal life – not the Christian life.

Third, Scripture clearly and repeatedly declares that repentance is necessary for salvation and eternal life. Jesus taught this (Luke 5:32; 13:3), Paul taught this (Acts 17:30), Peter taught this (Acts 2:31; 2 Pet. 3:9), and all the apostles taught it (Luke 24:47).

Fourth, the Bible emphatically teaches that repentance is part of a person's conversion response to God (Acts 20:29; 26:18; 1 Thess. 1:9-10). God does not want any person to "perish" as 2 Peter 3:9 states (the context is talking about the perdition of ungodly people, God's judgment, and the day of the Lord – vv. 7, 10). In this same verse, Peter declares that God wants all men to come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9). If this is true, then the message needs to be clearly declared to unsaved and ungodly people who are perishing and without Christ.

Romans 2:5

“But after thy hardness and impenitent (unrepentant) heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God.”

The message is clear. Repent or else! Those who teach that repentance is not related to salvation and eternal life go to great lengths to explain away the obvious truths that Jesus and the apostles taught in the Gospels and epistles, and by so doing, commit voodoo exegesis and eisegesis. “I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance” (Luke 5:32). We should follow the example of Christ and do the same in our evangelism.



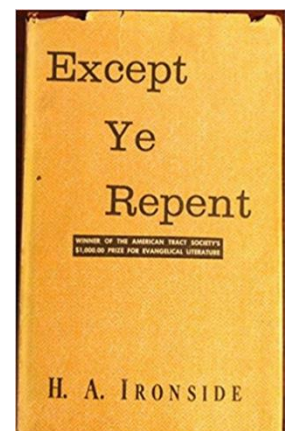
Without repentance regarding one’s sinfulness before God and the need for a Savior, without repenting of one’s self-righteousness, without repenting of a person’s rebellion against God and possessing the desire to be released from one’s sins, no one would ever be saved. They would see no need to express faith in Christ and be saved! *Repentance is the hinge that opens the door to faith in Christ.* How can a

person be ready or prepared to believe on Jesus Christ when they are in open rebellion against God, His way of salvation through Christ, and when they are filled with self-righteousness like the Pharisee (Luke 18:11)? Repentance precedes faith (Acts 20:21) and paves the way for faith to occur while being synergistically bound to the expression of faith.

Harry Ironside once stated:

“There can be no faith without repentance, and no repentance without faith. What God hath joined together let no man put asunder.”

Let’s use the analogy of a coin. A coin has “heads and tails” as we like to say. A coin is not a coin without both sides. In a similar



way, conversion is not conversion without the both sides of repentance and faith occurring. You cannot have one without the other. From a Biblical perspective, anybody who was ever been saved has repented and has also expressed faith in Christ. Repentance is the “heads” and faith is the “tails.” Both are necessary to bring a person to salvation and are joined together as a work of God’s grace that takes place in the heart of an unbeliever (Rom. 2:4; Acts 18:27). Repentance and faith are like two peas on a pod. They are connected together and constitute the total response that a sinner must have before God in order to be saved.

Salvation is by faith alone in Christ, but this is a faith that has been prepared or spawned by repentance. Theologically, both work simultaneously together to bring a person to salvation. Repentance brings a person to the place where they are ready to place their “faith alone” in Christ for deliverance. Yes, we can conclude that salvation is still by “faith alone.” But working behind this faith is the change of mind and heart that occurs in a sinner as he reacts to the revelation of God to his heart. Salvation is by faith alone (as opposed to works – Eph. 2:8-9) but repentance is not a work. It is intertwined with faith and is what actually brings a person to “faith alone” in Christ.

The verses dealing with repentance would lead us to the conclusion that repentance is inseparably bound to faith and must be expressed before God at the time of one’s conversion. A person cannot get to faith alone in Christ alone without repenting. The “Free Grace Movement” argues that repentance is a form of “works” and therefore cannot be included in the sinner’s response toward God. Of course, they refuse to see the difference between the ROOT of repentance (a change of mind and heart) and the FRUIT of repentance (Matt. 3:8). They refuse to acknowledge the difference between how sinners have “turned to God from idols” *inwardly* at the time of conversion “to serve the living and true God” which is what follows *outwardly* in their Christian life (1 Thess. 1:9). Acts 26:20 speaks of how the Gentiles “should repent and turn to God (the response necessary for salvation), and do works meet for repentance” (the fruit of repentance which comes after salvation).

Now think of this. How can grace be “free” without a person repenting of his sin and rebellion against God and desiring to be released from his sins? Furthemroe,

how can a person be free without repenting of his legalism (human effort to be justified before God) and his warped worldview of God and cultic view of Jesus Christ? How can an apostate who rejects the Gospel and claims of Jesus Christ be saved if he is not willing to repent of his apostasy? If grace is really free, a person must repent of his “works religion” or personal legalistic works if he is every going to be saved and experience the wonder of free grace. No person can be saved without repentance.

Luke 24:47

“And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.”

As stated above, this is one of the Great Commission passages! How can repentance not be necessary (working synergistically with faith) if it was to be preached among all nations! If a person does not repent, they cannot express faith in Christ for they will see no reason to express faith in Christ. This means the message of repentance needs to be pressed upon the unsaved masses. They must change their mind regarding their own sinfulness, self-righteousness, the need for a Savior (Jesus Christ), desiring release from the penalty and power of sin over their lives. If a person does not repent, they continue to live as they always lived in apostasy and rebellion against God (Matt. 13:20-22; 2 Pet. 2:20-21).

Charles Spurgeon wrote:

“If the man does not live differently from what he did before, both at home and abroad, his repentance needs to repented of, and his conversion is a fiction.”

Apostasy, Perseverance, and Assurance



A Biblical and balanced view of the perseverance of the saints basically means that that the work of God will never cease in the Christian, that all who are truly regenerated (born again) will never stop believing or

trusting in Christ, and that they will in some measure reflect a new way of life because God has promised to never leave them nor forsake them (Hebrews 13:5). Perseverance of the saints means that all those who have a genuine faith in Christ will persevere in their expression of faith and fruitfulness, howbeit, in varying degrees, ways, and with varying intensities. We must always remember that Christians are kept by the PROMISE of God (John 6:47), the POWER of God (1 Pet. 1:5), the PASSION of God (Rom. 8:38-39), and the PRIESTHOOD of God (Heb. 7:25). We are not kept because of our perseverance but our perseverance is the evidence of our salvation.

Perseverance of the saints (Bible believing and fruitful living that is witnessed in all of God's children) does not mean that those who are truly saved will not backslide or can never have strong doubts about their faith. It means that ultimately, they will remain in the faith, since it is God who is keeping them and not themselves, and since God is the One dedicated to working in the hearts and lives of His children. This teaching can be substantiated by looking at many verses throughout Scripture.

Philippians 2:13

“For it is God which worketh in you both to will (*giving us the right desires*) and to do (*giving us the needed power*) of his good pleasure.”

Perseverance means that God's life and the Holy Spirit has become so powerful in the believer's life that the Christian cannot ultimately thwart God's intention to produce both moral and doctrinal fruit pleasing to Himself. Instead of the *perseverance* of the saints, we might call this the *preservation* of God! In other words, because of God's commitment to His children, they will maintain doctrinal faithfulness to the basic tenants of the Christian faith, such as the Gospel (death, burial, and resurrection of Christ), the virgin birth and deity of Christ, the Second Coming, etc. They will also maintain a certain level of moral and ethical fruitfulness. Their lives will eventually reflect some new level of character transformation and obedience to God and His truth.

We manifest our status as saints by actively advancing in Godlikeness (2 Pet. 1:4) through the help of the Spirit (2 Cor. 3:18). The Holy Spirit does not override a

person's will in the sanctification process, but He does continue to work in the heart and life of all those who are God's children, so that they cannot commit God-defying, Gospel-rejecting, and morally degrading apostasy. Perseverance simply means that God's life and nature working in conjunction with a person's own life will prevent them from becoming an apostate that abandons God and all signs of His indwelling life (1 John 3:9-10).

The Free Grace Movement of today seems to think that any kind of perseverance in truth or good works which necessarily follows salvation infringes on the teaching of free grace. Why do they think this? It's because they feel that a person must legalistically look at the level of their perseverance to determine if they are saved, or to determine if they are one of God's children, which causes grace to no longer be free. Although many in Reformed Theology teach this, the Bible reveals that perseverance is not the measuring stick of one's salvation, but the added confirmation and blessing that a person has already passed from death unto life (1 John 3:14). It tells the redemptive story that a person's faith in Christ has brought them out of the slave market of sin (1 Cor. 6:20; 7:23).

A large segment in Reformed Theology distorts the Biblical meaning or understanding of perseverance by using it as the sole determination of the assurance of a person's salvation. In reacting to this errant teaching, the Free Grace Movement distorts the Biblical meaning or understanding of free grace by avowing that the Bible teaches nowhere that a person saved by grace must be transformed by grace or freed from sin's power through sanctifying grace. They go to great lengths to prove this at the expense of sound hermeneutics and the clear and obvious meanings of Biblical texts.

Both extremes, the Reformed view and Free Grace view, are wrong and in error. A born again Christian does not persevere in truth and fruitful living in order to be saved or to determine whether or not he has been saved in the past, since salvation and assurance is based upon his faith in Christ alone (John 3:15-16; 1 John 5:11-13). However, the born again believer also demonstrates varying degrees of transformation of living which provides a secondary confirmation of his salvation. This change of lifestyle and reconfirmation of his salvation becomes an added blessing in his Christian life.

2 Peter 1:10 says:

“Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence (make every effort) to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things (practice Christian virtues as stated in vv. 4-8), ye shall never fall.”

If you want to make sure that you are an individual who is part of God’s sovereign elective purpose, you can confirm the reality of this by seeing God at work in your life. It’s not a matter of “how much”

or “how little” God is doing but that He is gradually changing you into the likeness of His Son. A sense of God’s presence in your heart and life produces a secondary blessing of assurance that we are God’s child. As we pass through life and see the changes that God has brought into our lives, however big or small they might be, we can say, “I was nothing before You found me, You have given life to me. Your touch is what I needed, You have given life to me!”

God at work in our lives is a very simple test that reaffirms we are one of God’s elect children. This is not a test that provides us with the absolute assurance of salvation since this can only come through faith alone in Christ alone (Gal. 3:26). It’s a general examination (2 Cor. 13:5) that follows faith, a natural or normal observation which occurs throughout one’s life, which gives believers an added reassurance that they are one of God’s children. The Free Grace Movement has made a mountain out of molehill when it comes to a person being reassured of his salvation through self-examination.

In reacting to the errors of Reformed Theology, free gracers have turned something that is normal, exciting, and part of the Christian experience (“make your calling and election sure”) into something that is legalistic, a grace destroyer, and off limits to the Christian way of living. But observing and experiencing the life-changing, life-transforming, and life-liberating grace of God in one’s life (Titus 2:12) is not a grace destroyer. In fact, the Bible is very clear that because of God’s grace working in conjunction with one’s life, there will always be some transformation of living and



fruitfulness in every true child of God (John 15:1-3; Eph. 2:10), even when the fruit may seem to be dormant and unproductive for a season (2 Pet. 1:8).

Warren Wiersbe comments:

“The person who claims to be a child of God but whose character and conduct give no evidence of spiritual growth is deceiving himself and heading for judgment.”

Of course, no child of God will always be on the mountaintop, but he will always manifest varying amounts of fruitfulness in his life. Peter had been addressing the need for God’s children to live out lives of Christian virtue since they had been purged from their old sins and way of life (1 Peter 1:5-9). Peter acknowledges that there can be a lack of fruit in one’s life as God’s children. It’s clear that God’s children can become spiritually shortsighted and experience times of bareness and unfruitful living since Peter urges them to produce Christian virtues so that “ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful” (2 Pet. 1:8-9). However, neither does Peter deny that God’s saints will be totally unproductive and without any signs of fruitfulness or regenerating life, since he reminds each of them “to make your calling and election sure” (2 Pet. 1:10).

The Bible declares that one’s godly behavior is like a “warranty deed” for himself that he was in fact called and elected by God. God’s eternal purposes can never be thwarted but we can confirm His elective purpose for our life by growing in likeness to the Lord (Rom 8:28-30). By manifesting the fruitful living, we can provide unmistakable evidence that we truly belong to Him. A holy life proves the reality of our salvation. In fact, living a holy life will keep us from stumbling (2 Pet. 1:10). Of course, this is not a question of falling into eternal perdition; the work of Christ delivers us from this. Rather, it refers to falling into sin, disgrace, or disuse in the Christian life.

Perseverance in transformed living does not provide us with our *primary* assurance which comes through faith alone in Christ alone (Acts 4:12). However, there is a *secondary* assurance that we can experience in our hearts as we see God’s transforming work taking place in our lives. The believer can look back upon his life and proclaim: “Dear Heavenly Father, since You have saved me, I know that I have been far from perfect. I have not arrived. But I also know that You have been

working in my heart and life in various ways and at many times throughout my life. I thank You for new life and for making a difference in my life.” Although we struggle along the way, after we express faith in Christ, our life is never really the same again. This is because God has come to live within us (Gal. 2:20), to convict us, bring character change into our lives, and conform us to the likeness of His Son.

2 Corinthians 3:18

“But we all (*all Christians*), with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, *even* as by the Spirit of the Lord.”

Paul clearly reveals that every Christian is being conformed into the likeness of Christ gradually by the Spirit of God which is a strong verification that all Christians do give evidence of transformation of living and do not become apostates. In a very real sense, when a person comes to faith in Christ, they are never again exactly the same because of the outworking of their new position and union with Christ (Eph. 4:22; Col. 3:9; 2 Cor. 5:17). God begins to work in their hearts and lives in new and exciting ways to liberate them from the old person they used to be under sin’s power. Therefore, we can sing today:



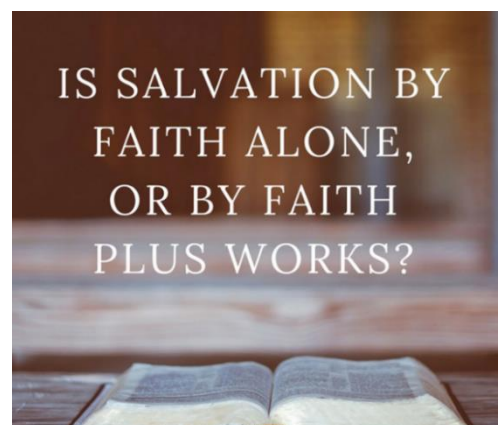
“Oh I thank God for Calvary,
It’s the blood that sets me free,
He bore my shame, O praise His name,
I’ve never been the same,
Since I came to Calvary.”

As mentioned already, some who embrace the “free grace” position suggest that a Christian can commit total apostasy, forever deny Christ, become an atheist, or a Satanist, and still go to Heaven when he dies. The Scriptures denounce this type of teaching which has become a knee-jerk reaction to some of the extreme teachings on the doctrine of the perseverance of saints. Some of the more extreme positions on perseverance result in Lordship Salvation which teaches that works, which

include making Jesus Lord over one's life, promising to do what is required of a disciple and follower of Christ, is actually mixed with the expression of one's faith at the time of conversion. Promising to do something, become something, meeting the requirements for discipleship, becoming a follower of Christ, committing oneself totally to Christ, stepping out to obey His commands, making Jesus Lord over area of one's life, taking the initiative to serve Christ, and complying with the conditions that Jesus requires for salvation is integrating a form of works in the conversion response. These type of requirements takes away from the free expression of faith alone in Christ (Rom. 3:28; 5:1; Gal. 2:16; 3:24).

According to the reformed way of thinking, works can never be separated or divorced from faith. They teach that works must always be connected with faith to make the faith genuine and therefore embrace the errant teaching of Lordship Salvation and Lordship living as the ground of a person's assurance of salvation. Many who espouse perseverance will teach that one's *primary* assurance of salvation comes through an individual persevering in their good works, which occurs throughout their entire lifetime. For this reason, many conclude and teach that we can only possess "an assurance" regarding our salvation, which is based upon whether or not we have enough good works to actually prove the genuineness of our faith at the time of our conversion, and therefore prove that we are one of God's elect.

Of course, mixing works with faith as it relates to our salvation (legalism) is clearly forbidden (Eph. 2:8-9) and possessing "an assurance" based upon legalism is not the same thing as saying, "Blessed assurance Jesus is mine!" Rigid Calvinism and Lordship Salvation does not result in the assurance of salvation since one's imperfect life becomes the ultimate and underlying source of assurance. Reformed Theology teaches that a person comes to good works by faith, and not to faith by good works. However, they combine faith with works at the time of a person's salvation (Lordship Salvation theology) which defies the Biblical message that concludes salvation is "by grace alone, through faith alone, plus nothing!"





If someone must promise to follow Christ, become His disciple, love Christ more than anything else, give up everything that comes between them and God, then they are *frontloading* the Gospel with works. Furthermore, if we must constantly and meticulously observe ourselves, separating our good works versus our sinful departures in life, to know whether or not we are saved, then we are *backloading* the Gospel with works where a believer is “made perfect by the flesh” (Gal. 3:2-3).

If we must legalistically perform self-examinations every day of our lives to determine that our faith in Christ was genuine, to determine that we are truly saved, and to possess assurance, then we have thrown free grace under the bus. How can salvation be free (Rom. 3:24; 6:23; Rev. 22:17) if we can never be sure that we are saved and know that we possess it? None of the self-examination passages (1 Pet. 1:10; 2 Cor. 3:15; 1 John 2:3-5; 1 John 4:7-8) are given to frighten believers into creating a legalistic list of things that they must do to determine if they are saved.



They are simply a confirmation of what we already know to be true through faith in Christ (John 3:15-16). Our transformation of living serves as an added confirmation and blessing to our faith in Christ. When it comes to salvation and our primary assurance, it’s grace all the way and faith in Christ all the way (Eph. 2:8-9). Whenever we depart from this, we will eventually end up doubting our salvation.

In reacting to these extreme and unbiblical conclusions within the ranks of Reformed Theology, some within the Free Grace Movement have cherry-picked certain verses and passages of the Bible and reinterpreted them to deny the need for Biblical repentance in the conversion response, to deny any teaching on perseverance or transformation of living, and to conclude that believers can actually become unbelievers, evolutionary atheists, and apostates and still go to Heaven when they die. They do this to protect what they term is the Biblical teaching on “free grace.” They reason, that if grace really is free, then there are no

requirements for change, transformation, or new life that must follow regeneration. Out of fear of mixing works with faith, the Free Grace Movement theologically protects unregenerate, godless, unsaved apostates, who are not even saved by God's grace. But trying to support the teaching of free grace by maintaining the salvation of hardened apostates is like trying to keep the Titanic floating after an obvious gaping hole was opened on the right side of the ship. The free gracers should stop protecting, with their theology of free grace, those people who are apostates, unbelievers, and people who want nothing to do with grace.

Titus 1:15-16 reveals that false teachers who apostatize are not saved:

“Unto the pure (*God's people who live a pure life in their heart and mind*) **all things are pure** (*they possess a proper perspective on morality and godliness*); **but unto them** (*the Devil's apostates*); **that are defiled and unbelieving** (*a non-believer*) **is nothing pure but even their mind and conscience is defiled** (*they are morally contaminated in both their thinking and nature so that their decisions and conscience are no longer reliable guides*). **They** (*the unbelieving apostates*) **profess that they know God** (*profession without possession*); **but in works** (*their conduct and living*) **they deny him** (*God's authority, morality, rule, etc.*), **being abominable** (*detestable and disgusting*), **and disobedient** (*unable to be persuaded to do right and believe what is right*), **and unto every good work reprobate”** (*unapproved and rejected from a moral standpoint – like coins tested and found to be spurious, false, unfit, rejected, and worthless*).

The apostates will sometimes pose as Christian believers, but their practice does not match their profession. Titus clearly reveals that apostates are unbelieving (a nonbeliever). They are not saved and their lifestyle and belief system reveals this. Their profession is not seen in their performance. Their minds have been made up and they will not face the truth and seek to live out the truth in their daily lives. As far as these unbelieving apostates were concerned, in their conduct they denied God, disowning Him and showing no allegiance to Him and to His Word. Their disobedient lives betray their professed faith in God and in the end God denies them (Matt. 10:33). Whenever there is a conflict between a man's talk and his walk, it is always his walk and not his talk that truly reveals what he is.

1 John 2:4 is a similar verse:

“He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.”

Someone said:

“Of all bad men religious bad men are the worse.”

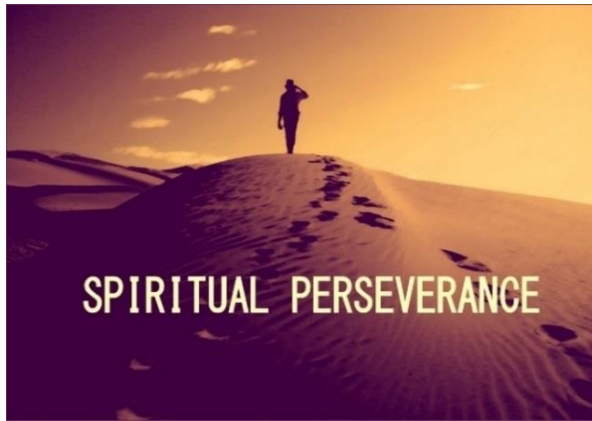
As a general rule and pattern, apostates persevere in ungodly living and false doctrine, while God’s true saints persevere in godly living and true doctrine. Jesus and the apostles always made this distinction and we should not try and dumb it down to promote a free grace standard that has gone awry and lost its way. The Bible speaks against the type of reasoning being promoted in the Free Grace Movement which concludes that a believer can live like the devil his entire life, become apostate, and go to Heaven when he dies. The reason this type of person cannot go to Heaven is because he was never saved.

It’s to these type of people that Jesus will one day say, “I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity” (Matt. 7:23). The Bible reveals that all believers will give some evidence of fruitfulness or transformation in their lives (Matt. 13:8; John 15:2, 5; Rom. 6:22). When a person lacks these signs of life they demonstrate that they were never born again (John 15:2, 6). Where there is no fruit (“without fruit” – Jude 1:12) there is no root or life (Matt. 7:19-20; 13:21-22).



The Bible consistently and repeatedly teaches that there is a difference between apostates and God’s children. There will always be some change and signs of regenerating life within the heart and life of a person who is a genuine, born again believer. The Bible also teaches that all true or genuine Christians do persevere in key doctrines regarding the person and work of Jesus Christ (Heb. 3:6, 14). Christians are not perfect but they are Christological for “Whosoever believe that Jesus is Christ is born of God” (1 John 5:1). They will always manifest some fruit in their lives (doctrinally and morally) which will give evidence that they have become partakers of God’s life and the “divine nature” (2 Pet. 1:4). When a person shares the same nature of God (a Godlike nature), they do not persistently live like the

devil's children without manifesting signs of God's life and new nature for "his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin (habitually and continually), because he is born of God" (1 John 3:9).



Jesus taught spiritual perseverance in John 10:27-28: "My sheep hear my voice (*PURSUIT of God*), and I know them (*PERCEPTION of God*), and they follow me (*PERSEVERANCE in obedience*): And I give unto them eternal life (*PROMISE of Christ*); and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand" (*PRESERVATION of God*).

John 8:31

"Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word (*perseverance in the truth*), then are ye my disciples indeed" (*true followers*).

Romans 8:17

"And if children (*God's regenerate children = STATUS of Sonship*), **then heirs; heirs of God** (*inheritors of God's future blessings which include Heaven, a glorified body, eternal life, earthly Millennium, etc. - Gal. 4:7; 1 Pet. 1:4; Tit. 3:7*), **and joint-heirs** (*co-sharers*) **with Christ** (*sharing in the same blessings of Christ presently and in the future – Eph. 1:3; Col. 3:3; Rev. 2:26*); **if so be that we suffer with him** (*STATUS of Suffering = perseverance in identifying and suffering with Christ and for His cause, or incurring the hostility of the world with its shame and reproach, in varying degrees and ways, – 2 Tim. 2:12; 1 Pet. 5:9-10; Phil. 3:10*), **that we may be also glorified together**" (future glorification of the body).

Colossians 1:22-23 also points to perseverance:

"In the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unproveable in his sight (*POSITION in Christ*): If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel (*PERSEVERANCE in truth*), which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven; whereof I Paul am made a minister."

Hebrews 3:6

“But Christ as a son over his own house (PEOPLE of God); whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope (our hope in Christ) firm unto the end” (PERSEVERANCE in the truth of our salvation through Christ).

Of course, our salvation is not dependent on holding fast. If this were true, then salvation would be by our endurance rather than by Christ’s finished work on the cross (John 19:30). The true meaning of this text, as the many others which we will observe, is that we prove we are God’s house (His true children) if we hold fast. Endurance is a proof of reality. Those who lose confidence in Christ’s finished work as the hope of their salvation and return to rituals and ceremonies show that they were never born again. Again, holding fast to the truth of our salvation through Christ is not speaking of how to be saved or remain saved. It means rather that perseverance in faithfulness is proof of real faith (1 Cor. 15:2). The person who returns to the rituals of the Levitical system to contribute to his own salvation proves he was never truly part of God’s household (1 John 2:19). Bruce writes: “Nowhere in the New Testament more than here do we find such repeated insistence on the fact that continuance in the Christian life is the test of reality.”

Hebrews 3:14

“For we are made partakers of Christ (the PERSONAL salvation of the saints as in 3:1), if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end” (PERSEVERANCE in our belief in Christ, the foundational conviction that He is God and the Savior, which becomes the PROOF of our salvation).

The evidence of salvation is perseverance in doctrinal integrity. The fact that a person continues in the faith (the basic teachings of Christianity) and does not move away from the hope found in the Gospel message is a matter of doctrinal perseverance. This means a Christian will not utterly abandon the Gospel message and Biblical truths that Christians have embraced since apostolic times. They can neither totally nor finally fall away from the truth and deny Christ.

Philippians 1:6

“Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you (SALVATION) will perform *it* (SANCTIFICATION) until the day of Jesus Christ” (GLORIFICATION).

The fact that Christ “will perform it” indicates that there will be sanctification that occurs in every believer’s life. God will make sure it happens! He will also make sure that we do not abandon the ship of Christianity by committing apostasy, where we finally and forever abandon God and the Gospel, deny His existence, and live like the devil the rest of our lives.

Philippians 2:13

“For it is God which worketh in you (*the perseverance of God*) both to will (*He gives us new inner desires*) and to do (*He gives us new power*) of his good pleasure. “

This reminds us that God promises to work in our hearts and lives, changing us, so that we cannot turn into a full-blown apostate who denies the faith, hates God, and espouses atheism. It means that through God’s inner work in our hearts, He preserves us from a final state of apostasy and abandonment of the truth.

1 John 2:19 adds:

“They went out from us (*severance from true Christianity*), but they (apostates within Christendom) were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us (*perseverance in the truth and righteousness*): but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us.”

Of course, these people were with the disciples in terms of outward appearances before they departed. They had made an outward profession of faith, and Jesus makes it clear that it is possible for a person to do this even when he doesn’t possess what he’s professing. Jesus says in Matthew 15:8, “This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with *their* lips; but their heart is far from me.”

1 John 5:18 gives this promise:

“We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not (*habitually – as a way of life - without any signs of regenerating life*); but he that is begotten of God (*the new birth*) keepeth himself (*perseverance through the new birth and God’s nature*), and that wicked one toucheth him not” (*personal victory over the devil*).

Of this we can be sure, that the person who has the divine nature does not go on practicing sin without any conviction, character change, or conduct transformation. The reason for this new life is because he has been born of God and “keeps himself” which means that through the life of God and His nature, we will not live in total defeat and bear no fruit in our Christian life. This is because God is providing us with a new persevering power and godly desires, so the wicked one (the devil) does not touch our lives and keep us in total defeat and slavery as was true previously in our unsaved state (Eph. 2:1-2). In other words, with God’s life indwelling us, He will not allow us to be totally overtaken by the devil to the point that we will never give evidence of God’s life within us, through manifesting fruitful living and conduct that reflects Christlikeness.

In John 17:11 Jesus prayed for His disciples:

“And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to thee. Holy Father, keep through thine own name (PRESERVATION of God) those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we *are*” (PERSEVERANCE in truth and righteousness).

Jesus asked the Father to keep (watch over, guard, or preserve) the disciples through His name (Prov. 18:10) so that they might remain true to the revelation of God that Jesus had given to them while He was with them. It means that a protective hedge would be placed upon them so that they would continue to be unified in their desire to follow the truth, serve, and glorify God. The result of God’s protective hand would mean that would not abandon Him and the truth and live without any regard for Christ and His Word. The keeping power of God prevents His children from full blown apostasy and rejection of Christ and the Gospel. In answer to Jesus’ prayer, Christians cannot commit the kind of apostasy which causes a person to abandon the faith one delivered to the saints (Jude 3) and live a life totally independent of God.

Jesus goes on to say in John 17:15-23:

“I pray not that thou shouldst take them out of the world, but that thou shouldst keep them from the evil (PRESERVATION from Satan and sin). They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth. As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the

world. And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth (PERSEVERENCE in holiness). Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word (*future generation of Christians*); That they all may be one; as thou, Father, *art* in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me” (PARTICIPATION or unity that takes place through the sanctification of believers).

Remember that Jesus’ prayers never go unanswered! This means that none of His children will commit total apostasy and utterly abandon the truth. The reason is simple; Jesus is praying for them! This is illustrated in Peter’s betrayal of Christ. Peter was confident of his willingness to stand with Jesus, whatever the cost. He told the Lord he was ready to be killed for His cause (Luke 22:33). Yet Jesus knew the truth and sadly told Peter that he would deny Him three times (Luke 22:34). Did Peter fail? Yes, he failed miserably. But was his faith totally overthrown? Never. This is because Jesus Himself was interceding on Peter’s behalf, and His prayers did not go unanswered. “But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren” (Luke 22:32).



These verses clearly reveal that Christians do in some measure persevere in key doctrinal truth and manifest varying amounts of godly/fruitful/virtuous living since they possess God’s regenerating life (John 3:5). They walk a different path than the unsaved. They do not reflect apostates in their doctrinal beliefs or detestable living. Believing differently and living differently than we did before we were saved, bearing some fruit and transformation of living, possessing a desire to confess our sins and live free from sin’s power is the hallmark and defining mark that we are God’s children. God makes sure that His perseverance through us will keep us in

faith, and in “the faith,” and produce some fruitful living throughout our Christian lives, instead of departing into total apostasy, abandonment, and bareness.

Jesus said in Matthew 7:21:

“Not every one 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.”

Jesus taught that doing the will of the Father (Matt. 7:21) or practicing and persevering in righteous living, which is the expression of doing God’s will, demonstrates that a person will some enter the earthly kingdom. We must remember that godly and fruitful living is the CONFIRMATION of a person’s salvation – not the WAY of salvation and entrance into the Father’s presence (John 14:6). In other words, when God invades our lives, we begin to believe and live differently. We begin to demonstrate new life in both our CHARACTER and CONDUCT transformation. When a person has no interest in following God’s will, gives no genuine evidence of regenerating life, and is continually defiant and disobedient to God throughout his life, then he cannot be saved and will not spend eternity with Christ.

Hebrews 5:9

“And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation (the PROMISE of salvation) unto all them that obey him (the PERSEVERANCE and PROOF of salvation).

Romans 8:1

There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus (the POSITION and PROMISE of salvation), who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit” (the PERSEVERANCE and PROGRESSION in holiness which is the PROOF of one’s salvation).

The Bible teaches that transformation in conversation and conduct, in doctrine and deeds, becomes the proof of one’s salvation. A person who is saved will manifest some fruit and change of lifestyle which gives evidence of his salvation. This transformation becomes a secondary marker in their Christian life that provides them with assurance. As already stated, the primary assurance of one’s salvation comes through faith in Christ and His promise (John 3:26; 6:47). But an added blessing of assurance comes through transformation of living.

Ephesians 2:10

“For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus (NEW BIRTH) unto good works (NEW LIFE), which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.”

New life is not an option of the Christian life but will be part of a Christian's experience. The Scriptures repeatedly teach this. We cannot live as we once did “without God in the world” (Eph. 2:2). His presence in our lives means that He will not let His children go. He will continue to work in the hearts and lives, producing fruit and transformation. Why? It's because He deeply loves His children (1 John 3:1).

1 Thessalonians 5:23-24

“And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and *I pray God* your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ (*PRAYER of preservation for God's saints*). Faithful *is* he that calleth you, who also will do *it*” (*PROMISE of God's perseverance within us to produce sanctification and finally glorification as in Phil. 1:6*).

Hebrews 10:39

“But we are not of them (the apostates) who draw back unto perdition (judgment in hell); but of them (the Christians) that believe to the saving of the soul” (that have believed and do not abandon their belief in Christ).

This is a particular kind of faith that is in view. It is faith that has been placed in Christ so as to obtain eternal salvation. It is this faith in Christ that will not be abandoned by Christians who have embraced Christ. Abandoning this belief is the mark of unbelief, apostasy, and confirms that a person is not saved.

Robert Gromacki remarks:

“Judas Iscariot was the perfect example of a professing believer who drew back into perdition. Christ called him ‘the son of perdition’ (John 17:12). Although Judas identified himself socially and religiously with Christ and the apostolic group, he never was saved (John 13:10–11). He never was a gift from the Father to the Son in the eternal decree of election (John 6:37; 17:9–10). The withdrawal was the evidence of an unregenerate heart, and the destination of all lost men is “perdition” (apōleian), eternal separation from God in the lake of fire. The term

“perdition” is related to the other descriptive words for the unsaved: the “lost” (Luke 19:10) and the “perishing” (1 Cor. 1:18).”

Hebrews 13:20-21

“Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, Make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is wellpleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ (PERSEVERANCE through Christ’s power); to whom *be* glory for ever and ever. Amen.”

Jude 1:24-25

“Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling (PRESEVATION from apostasy), and to present *you* faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, To the only wise God our Saviour, *be* glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.”



Next, I want to make some general observation about John 15, before examining these verses. In this chapter, Jesus was speaking of the union that the believer would possess with Christ. It’s explained as an abiding relationship (“He that abideth in me, and I in him” – John

15:5). This is a saving relationship with Christ that is formed through the baptizing ministry of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13). Jesus referenced this abiding relationship as He looked ahead to Pentecost: “and ye in me, and I in you” (John 14:20). The very instant a sinner trusts Christ, he enters into this spiritual union with Christ. It’s a saving union, but at the same time, it produces a relational fellowship and communion with Christ.

The saving transaction that links us to Christ occurs all at once and never changes (Gal. 3:27) but maintaining communion with Christ is a moment-by-moment responsibility. There is a relational aspect of abiding in Christ that depends on obeying His Word and keeping clean (John 15:3, 10). What does it mean to “abide”

in Christ? Experientially, it means to keep in fellowship with Christ so that His life can work in and through us to produce fruit. This certainly involves obeying the Word of God and confessing our sins so that nothing hinders our communion with Christ (John 15:3). It also involves obeying Him because we love Him (John 15:9–10).

Warren Wiersbe summarizes this chapter well:

“This abiding relationship is natural to the branch and the vine, but it must be cultivated in the Christian life. It is not automatic. Abiding in Christ demands worship, meditation on God’s Word, prayer, sacrifice, and service—but what a joyful experience it is! Once you have begun to cultivate this deeper communion with Christ, you have no desire to return to the shallow life of the careless Christian.

He goes on to say:

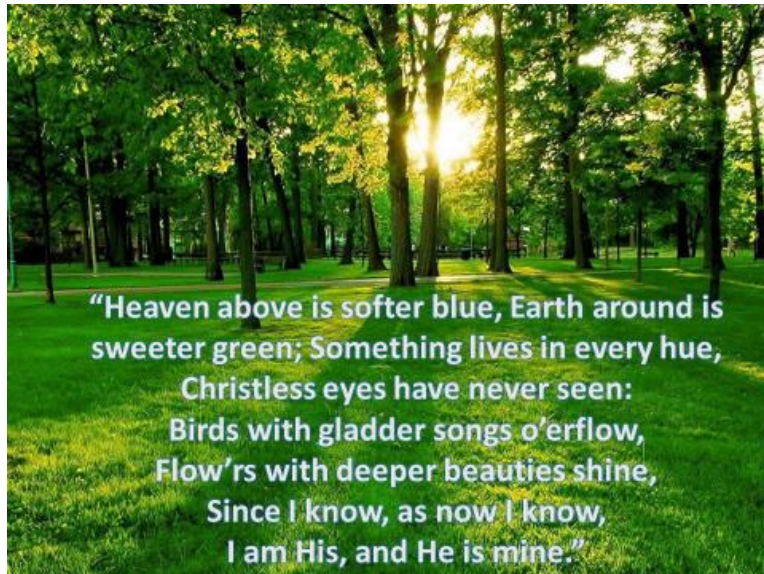
“How can we tell when we are ‘abiding in Christ?’ Is there a special feeling? No, but there are special evidences that appear and they are unmistakably clear. For one thing, when you are abiding in Christ, you produce fruit (John 15:2). What that “fruit” is, we will discuss later. Also, you experience the Father’s “pruning” so that you will bear more fruit (John 15:2). The believer who is abiding in Christ has his prayers answered (John 15:7) and experiences a deepening love for Christ and for other believers (John 15:9, 12–13). He also experiences joy (John 15:11).”

John Phillips adds:

“The Lord uses the word abide to convey the idea of remaining close to one another, in intimate connection. The believer takes up his abode in Christ; Christ takes up his abode in the believer. The life of Christ becomes the life of the believer, supplying grace and power for living the ‘Christ life’ on earth.”

It would seem that the outworking of the abiding relationship has to do with reciprocal fellowship between the believer and Christ (James 4:8). The relationship between the believer and his Lord is so intertwined that it is almost impossible to speak of one without the other (“Abide in me, and I in you” – John 15:3). The passage carefully balances our mutual participation with Christ. We do have a part to play to maintain fellowship with Him (1 John 1:7-9), yet we must keep in mind that apart from Christ we can do nothing (John 15:5). “Abiding” in terms of this metaphor refers to the branch receiving nourishment from the vine and

maintaining a connection with the vine, which results in one's continued fellowship and intimacy with Christ, a relationship that produces fruitful living.



The key to understanding what Jesus meant by "abiding" is the expression "in me," which reflects a theological concept called "positional truth" or "identification." Paul the apostle often described believers as being "in Christ" (2 Cor. 5:17). "Identification" describes the believer's spiritual relationship with Christ as he shares the life of Christ on a daily basis. Jesus

wants us to focus our attention on abiding rather than production. The production of fruit will follow when we are abiding in Christ. Remaining in fellowship with Christ, or maintaining a close relationship with Him is the most important thing that comes out of our shared union with Christ. "Abide in me, and I in you" reflects the beautiful hymn, "I am His and He is Mine" which speaks of the believer's mutual fellowship and togetherness with Christ.

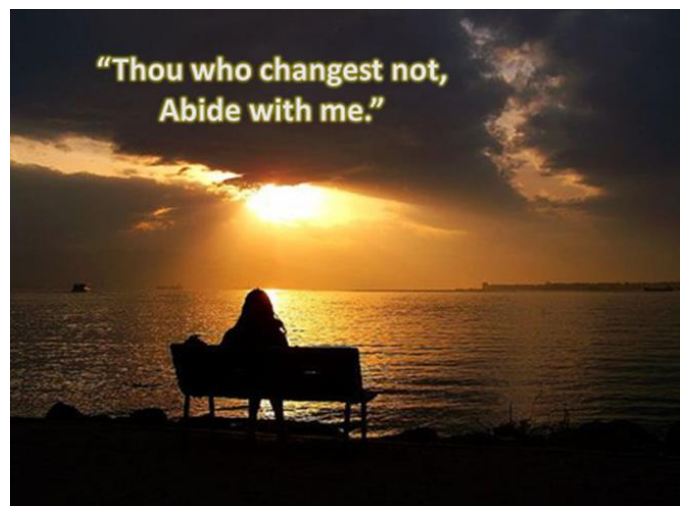
The mutual indwelling of Christ and the believer ("Abide in me, and I in you" - John 15:3) teaches that there can be degrees of abiding in Christ as seen in the present imperative. Paul communicates a similar thought in Ephesians 3:17 when he prays "that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith." Christ already dwelt in the Ephesians through the Holy Spirit, but Paul still wants them to be filled with the Spirit (Eph. 5:18). To abide in Christ simply means to live in a close relationship to Him. The means by which this intimate relationship is maintained is through trust, prayer, the Word, love and obedience. The outcome of bearing fruit is not some kind of mechanical production of fruit. The disciple is to possess a loving and intimate relationship with Jesus (John 15:9), out of which a transformed life, or fruit-bearing life will flow. The results of abiding in Christ are indicated in this passage which are fruitfulness characterized by Christlikeness, answered prayer, joy, and loving others. Jesus states as a principle that fruitfulness is not possible apart from

believers availing themselves to their union and fellowship with Him for Jesus taught “no more can ye (bear fruit), except ye abide in me” (John 15:4).

In John chapter 15, Jesus seems to be stressing the saving aspect of our union with Christ and what it produces (fellowship and fruitfulness). This means that our fellowship with Christ and fruitful living flows out of our saving union with Christ which becomes the evidence of our attachment to the vine (Christ). The “abiding” or “remaining” gives the evidence that salvation has already taken place. Of course, abiding in Christ in one’s Christian life is not the WAY of salvation but the CONFIRMATION of one’s salvation. John also reveals elsewhere that the abiding relationship produces fellowship with God (1 John 1:6), fruit or transformation of life (1 John 3:6-8, 24), and faithfulness to the doctrine of Christ (2 John 9). If these evidences of salvation are lacking in a person’s life, or never show up in any repeated or permanent fashion in a person’s life, then that person cannot be saved.

In the most basic sense and understanding of the passage, if a person abides in Christ it reveals that he is saved, and if he fails to abide in Christ, or does not experience fellowship with Christ, it reveals that he is not saved (John 15: 2, 6). The two types of branches represent the two types of disciples who outwardly profess attachment to Jesus. The genuine branches that abide in Him are those who are saved, and the false branches that do not abide in the vine (Christ) are the unsaved. Furthermore, it is only to the degree that His disciples abide in Christ that they can bear spiritual fruit. In essence, abiding in Christ produces fruit in varying degrees and become evidence of one’s saving relationship with Christ. We can summarize our union with Christ in this way:

- Living Union - so we can be born again and bear fruit,
- Loving Union - so we can fellowship with Him,
- Lasting Union - so we need not fear separation from Him.



With these thoughts in mind, let's consider some of the verses in John 15 which relate to our study.

Jesus began His teaching on abiding in John 15:1-2:

"I am the true vine (a person must be connected to Christ to be saved), and my Father is the husbandman (the Father owns the vineyard!). Every branch in me (united to Me by profession only) that beareth not fruit (a dead branch - representing someone who is spiritually dead) he taketh away (to judgment – John 15:6): and every branch that beareth fruit (representing someone who has spiritual life indwelling them and who is bearing the fruit of Christlikeness), he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit" (perseverance in fruitful living).

Some suggest that when Jesus speaks of every branch "in me" (John 15:2) that this presumes a genuine or true relationship exists with Christ, and since (John 15:3) specifies Jesus' audience as those who are "already clean" that the dead and fruitless branches are referencing God's children who are no longer in fellowship with God and producing fruit because of their backslidden condition. But this is an unwarranted conclusion since in verse six John changes the use of pronouns (he, them, they) to indicate a different group of people (the unsaved) and since the parabolic figure and imagery of burning, including the burning of trees and agricultural crops, is repeatedly used in Jesus' writings as a figure of eternal judgment (Luke 3:17; Matt. 3:10-12; John 15:2, 6; 13:40-42, 50; 25:41).

Furthermore, Jesus clearly reveals that Judas was not clean (John 13:10) for he was unregenerate and a son of perdition. Therefore, the first expression "in me" (John 15:2), as it relates to the burned branches, must mean "in me" only by profession. In other words, Jesus was teaching there is no saving link or union with Him, no life-giving relationship existed between Him and the fruitless branches, since His life was not flowing through them, as evidence by a lack of fruitfulness.

Here is the point, no fruit can be better than the vine that produces it. There may be many branches, but if they are going to bear the right kind of fruit, they must be a part of the real vine (Jesus). Those who are not properly attached to Christ do not bear genuine and lasting fruit which gives evidence that they are not saved and one of Christ's true followers. The practice of the farmers was to gather the dead branches, put them on pile, and burn them. This is a clear picture of unbelievers facing future judgment since they never possessed a saving union with Christ. But

those who are genuine believers must learn to submit to God's pruning process, trusting that the Father knows what He's doing.

John 15:3-4

"Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you. Abide in me, and I in you (*the personal responsibility of maintaining a relationship with Christ because of union or togetherness with Him*). As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me" (our responsibility to maintain fellowship with Christ - Phil. 3:10).

The only way believers can bear the fruit of a Christ-like character is by living in touch with Christ moment by moment. Jesus taught that this life-sharing relationship with Himself is essential for bearing fruit and the degree to which we walk with Him and rely on His power will determine how much fruit we produce. The key to the abiding relationship with Christ is to allow God's truth to cleanse our lives. His Words condemns sin, it inspires holiness, and it promotes spiritual growth.

Jesus said to His disciples in John 13:10:

"He that is washed needeth not save to wash *his* feet, but is clean every whit: and ye are clean, but not all."

Jesus was referring to Judas who was the unclean one. Judas was the unfruitful branch that was taken away and whose final end was to be cast into the fires of hell (John 15:2, 6).

Jesus continues in John 15:4-5:

"I am the vine (the Giver), ye *are* the branches (the receivers): He that abideth in me, and I in him (*POSSESSES a saving union with Christ that is evidenced by fellowship and communion with Him*), the same bringeth forth much fruit (*PRODUCT of salvation and the abiding relationship*): for without me ye can do nothing."

A living intimacy with Christ is absolutely essential if one's life is to bear fruit. The place of the branch is in the vine. The branch has no life and can produce no fruit on its own (Phil. 2:13). All life and fruit are derived from its organic connection with the vine. The fibers of the vine run from the root to the farthest branch. It is this connection that gives vitality to each branch. Jesus is teaching that fruit bearing is

not only possible but certain when the branch remains in union with the vine. In other words, true believers will manifest the fruit of transformation in their lives. Of course, uniformity of both quantity and quality are not promised (vs. 2) but the more one abides (remains close to the Lord and maintains a relationship with Him), the greater amount of fruit will be produced (vs. 5). Here is Jesus' point; if the life of Christ is connected to a disciple, fruit will be inevitable. The abiding life is to become the abounding life.

John 15:6

"If a man abide not in me (*POSSESSES no saving union with Christ, lacking a true relationship with Him, and therefore bearing no fruit – vs. 2*), he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast *them* into the fire, and they are burned" (*PERMANENT judgment of the unsaved*).

Jesus changes the pronouns from "ye" (the true disciples) to third person pronouns (he, them, they) which indicates He is now speaking of the unsaved who were only professing disciples that were not genuinely attached to the vine (Christ). The severed branches are carefully distinguished from the real ones which is a clear indication of their unregenerate and lost estate.

Although some have tried to conclude that this is referencing a Christian's fruit or works being judged by fire at the Beam Seat (1 Cor. 3:12-15), the text clearly reveals that "he is cast forth as a branch," which references the entire person (an unsaved individual) being judged in hell. It cannot be dismissed in John's teachings that "abiding" has to do with possessing a saving relationship with Christ which in John's epistles results in a person manifesting fruit, fellowship with Christ, maintaining faith in Christ, and doctrinal integrity regarding Christology and the Gospel (1 John 2:24; 3:23-24; 4:15).

In this passage, there can be no doubt that the "burned" branches refer to professing Christians who, like Judas, are not genuinely saved and therefore are judged. Like a dead branch, a person without Christ is spiritually dead and therefore will be punished in eternal fire (Matt. 25:46). Judas was an example of a branch that was cut off. Remember that Judas was with Jesus; he seemed like a "branch." But he did not have God's life in him; therefore, he departed and his destiny was like that of a dead branch. Fruitfulness is the result of the Son's life being reproduced in a disciple. Fruitlessness is the result of the absence of the Son's life.

The latter faces judgment for Christ has no part his life. He does not have a saving relationship with Christ. An absolutely fruitless life is concrete evidence that one is not a believer. Therefore, the dead or fruitless branches represent those who profess to believe in Jesus, but their lives give no evidence of saving faith. They don't bear fruit.

John 15:8

“Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples.”

The proof of being a genuine discipleship is fruitbearing (John 8:31; Matt. 13:8). The absence of fruit is the mark of unregenerate people, who are only superficially attached to Christ, but possess no saving union and relationship with Him (Matt. 13:4-7).

Homer Kent explains it well:

“The branches are people who have professed faith in Christ. They are of two types: (1) Fruit-bearing branches, representing true believers who by their vital union with the vine exhibit the fruit which is the evidence of life. (2) Fruitless branches, representing persons attached in some superficial way to the vine, but without the vital life flowing through them to produce fruit. It is the branches themselves (i.e., the persons) that are burned, not just their works. A comparison with Psalm 80:15–16 shows that the burning is clearly the judgment of unbelievers. The fruitless branches represent the mere professed believer who is finally severed from his superficial connection with Christ. This had actually happened earlier in the evening with the removal of Judas from the group.”



There is only one evidence if a branch is truly alive: Does it produce clusters of grapes? In this vine and branch imagery, the unbeliever bears no fruit (vs. 2) but every true believer bears fruit, and the normal progression is fruit, more fruit (v. 2), and much fruit (v. 5). Since all true believers possess the indwelling Christ, they will inevitably experience fellowship and manifest fruitfulness in their lives, which are inseparably tied together because of the believer's spiritual identification and attachment to Christ. Fruitfulness will be the inevitable outcome of sharing

one's life with Jesus. Jesus is teaching that there is no such thing as a fruitless Christian. John the Baptist challenged his hearers to "Bring forth therefore fruits meet (fitting) for repentance" (Matt. 3:8), and warned that "every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire" (Matt. 3:10). This is exactly what Jesus has been teaching in this vine and branch analogy.

Tom Constable's Expository Notes give us this final conclusion on the passage: "Obviously it is impossible for a branch to bear any fruit if it has no contact with the life-giving vine. Many unbelievers appear to bear the fruit of godly character and conduct, but their fruit is phony. It is similar to plastic fruit that some people hang on trees to give them the appearance of being healthy and productive. It is natural, though not inevitable, that a branch that has vital connection with the vine bear *some* fruit."

In concluding our study of John 15, we must remember there are times when believers have lapses, when they fail to be faithful to their life in Christ. They can live carelessly and carnally. But true branches, through whom the life of the vine flows, cannot ultimately fail to produce fruit (Matt. 13:23; Rom. 7:4; Gal. 5:22–23; Eph. 5:9; Phil 1:11; Col. 1:10; James 3:17). A believer may go through periods of his life without bearing fruit, but not his entire life, since he is linked to the vine (Jesus Christ). Christ inevitably says that those who do not produce any character and conduct transformation (fruit) are not attached to Christ, possessing His life, and therefore are not saved.

A series of verses in the epistle of 1 John also speaks of maintaining faith, fruit bearing, and faithfulness to doctrine as the evidence or proof of one's salvation. Perseverance in these specific areas gives the confirmation that a person is God's child.

1 John 2:3-6

"And hereby we do know that we know him (PERSONAL saving relationship with God through Christ), if we keep his commandments (PERSEVERANCE in obedience and truth). He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoso keepeth his word (PERSEVERANCE), in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him (POSSESS a saving union with God through Jesus Christ). He that saith he abideth in him

(PROFESSION of one's saving and sanctifying relationship) ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked" (PRACTICING the Christian life).

1 John 2:23-24

"Whosoever denieth the Son (an unbeliever), the same hath not the Father: *(but he that acknowledgeth the Son hath the Father also.* Let that therefore abide (remain) in you, which ye have heard from the beginning. If that which ye (the believer) have heard from the beginning shall remain in you, ye also shall continue in the Son, and in the Father" (PERSEVERANCE in the truth that Christ shares divinity with the Father).

1 John 3:23-24

"And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment. And he that keepeth his commandments (*PERSEVERANCE in belief and love which is the PROOF of one's salvation*) dwelleth in him, and he in him (*POSSESSESS a saving union with Christ - John 15:4-5, 7*). And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us" (*PRESENCE of the Spirit*).

1 John 4:15

"Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God (PERSEVERANCE in the truth of Christ's deity), God dwelleth in him, and he in God" (POSSESSESS a saving union with God through Christ).

Revelation 14:12

"Here is the patience of the saints: here *are* they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus" (PERSEVERANCE in obedience, truth, and faith).

3 John 3

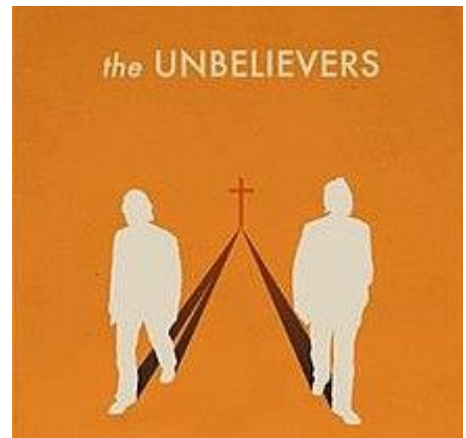
"For I rejoiced greatly, when the brethren came and testified of the truth that is in thee (PLACEMENT of implanted truth in all Christians – Phil. 2:13), even as thou walkest in the truth" (PROOF of salvation).

God's children are not perfect (1 Cor. 3:3; James 4:4). They may at times doubt or question their faith and pass through periods of time when they do not bear fruit. They may pass through times when they are no longer moving forward, no longer

growing in Christ. But we have learned from all of these verses that God's children cannot totally apostatize and abandon the Gospel and God (Col. 1:23), deny Christ's deity (1 John 2:23-24), and become totally unfruitful and spiritually unproductive throughout their entire lives. God's saints do not always persevere as they should, they may not bear fruit for a period of time, but they will not apostatize in the realms of Christology (1 John 4:15; 3:23-24; Rev. 2:2-3), in their ultimate expression of their faith in Christ (Heb. 3:14; 1 Thess. 1:4-5; Heb. 10:39; Rev. 14:12), and completely stop producing fruit throughout their Christian life (Titus 1:16). Once again, life begets life.

Apostasy and Believing Unbelievers?

Is it possible for a believer to unbelieve? At this point, I need to answer this question by stating something in a clear fashion. In Biblical revelation, a person who is said to be a believer cannot at the same time be an unbeliever. Yes, some free gracers will conclude that there is such a person as a believing unbeliever. But if one does not believe on Christ or in God, how can they be a believer? Can a nonbeliever go to Heaven? News flash: only believers go to Heaven (Acts 16:31). Unbelievers go to hell. You cannot deny the clear teaching of Scripture on this matter.



Revelation 21:8

“But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.”

The Bible cannot make this any clearer to all who read it with open eyes and understanding. Only someone with an presuppositional axe to grind can miss the clear and unmistakable teaching of Scripture on this point.

Hebrews 10:39

“But we are not of them (apostates) who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe (Christians) to the saving of the soul.”

Call it perseverance, or whatever you want to label it (I’m not a Calvinist but a Biblicist), but believers don’t become unbelievers! Only apostates are identified as “unbelieving” (Titus 1:15). Believers are never said to become apostates. True or genuine Christians do not ultimately deny Christ and become an atheist, promoting a godless atheistic religion. They do not become an infidel denying the basic tenants of the Gospel and Christianity, or a Muslim teaching courses against Christianity and Jesus Christ. And yet, there are “free-gracers” who suggest this is possible. A Christian can deny the faith, reject the personal claims of Jesus Christ, join “Hell’s Angels” and embrace Satanic Theology and go to Heaven anyway.

Hebrews 3:6 gives us another story:

“But Christ as a son over his own house; whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end.”

1 Corinthians 15:1-2 adds: “Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain.”

Paul states that we “stand” in the saving merits of the Gospel and that we possess a position of acceptance before God. He also confirms that it’s only by the Gospel that “ye are saved” which means we must only look to the Gospel for the finality of our salvation and acceptance before God. There should be no question marks regarding a person’s salvation when they fully embrace the Gospel of Christ’s death



and resurrection on their behalf and are saved. The problem arises when they reject this message and apostatize from it. Paul reasons that if this is the case, “ye have believed in vain” which means their belief was not genuine and it did not produce salvation.

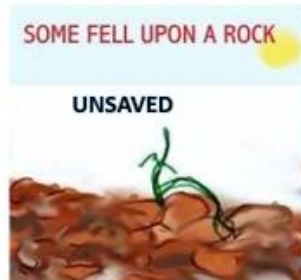
Some of the apostates in Corinth were teaching that there was no resurrection, and if this were true, there is a sense that every person's faith would be vain and worthless (1 Cor. 15:14). But it's equally true that a person's faith is without effect (1 Cor. 15:17) if they choose to openly reject Christ's resurrection as "some" (1 Cor. 15:12) were concluding in their assembly. These were the philosophical apostates who were prime examples of those who "believed in vain" for they had rejected the truth of the resurrection of Christ. Believing in vain is believing superficially, without cause and effect, which means a person does not place genuine faith in Christ and specifically His resurrection as an integral part of the Gospel.

The fact that these Christians were standing firm was proof that their faith was genuine and not empty. Of course, continuing to believe in the basic truth regarding the resurrection is not the *way* of salvation but the *confirmation* of a person's salvation. Those who categorially deny Christ, salvation, and the Gospel message, which includes His resurrection from the dead, were never saved for they "believed in vain." Believing the Gospel includes holding firmly to belief in Christ's resurrection. Unless an individual holds firmly to Christ's resurrection, his belief is "vain" (Matt. 13:18–22).

No one should ever doubt the eternal security of BELIEVERS. But how can UNBELIEVERS have eternal security? How can a believer be a nonbeliever? There is no such thing as a believing apostate who has rejected belief in Christ, salvation through Christ, and abandoned God forever. This type of person can only be one thing - an unbelieving apostate. It does not compute Biblically and logically to say an apostate is a believer when he has confirmed in his own heart to reject Christ and His claims, when he possesses a settled conviction to reject the Gospel and Christological truth, and when he gives outward evidence of utter abandonment to secularism, hedonism, and atheism. An apostate, who rejects the Gospel and the claims of Jesus Christ, must repent of his apostasy in order to be saved, so he can be identified as a believer.

There are many over the years who have "believed in vain" for their doctrines and deeds betray them later in life. Someone who at one time made a profession of faith but then totally and unreservedly denies the faith has "believed in vain." By all outward appearances, there are those who appear to be believers, who are

involved in church life and perhaps even in ministry. So what happens to some of them? Is this a case of a believer becoming an unbeliever? No, it's the case of nonbeliever remaining a nonbeliever.



The oft-disputed parables of Matthew 13 are sometimes used to support apostasy in the life of believers, or that a believer can actually become a nonbeliever. The different soils represent the different hearts and lives of people. Many will tell you that three out of the four soils represent believers who have backslidden and one of them even commits apostasy by no longer believing

in Jesus. This is because Luke's version says the stony soil person actually believed for a short time ("which for a while believe" - Luke 8:13) but then no longer believed. Many will tell you from this passage that it's possible for a Christian to apostatize and no longer believe and still be saved. But when putting this in the greater context of what Jesus is teaching in these parables, we discover that this is not a case of believer becoming an unbeliever, but an unbeliever remaining an unbeliever.

As far as Matthew 13 goes, everyone wants to dismiss the facts that there was only one good soil type (Matt. 13:23; Luke 8:15) and that only one manifested genuine and lasting fruit (Luke 8:15; Matt. 13:23) which is the mark of regeneration (John 15:1-6; Eph. 2:10). Most fail to see the connection between soil #1 and soils #2-3. When it comes to soil #1, Satan steals the seed "lest they should believe and be saved" (Luke 8:12). This sets the context for the next two soil types (the stony and thorny soils), one of "which for a while believe" (Luke 8:13), like Simon and others (Acts 8:13; John 2:23-24), but who eventually "fall away" (apostasy) and do not bear genuine or lasting fruit ("bring no fruit to perfection" - Luke 8:14 and

“becometh unfruitful” – Matt. 13:22). These are clearly designed to represent nonbelievers.

The belief, blooming, and bearing of fruit, which is observed in the second and third type of soils, is not designed to teach life, but deception and unbelief. This is the obvious point Jesus is making, even as He teaches in the next parables of the tares among the wheat (the true and the false), the birds lodging in the tree (Matt. 13:31-32), the woman mixing leaven in the meal (Matt. 13:33), and the good vessels among the bad vessels (Matt. 13:45-50). In all these parables, Jesus is marking a clear distinction between the saved and the unsaved, as evidenced by the dichotomy of “children of the kingdom” versus “children of the wicked one” (Matt. 13:38).

As far as the soils go, eventually, as Jesus taught earlier, “By their fruits ye shall know them” (Matt. 7:16, 20). Soils 2 and 3 represent those who fall away in utter rejection of Christ and show no signs of regenerating life and lasting fruitfulness. They turn their back on God and live without any evidence of transforming life, proving that they were deceivers, imposters, wolves in sheep’s clothing (Matt. 7:15), and only professors (Titus 1:16) but not possessors of true salvation (Matt. 7:23). The abrupt blooming and bearing of fruit which does not last (soils 2 and 3) is not the germinating signs of everlasting life, as some suggest, but one of deception, non-repentance, and spurious faith (“faith without works is dead” - James 2:26).

Soils 2 and 3 have nothing to do with immature believers. They represent nonbelievers who do not bear genuine fruit which is the mark of apostasy and the unregenerate way of life (“without fruit” – Jude 12). Trying to find immature or carnal believers in Matthew 13 is reading the epistles back into the Gospel records and does not align with the clear distinctions that Jesus makes in the Gospel accounts between genuine disciples versus spurious disciples and the dangers of false profession and religion (Matt. 7:15-29; 13:1-52; 23:27; John 6:64; 8:31; 15:6). Making soils #2 and #3 into carnal and ineffective Christians is attempting to force theological presuppositions into a context which does not actually support the basic tenants of one’s belief system.

While studying different portions of Scripture, both the Free Grace and Reformed Theologians must be careful that they do not play a one note banjo and become forever stuck on one of their major premises (perseverance versus nonperseverance, repentance versus no repentance, etc.) at the expense of missing what the true text is actually teaching and the points that Jesus is trying to make! I have noticed that Calvinists push hard to find perseverance in every text and Free Gracers work hard to demote perseverance in just about every text. Why? It's because they are afraid to misrepresent their core beliefs. However, as we have already seen in this study, we can maintain a "free grace" position without reinterpreting what Jesus is clearly teaching in the gospel records regarding repentance, faith, salvation, eternal life, and discipleship. When these subjects are understood from a Biblical perspective, they do not undermine free grace.

Again, the parables of Matthew 13 actually teach that believers remain believers and unbelievers remain unbelievers. The parables certainly have present-day application to our times. There are a number of prominent skeptics who started out as professing believers. Some of them were hailed as great Christians dedicated to God's cause. Dan Barker, atheist and president of the Freedom from Religion Foundation, started out as a minister and Christian musician. Charles Templeton (now deceased), as mentioned in the beginning of this study, was an evangelist who at one time toured with Billy Graham but later became an outspoken agnostic. Bart Ehrman is a New York Times best-selling author and well-known skeptic who continually casts doubt upon the reliability of the New Testament. Ehrman describes himself as a former born-again fundamentalist. He studied at Moody Bible Institute and graduated from Wheaton College. All of these people are examples of unbelievers remaining as unbelievers. This is because there is no such thing as a believer becoming an unbeliever.

More recently, the former pastor Josh Harris, who wrote popular books on courtship and who denounced homosexuality, has totally jettisoned or abandoned his position on Christianity and homosexuality. Harris remarked that he "deconstructed" his faith. Here are his own words: "The information that was left out of our announcement is that I have undergone a massive shift



in regard to my faith in Jesus," he explains. "The popular phrase for this is 'deconstruction,' the biblical phrase is 'falling away.' By all the measurements that I have for defining a Christian, I am not a Christian. Many people tell me that there is a different way to practice faith and I want to remain open to this, but I'm not there now."

He goes on to say: "I have lived in repentance for the past several years — repenting of my self-righteousness, my fear-based approach to life, the teaching of my books, my views of women in the church, and my approach to parenting to name a few," he writes. "But I specifically want to add to this list now: to the LGBTQ+ community, I want to say that I am sorry for the views that I taught in my books and as a pastor regarding sexuality. I regret standing against marriage equality, for not affirming you and your place in the church, and for any ways that my writing and speaking contributed to a culture of exclusion and bigotry. I hope you can forgive me."

Here is another classic example of apostasy, which refers to someone who once professed the truth, but eventually abandons it and repudiates morality, Christianity, and his faith in Jesus. These are all the classic signs of apostasy. These type of people are best described by our Lord as wolves in sheep's clothing (Matt. 7:15; Acts 20:29). Of course, aside from these high profile cases are the thousands, perhaps millions of people who have made professions of faith, sometimes as children, but years later maintain no faith in Christ. Whether they call themselves atheistic, agnostic, or simply uninterested, they have left the faith. What are we to make of these people? Were they born-again believers at one time, but now they are unbelievers? The answer is that they were always unbelievers, since the Bible does not support the theory that believers can become unbelievers, renouncing God and the claims of Jesus Christ, abandoning the truth of the Gospel, and repudiating Christianity.

Although these people may have given some outward and immediate signs of having genuine faith, their subsequent choices and statements reveal that they were never true believers. No matter what they say, or what experience they claimed to have, they were never born again and sealed by the Holy Spirit (Eph. 4:30). It's true that genuine believers may experience times of doubt, uncertainty, disobedience, and momentary unbelief, but they will never renounce their faith.

As we have previously seen, all those who are truly saved will persevere (continue) in their faith and basic teachings of Scriptural truth because of the indwelling teaching and transforming ministry of God's life implanted within them (1 John 3:9; 5:18). A genuine believer can never become an unbeliever (an apostate) because he or she has been born again by the Spirit of God and the holy Spirit and His teaching ministry remains in them forever (John 14:17 16:13). It's God that enables continual faith (Phil. 2:13) and keeps God's true children from committing total apostasy or abandonment to atheism, agnosticism, and anti-god philosophies.

We can know if a person's faith in Christ was genuine by the type of fruit that it produces. Jesus, Paul, Titus, John, and James clearly taught this. This is the approach that is most supported by Scripture. Scripture and history are filled with examples of people who made an initial positive response to Christ only to fall away later. Once again, in the parable of the sower and the seed, some of the seed sprung up quickly, only to wither away or be choked out by weeds. I'd like to comment on this passage in more detail.

Jesus taught in Matthew 13:20-22:

"But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it; Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended. He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful."

Here is a Biblical example of an unbeliever remaining and unbeliever. It's clear that the truth did not take firm root in the heart of this individual represented by the stony soil heart. The fact that Jesus taught this person has no root and ends up producing no lasting fruit is the classic example of someone who does not repent and express genuine faith in Christ, who does not receive regenerating life, and therefore does not continue to produce fruitfulness (a life of transformation and good works). If a person does not repent of his sinfulness before God and express in the Savior, he is pictured as having no root (no regenerating life) and therefore no lasting fruit remains in his life. This is why his fruit withers away.

“For unto us was the gospel preached ...
...but did not profit them,
not being mixed with faith”
(Hebrews 4:2)



Hebrews 4:2 represents this stony heart person: “For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard *it*.” Paul is drawing an analogy of the experience of the people in the wilderness to his present-day audience. The people needed to accept the good news of Canaan’s rest by faith and we must accept the good news of the Gospel rest that comes through the finished

work of Christ by faith. If a person’s faith does not rest in Christ as his Savior, then he will eventually apostatize, as some were doing in Paul’s day (Heb. 10:39).

Here is the point. Whatever fruit previously existed in the life of the person represented by the stony soil was that of moral reform and reformation. It was reformation without regeneration. It was religion without rebirth. This person had what appeared to be a joyful reception of the truth (the seed that was sown) and when through some kind of religious experience, but then turned away from it, proving that there was no root of repentance and regenerating life in his heart. The result was the withering away of what was not genuine fruit. It was not the kind of fruit that was produced by God’s true children since this person was not linked to the vine – Jesus Christ (John 15:5)

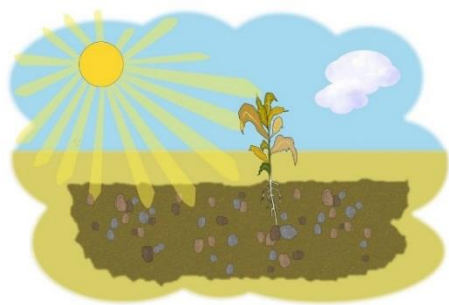
Similar to the apostates that Peter describes, all of the efforts of this person to improve his life (2 Pet. 2:20) ultimately results in nothing more than temporary and superficial moral reform. Again, this is the type of reformation that is represented today in the religion of nominal Christianity, which is devoid of genuine faith and repentance. Today people try to conform to the way of Christianity through reformation and rituals but they lack true repentance and regeneration. The expression “unfruitful” aligns with what Jude says of apostates.

Jude 1:12

“These are spots in your feasts of charity, when they feast with you, feeding themselves without fear: clouds *they are* without water, carried about of winds; trees whose fruit withereth, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots.”

When a person’s fruit withers and he does not manifest any more fruit (“without fruit”), it proves that his Christian life was a sham. The fruit that existed before was nothing but superficial acts of religious reformation. It was not the fruit related to new life in Christ. So, when Matthew describes the person who “becometh unfruitful” (Matt. 13:22) and Jude adds that an apostate’s “fruit withereth” and he eventually is “without fruit” (Jude 12), this can only mean that these people do not possess regenerating life and therefore cannot produce any true and lasting fruit or evidences of regenerating life. This is because the apostate’s nature was NEVER changed because they were NEVER born again. They NEVER possessed repentance and regeneration; therefore, they did not change *who* they were and *how* they lived.

Free Grace Theology denies that the stony soil of Matthew 13:20-22 represents an unsaved person. In the Grace New Testament Commentary which represents the free grace position, it says of this passage: “While many commentators say the second soil represents another type of unbeliever, that view is untenable because the seed sprang up (v 5), and clearly germination must precede springing up! Luke 8:13 specifically says that this person believed the saving message for a time. Sadly, apostasy is possible for born-again people. Of course, everlasting life, once it has germinated, is everlasting—even if the faith later fails.”



The idea that germination in this case means real or genuine spiritual life, the kind that is presented by true regeneration, is reading into the words of Jesus. The fact that the root is shallow and the fruit dies indicates the disingenuous nature of this person. It is speaking of deception. What appeared to be life was nothing more than sham and temporary. The quick but temporary growth of the seed in the stony soil was like the “quick grow” grass seed that I planted one year. I could not believe how fast is

grew. It literally came up overnight. But when the hot sun began beating down upon it, it did not take long for it to wither away and die.

Jesus was not teaching that this person possessed regenerating life but a life of reformation that was not followed by true, lasting, and productive fruitfulness. Furthermore, the Grace New Testament Commentary does not give the full story of Luke 8:13: "They on the rock *are they*, which, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, which for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away." The Bible says "which for a while believe" which again speaks of a temporary and superficial belief that has no solid ground or root. There was no genuine repentance and faith. It was sham and counterfeit. The fact that it is temporary means that it is not real for Jesus taught elsewhere that His genuine children and followers produce varying amounts of fruit that grows and lasts (John 15:1-8). This person is best described as rootless, fruitless, and lifeless. The stony soil person is an example of an unbeliever remaining an unbeliever.

John 6:66 reveals:

"From that *time* many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him."

Since believers do not become unbelievers (Heb. 10:39), this is another glaring example of unbelievers remaining unbelievers. There were people who had identified themselves as followers of Jesus, but they turned back when Jesus said something they disliked. It was not that they lost salvation; they never had it to begin with, and this incident is what showed their true colors.

Next, Jesus spoke about Judas to drive home this point of those who turn back and away from Him. Yes, even one of Christ's original followers turned away from Him and followed Jesus no more, proving that he was not born again.

John 6:67-70

"Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away? Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God. Jesus answered them, Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil?"

At the time Jesus spoke these words, Peter and Judas *looked* very much alike for both were disciples. On the night that Jesus was arrested, Peter and Judas *looked* very much alike since both denied the Lord. A few days later, however, they *showed* themselves to be very different. Judas, overcome with remorse, did not seek repentance and forgiveness but committed suicide (Matthew 27:5). But Peter was filled with shame and wept (Matthew 26:75). Three days later Peter is still with the disciples and becomes an apostle of the Risen Lord.

Of course, neither Judas nor Peter lost his salvation. Judas' true nature was that of an unbeliever and apostate. He liked Jesus well enough and dabbled with the whole discipleship thing for a while, but he never really believed. We might say he only "pretended" to be a believer. Judas was the treasurer for the disciples, and John 12:6 tells us that he was dipping into the money for himself which in itself proves the true nature of who he was. Peter, on the other hand, for a short period of time, "pretended" to be an unbeliever, but over the course of time his true, redeemed nature showed itself.

First John directly addresses the issue of professing believers who seem to become unbelievers. But in reality, it is another case of unbelievers remaining unbelievers, who they always were.

1 John 2:19

"They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would *no doubt* have continued with us: but *they went out*, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us."

Some false teachers, who had appeared to be true believers at one time, were troubling the church. Although those who departed from the faith had previously appeared to be genuine, John makes it very clear that they had never actually been "of us" since one of the marks of a believer is that he "continued with us." People may be able to "fake it" for a while, but they cannot sustain the part of a sham believer forever. The truth will come out. 1 John 3:9 once again states: "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God." A genuine believer is kept from falling into a lifestyle of continuous sin, without bearing any fruit, because he has been born of

God and God and His life keeps the believer from becoming a full-blown apostate in His belief system and living.

A true believer may fall into disobedience and struggle with doubts, but a true believer will never renounce Christ. Doubts are one thing, but utter denial, rejection, and abandonment to apostasy, which involves rejecting the Gospel, Christ's deity, and salvation through Christ, confirms that a person is not one of God's children. A person who has renounced Christ by his words or deeds has not lost salvation; rather, he is demonstrating that he never had genuine faith. He is not a believer that becomes an unbeliever but is an unbeliever that remains an unbeliever. God's people will remain believers. They will never abandon the ship of Christianity and Christ

I recently was talking with a friend of mine who went through a serious illness. He said that he began to doubt his faith and read books that were even contrary to the faith. He once again rethought the evolutionary theory and wondered into the realm of the skeptics. But in the final analysis, after much suffering, spiritual confusion, and unrest, he finally said this to me: "Where else could I go? What else is there in life but Jesus Christ and what He offers to us. There is nothing else." Now this is the case of a believer remaining a believer, persevering in faith and doing what is right, even when struggling with doubts at a specific time in his life. God will continue to work in our hearts and lives so that we do not abandon the faith and become an apostate (Phil. 2:13). His regenerating work in our hearts will not allow us to capsize, crash, and forever deny Him, His Word, the Gospel, and become an atheist and apostate. He will reveal Himself to us even in the darkest night!

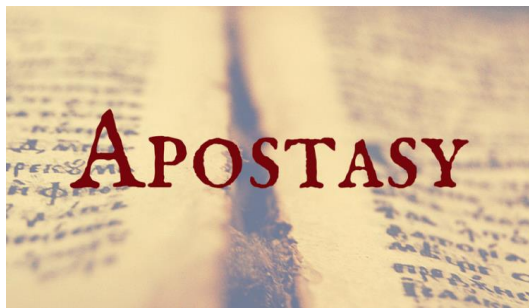
Charles Spurgeon said it best:

"God is too good to be unkind, too wise to be mistaken; and when you cannot trace His hand, you can trust His heart."

Now let's get down to the nitty gritty. On the one hand, the "free-gracers" may be correct in saying that a believer can commit certain acts of apostasy (examples will be given later) but they are incorrect when they conclude that a believer can become an actual apostate, who categorically and forever denies Christ and the Christian faith, and still goes to Heaven when he dies (2 Pet. 2:3, 17). On the other

hand, those who see God persevering or continuing to work in the hearts and lives of His true children, sometimes cannot conceive of any actions related to apostasy occurring in the life of God's children (Phil. 2:12-13). As always, the truth lies somewhere in between these two ideas. No, I'm not attempting to be a peacemaker and speaking out of both sides of my theological mouth. This study will reveal that Christians can at times reflect apostasy in relation to their living and some of their beliefs, but they will not totally and forever apostatize and ultimately reject the Gospel and Jesus Christ.

Apostasy and God's Children versus the Devil's Children



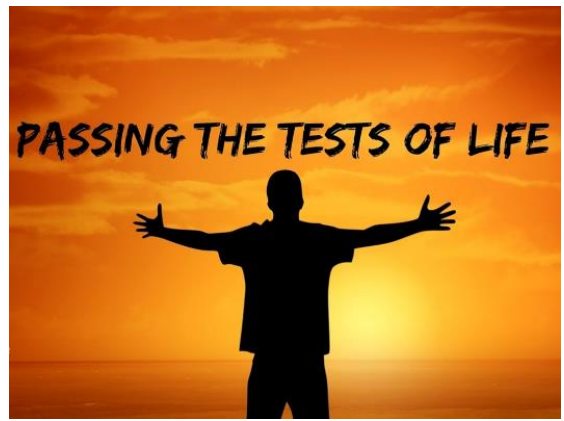
Let me start with a very clear Scriptural axiom. God's children can never be the devil's children and the devil's children can never be God's children (John 1:12; 8:44; Acts 13:10; 1 John 3:8, 10). Period. This means Christians can never become *actual* apostates (the devil's children), but this does not mean they cannot commit various acts of apostasy and at times reflect apostasy in relation to false teachings and licentious living (Rev. 2:20).

As mentioned previously, the Scriptures always distinguish Christians from *actual* apostates (1 John 2:19; Heb. 6:9; 10:39) who do not possess the Holy Spirit (Jude 19; Rom. 8:9), who deny Christ (2 Pet. 2:1), and who are repeatedly said to be going to hell (2 Pet. 2:1, 3, 12, 17; Jude 12-13). They are also part of the company of nonbelievers who "do these things" (as a habitual way of life) and who will not inherit (obtain or receive as a possession) the earthly theocracy when its established over the earth (Gal. 5:21; 1 Cor. 6:9-10). None of these verses are descriptions of Christians! God's Word still makes a dichotomy between believers and nonbelievers in relation to belief systems and behavior.

Again, this certainly does not mean that Christians cannot commit certain acts of apostasy while stopping short of totally abandoning God, truth, and never giving evidence of regenerating life. We know that not all of God's saints and Christians persevere as they should (2 Sam. 11:1-5, 27; Ezek. 3:20; Luke 22:54-62; Acts 5:1-11;

1 Cor. 3:1-3; 5:1-5; 11:29-30; 2 Thess. 3:14-15; 1 Tim. 1:19-20; 5:8; 2 Timothy 1:15; 2:17-18; 4:10, 16-17; Heb. 3:12; 12:5-8; 2 Pet. 1:9; 2:7; 3:7-18). Some of these examples in Scripture do not strike me as Christians persevering in good works up to the end of their lives since some were prematurely taken from earth because of their sins. However, all Christians do manifest some change in their pattern of living and conduct as the sanctifying work of God begins to work in their lives (Phil. 2:12-13). They won't continually live like the devil's children without any signs of regenerating life (1 John 3:7-10).

I believe John is primarily presenting *tests of life* and not *tests of fellowship* in his epistle. The language of the epistle of 1 John seems to repeatedly point to this. Christians, or the "little children" are separated and made distinct from the "antichrists" (1 John 2:18-19) and apostates who are in the background of John's thinking and teaching. Yes, walking in the light is a test of fellowship with God (1



John 1:6-7) but in the backdrop of John's teaching it also becomes a test of regenerating life, since it was the apostates who were denying their sinful depravity, even though they were living in the darkness of sin (1 John 1:8, 10). John was teaching God's children to not be like the Gnostics heretics who denied sin, any need for confession to God, and refused fellowship with God.

Now let's use some old-fashioned, common, and Biblical sense. How can being part of "antichrists" which are later described as those who leave the Christian community (1 John 2:18-19) be a test of fellowship with God? How can being "of the devil" (1 John 3:6-9) be a test of fellowship? Only the devil's children are seen to be his offspring (John 8:44; Acts 13:10; Eph. 2:2:1-3). How can knowing that we have "passed from death unto life" (1 John 3:14-15), based upon not hating others and being a murderer, be a test of fellowship? How can denying the person of Christ be test of fellowship (1 John 2:21-23)? How do the repeated phrases of not knowing God (1 John 2:3-4; 3:6; 4:7-8) have anything to do with so-called tests of fellowship? How do the oft-repeated phrases of being "born of God" (1 John 3:9; 4:7; 5:1, 4; 5:18) pass for tests of fellowship with God? These verses clearly set forth tests of

regenerating life and contrast God's children and the devil's children. Well, I suppose they could be tests of fellowship with God, tests that prove people cannot fellowship with God, when they are unbelievers and unsaved!

The Children of God & The Children of the Devil

1 John 3:10

"In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother."

John draws a line in the sand and concludes that there is a difference between God's children and the devil's children. Of course, John's purpose is not to determine how many unrighteous acts a person must commit in order to know they are born again and one of God's children. He is not developing a legalistic system of "how many sins" and "how long one must sin" to determine a person's destiny of possess assurance of salvation. He clearly reveals in the epistle that the assurance of eternal life is not based upon tests of life but upon belief in the Lord Jesus Christ (1 John 5:10-13).

John is simply painting a broad stroke with his inspired paintbrush and is conveying the truth that Christians do not live like apostates – without confession of sin, without manifesting some fruit, without some transformation, and without some righteous display of living. In the final analysis, Christians do bear some spiritual fruit, they do demonstrate that they possess new life and have eternal life abiding in them (1 John 3:15).

According to some of the extreme free-grace teachings, a person can live like the devil his entire life, denounce his faith in Christ and the Gospel, become a Mormon, become a world-renowned evolutionist like Bill Nye and still be saved. This is because they deny that any change must occur in a person's life to give proof of a person's salvation in order to keep the message of grace free (without works). Of course, the questions of "how much" and "how long" a person must continue in sin and/or righteous actions (as free gracers taunt) are irrelevant for John is not basing a person's salvation upon these things. However, some of the free gracers seem to imply that those who view John's epistle as "tests of life" (proofs of salvation) must

out of necessity teach that assurance is built upon these tests of life. This is not the case since John clearly reveals elsewhere that assurance is based upon belief in Christ alone and the promise of eternal life (John 3:15-16).

The problem is not with John's teaching regarding these tests of life but how the Free Grace Movement and others react to them and misunderstand them. They build straw man questions and arguments based upon his teachings which is designed to shoot down the idea that these could be tests of regeneration. They say, "How many sins or how long must one sin, and to what degree must one commit sin in order to know he is lost and not saved? How many good works must a person perform in ratio to bad works to know they are saved? In their denial of the more extreme views of the *perseverance* of the saints, such as Lordship salvation (mixing faith with our works in the conversion response and attempting to acquire assurance of salvation through looking at one's works), they commit their own extreme *non-perseverance* theories which defy the clear teaching of Scripture.

John sets the record straight! The primary assurance of one's salvation is based upon an individual's belief in God's promise of eternal life through His Son. This is how we know that we are saved! We can only possess assurance when we believe in the PROMISE of Jesus Christ - not the CONDITION of our life.

1 John 5:11-13 gives us this wonderful promise:

"And this is the record, that God hath given to us (as a free, unmerited, and undeserving gift - Rom. 6:23) eternal life (which is eternal security), and this life is in his Son (not church sacraments, church affiliation, our good deeds, almsgiving, etc.). He that hath the Son hath life (eternal life is inseparable from the person of Jesus Christ); and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life. These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God (those who have expressed personal faith in Christ at the time of conversion); that ye may know (presently and in the future) **that ye have eternal life (the expression of personal faith in Christ results in the certainty or assurance of salvation – John 6:47; 11:25-26), and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God"** (we are to keep believing or expressing faith in Christ as the sole ground of our salvation and assurance after we have been saved).

John could not make it any clearer. It's as clear as the noonday sun. We are to base our eternal salvation on **FACTS** and not **FEELINGS**, **FAITH** in Christ and not our **FAILURES**, **BELIEF** and not **BEHAVIOR**, Christ's **PROMISE** and not our **PERFORMANCE**. John taught that believing in the promise of eternal life,



which is based upon Christ's death on one's behalf, is the ground of our assurance. There is no need of hoping or guessing or feeling or groping in the dark when it comes to possessing the assurance of salvation. We can **KNOW** that we are saved by simply believing on Christ today and forever. It's faith in Christ all the way! It is not a matter of hoping so, nor of waiting till the end to see if we really got it, but something of absolute assurance and certainty. Praise God!

If we are going to possess the absolute assurance that we are saved, then we must keep looking to Christ and His promise of eternal life that He gave to us. If one's Christian experience is made the grounds or basis for assurance, John's statement in 1 John 5:13 about knowing becomes a complete impossibility. If salvation or assurance depends on me, then on a good day, I'm saved, and on a bad day, I don't really know. But if it depends on what Jesus has done for me, then I can know.

At any time when we seek to gain and maintain assurance by looking at ourselves, instead of Christ, then we will eventually doubt our salvation (Isa. 45:22; John 3:14-16). John does not teach that we must look at ourselves (our good works or perseverance) to possess the assurance of eternal life. If we begin to look at ourselves, our performance, our good versus bad deeds, our feelings instead of our faith, then we will certainly begin to doubt our salvation. However, in his epistle John also teaches there is a secondary assurance that one can possess regarding salvation, which comes through a change in a person's character and conduct. In other words, the *primary* assurance that comes through one's faith in Christ and

this will also translate into a *secondary* assurance through one's transformation of living (2 Pet. 1:10). Life begets life!

1 John 2:3-5 speaks of the secondary confirmation and assurance of one's salvation through transformation of living: "**And hereby we do know** (*possess confidence*) **that we know him** (*possess a saving relationship with God through Christ*), **if we keep his commandments** (*as a general pattern or way of life*). **He that saith** (*the unbeliever who is not God's child*), **I know him, and keepeth not his commandments** (*as a general pattern and way of life*), **is a liar, and the truth is not in him** (*the truth about himself, his sin, and relationship with God*). **But whoso keepeth his word** (*the true believer and child of God who as a way of life is obedient and gives evidence of his salvation*), **in him verily is the love of God perfected** (*reaches its goal*): **hereby know we that we are in him**" (*we can have confidence that we possess a saving union and relationship with God, through Jesus Christ, when we are obedient and manifesting love in our hearts toward God*).

John's epistle is talking about the general bent or inclination of one's life, the basic characteristic of one's life, which is one of obedience or one of disobedience and rebellion against God. Let me explain what John is saying in a very practical manner. A person who is saved will at one point and on many occasions throughout his life say, "Thank You Lord for saving my soul. Thank you for what you have been doing in my life. I thank you that You have been working in my heart to change me slowly and gradually. I confess that I am not what I ought to be but praise God I am not what I used to be!" In this way, the believer receives the added blessing of assurance as He sees glimpses of God working in his life. A person who is truly saved will never say, "God, I want nothing to do with you. I never did. I hate you God. I renounce my faith in you, I reject your salvation through the Son of God on the cross, I don't believe you even exist, and for this reason I will live my life as I please without any of Your restrictions."

We must remember that even Solomon, who seems to be of interest to many in the apostasy debate, did fall into apostasy. But even after falling into the sinful apostasy of idolatry (1 Kings. 11:2-6 - "and went not fully after the LORD") he did not in the end curse God and die! Instead, he said later on in life, after coming to his spiritual senses, "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and

keep his commandments: for this *is* the whole *duty* of man” (Ecclesiastes 12:13). These are not the words of an apostate! They are the words of one of God’s children. It is certain that Solomon was not an apostate as described in the epistles of Peter and Jude who are mockers of God and the truth (2 Pet. 3:3; Jude 18).



Solemn eventually came to his senses and he is responsible for giving us much Scripture. Would God allow an apostate to give us multitudes of Scripture through the Holy Spirit’s supervision and guidance? I think not for the Bible says that “holy men of God spake as they were move by the Holy Ghost” (2 Pet. 1:21). Solomon was not an apostate as describe in 2 Peter 2.

Apostasy and Christian Living



“Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God (Heb. 3:12). Most reformed writers will tell you that this references an unbeliever moving into full-blown apostasy because he is not persevering in his faith. But Paul addresses this to the “brethren” or saints. He is not speaking to unbelievers but to believers. And no, Paul is not warning the saints about apostasy in order to demonstrate

they were never saved in the first place. MacArthur reasons this way: “Brethren is not a reference to Christians, as is “holy brethren” in 3:1. It refers to racial brothers, unbelieving Jews, as the term does throughout the book of Acts.”

Reformed Theology tries to take the easy way out of most Bible verses that point to believers not persevering in the way they think a believer should persevere. The widespread view that the writer was concerned about mere professors of the faith versus genuine believers is not found in the text. The author is definitely speaking to genuine believers. He addresses them as brethren (Gk. adelphoi; compare “holy brethren” in vs. 1) which is the uniform treatment throughout the book. Nowhere is there the slightest suggestion that they were mere professors, which were being contrasted with genuine Christians, as is widely believed by many reformed teachers.

The departing (Gr. *aphistemi*) is the source of our word apostasy, which is a deliberate departure from God’s revelation. It speaks of removal and to desert or withdraw oneself from the truth. These Jewish brethren were being tempted by an “evil heart of unbelief” to return to Judaism. To do so meant they would have to reject the fuller revelation which they had received of the sufficiency of Christ’s death and return to the incomplete revelation of Judaism. Thus, they are admonished to exhort one another daily with the truths that will strengthen their faith in Christ, such as the truths in this epistle that spoke of Christ’s finished work on the cross (Heb. 10:12) and intercessory work in Heaven (Heb. 7:25).

Again, the words “Take heed (beware), brethren” indicate that the author regarded the readers as genuine Christians. His concern is that some of them might have an evil heart of unbelief. The unbelief in view is not related to their personal salvation and eternal death. This is clear from the context and especially Hebrews 3:19 in which the very same word for “unbelief” (*apistia*) is used in relation to Israel’s wanderings in the wilderness. The wilderness generation did not enter the land “because of unbelief.” In other words, they failed to believe God’s promises that He would give them the land, and thus forsook their mission. What God’s people did at Kadesh Barnea was a rebellion against the Lord (Num. 14:4, 9; Deut. 1:26). In view of the past illustration of unbelief, the author of Hebrews 3:6 seems to be saying, “Hold fast, and don’t rebel against God’s will! Don’t go back to Judaism and move away from the sufficiency and finality of Christ’s death to grant you salvation and security.”

An unbelieving heart (“an evil heart of unbelief”) is evil because unbelief is evil. These were believers who could possibly refuse to listen, turn a cold shoulder to God, and eventually turn away from His will and truth. Evidently in the context of the epistle of Hebrews this describes a relapse from Christianity into Judaism. To depart from Him is to depart from the living God, His perfect way and word regarding the finished work of Christ, a departure which is in direct contrast to the admonition to “hold fast.”

Hebrews 3:6

“But Christ as a son over his own house; whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end.”

The Hebrews were encouraged to remain confident in the sufficiency of Christ’s death for their salvation and base their hope only and forever in Christ alone.

Similarly, Hebrews 3:14 declares:

“For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end.”

The test of continuance in the doctrine of Christ and His saving work is the proof of one’s salvation. The fact that we hold to our confession is proof that we are God’s true children. True faith always has the quality of permanence. We don’t hold fast in order to maintain our salvation, but as proof that we have been genuinely saved. Faith is the *root* of salvation; endurance is the *fruit* of salvation.

Verses like this are often misused to teach that a person can be saved and then lost again. However, such an interpretation is impossible because the overwhelming testimony of the Bible is that salvation is freely bestowed by God’s grace (Eph. 2:8-9), purchased by Christ’s blood (Acts 20:28), received by man’s faith (Gal. 3:26), and evidenced by his good works (Eph. 2:10).

Here is the teaching of all these verses when combined together. It’s very clear that God’s people can rebel against Him and His ways (Heb. 3:12), even doubting the sufficiency of Christ’s work on the cross, mixing works into the salvation equation, but they won’t completely abandon God, repudiate His truth, and forever turn

away from God's ways, His Son, and salvation through Christ (Heb. 3:6,14). Today there are many Christians who initially embrace Christ by faith, as the Hebrew and Galatian Christians did, but then begin to struggle with eternal security through Christ alone (Gal. 1:6; 3:2-3; 4:9-11) because of errant teaching. It was difficult for the Hebrew Christians to totally abandon the Mosaic Law and in a similar way there are Christians today who struggle over the assurance of their salvation through Christ alone. This is because they are taught to continually look to themselves (their good works and living) to assure them of their salvation. Here is the point. We must continue to believe and walk by faith just as we began the Christian life by faith.

1 Timothy 1:19-20 is another case of believers departing from God:

“Holding faith, and a good conscience; which some having put away concerning faith (the faith – what Christians believe and embrace) have made shipwreck: Of whom is Hymenaeus and Alexander; whom I have delivered unto Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme.”

A shipwrecked life can evidently be applied to Christians which appears to be the case in 1 Timothy 1:19. These two men have been likened to foolish sailors who threw their compasses overboard. Hymenaeus and Alexander appear to have been genuine believers in view of how Paul described them and turned them over to Satan, the removal of God's protective hedge on their lives as Christians. The idea of being delivered unto Satan (1 Tim. 1:20) implies an apostolic discipline (1 Cor. 5:5) and disassociation from the local church. The verb “learn” (1 Tim. 1:20) means “to learn by discipline.” When a Christian refuses to repent, the local fellowship should exercise discipline, excluding him from the fellowship of the saints. We do not possess the apostolic authority to turn someone over to Satan, but the disciplined believer may be more vulnerable to Satan's attacks, which can ultimately bring him back to his spiritual senses. Of course, Satan has to ask God for permission to attack a believer (Job 1-2; Luke 22:31-34).

The nature of the blasphemy is not mentioned here but apparently the teaching or living of these two Christian men were not according to apostolic doctrine and was in some sense blasphemous in nature. Today the seas are filled with shipwrecked Christians who have not accurately followed “the faith” or what the Bible teaches regarding doctrine and living. There are many shipwrecked believers today who

become sidetracked from the truth and God's will for their lives. These two men are examples of the tragedy of once bright, effective Christians being sidetracked into error, through the stifling of their consciences and abandonment of some key doctrinal truth or way of living. Their Christian life had started out like a mighty ship moving out to sea, but instead of returning to port with banners waving and a full cargo, they had crashed on the rocks and brought shame on themselves and their testimony.

Christians who "make shipwreck" of their Christian life do so by sinning against their consciences. Bad doctrine and conduct usually begins because of secret sins and a warped conscience. Hymenaeus and Alexander deliberately rejected their good consciences in order to defend their ungodly lives and teachings. Again, Paul did not tell us exactly what they did, except that their sin involved "blaspheming" in some way. Hymenaeus said that the resurrection was already past (2 Tim. 2:16–18), perhaps allegorizing it. Alexander was a popular name in that day, so we cannot be sure that the man named in Paul's next letter to Timothy (2 Tim. 4:14) is the same man; but if he is, no doubt he withstood Paul by teaching false doctrine. It's very clear that Christians can become shipwrecked spiritually and doctrinally at certain times in their lives.

Hebrews 12:15 also illustrates believers departing from sanctified living: "Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble *you*, and thereby many be defiled."

The writer of Hebrews once again acknowledges that God's people can become bitter and harbor sin in their hearts. In doing this, they will "fail of the grace of God" by not allowing God's transforming grace to sanctify and change their hearts and lives. The Book of Galatians also speaks about Christians falling from grace.

Galatians 5:1

"Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free (*free from law as a way of salvation*), and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage" (*the system of a works/law salvation*).

Galatians 5:4 then adds:

“Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace.”

We have seen that we can *fail* the grace of God (Heb. 12:15) and *fall* from grace (Gal. 5:4) but none of these expressions mean that God’s grace no longer is available to the believer for sanctification or salvation. They do not

mean a person can lose their salvation and in the end go to hell. Failing the grace of God means that Christians do not apply God’s transforming grace to their lives and falling from grace means that Christians do not maintain the Biblical and doctrinal position that grace alone saves them. They add works into the mix of salvation. Many Christians believe they are saved by grace but must then maintain a certain amount of good works to keep or maintain their salvation. This is bondage – the slavery to a works/law salvation and never knowing for sure that one is saved through the sufficiency of Christ’s death.



All of these Biblical illustrations of Christians not persevering as they should in faith, truth, and good works means that perseverance is not always manifested in every phase and part of a Christian’s life (2 Tim. 4:10). The many New Testament warnings against turning away from the Lord and the truth should make this fact obvious. After we are regenerated, we can still lapse into sin, sometimes into serious sin. The Bible reveals that it is possible for a Christian to experience a very serious fall, experience backsliding and moral lapses, and depart from doctrinal truth.



The whole idea of Christian apostasy boils down to these primary questions. Is there a difference between a Christian committing certain acts of apostasy and the actual apostate who totally repudiates God, Christianity, Jesus Christ, His death, blood, burial, resurrection, virgin birth, Second

Coming, and who seeks to live like the devil and a “hell raiser” without any signs of regenerating life? Is there a difference between a Christian departing from the living God (Heb. 3:12) in certain areas of his lifestyle and those “who depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits?” (1 Tim. 4:1)? The answer is yes. Is there a difference between a person who can “fail the grace of God” (Heb. 12:14) at times in his life and the individual who practices “turning the grace of God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ?” Again, the answer is yes.

There is plenty of Scriptural evidence to conclude that Christians cannot become *actual* apostates, but this is not to say they cannot depart from God in various forms and ways. They can backslide (2 Tim. 4:10; Rev. 3:17) and mimic certain aspects of carnality and cultural apostasy in their Christian life (1 Cor. 3:1-3), such as listening to the paganized form of apostasy in secular rock music, engaging in other perverted forms of worship (1 Cor. 12:3; John 4:22), and imbibing false teaching (1 Tim. 1:20; 2 Tim. 2:18), including a works salvation (Gal. 3:2-3). We are commanded to “touch not the unclean thing” (2 Cor. 6:17) which in the context of Corinth was a pagan form of heathen and idolatrous worship that was nothing less than apostasy (sacrificing meat to idols). God has called us to separate from all aspects of apostasy which would naturally mean we can reflect apostasy to some degree in our beliefs, actions, and associations within life.

This is why the exhortations are given to “hold fast the form of sound words” (2 Tim. 1:13) and “speak thou the things which become sound doctrine” (Titus 2:1). There is sufficient Scriptural evidence that Christians can be manipulated to reflect some traits of apostasy in their personal lives and theology. If this were not the case, then why are there repeated warnings to “take heed” (Acts 20:28-32; 1 Tim. 4:16; 2 Pet. 1:19) against false teachers (apostates) and their aberrant doctrines (“Not giving heed to Jewish fables, and commandments of men, that turn from the truth” – Titus 1:14). Hebrews 10:23 exhorts us: “Let us hold fast the profession of *our* faith without wavering; (for he *is* faithful that promised).” Once again, Hebrews 3:12 adds the warning which is directed to the brethren: “Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God.”

Departing (to revolt, desert, withdraw oneself) from the living God in relation to the Christian life means that God's people can move away from the solid ground of their sufficiency in Christ, His path or way for their life, and refuse to follow the clear commands that God has given them to follow. The warning is clear in the next verse: "lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin" (Heb. 3:13). Yes, a Christian is warned to not become hardened and deceived by allowing sin to rule and overtake his heart and life. There exists the very real possibility of allowing the sin nature to control one's life and bring deception into one's mind and heart. Sin offers escape from the reproach of Christ, lower standards of holiness, and can cause one to depart from the truth about the sufficiency of Christ regarding salvation and sanctification.

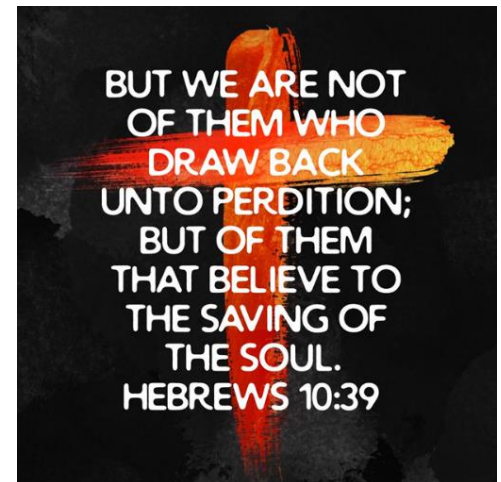
A Christian's heart can become insensitive to the Word and work of God and they can quench the Spirit's work in their lives (1 Thess. 5:19). So hard was the heart of Israel that the people even wanted to return to Egypt! In this case, they wanted to exchange their freedom under God for slavery in Egypt. Of course, Israel's history was similar to the hearts of the readers of this letter because they were also in danger of "going back" themselves and not believing in God's truth, Christ's sufficiency, and free grace (without law). So, according to this description, which is applied to God's people today, they too can depart from the living God (Heb. 3:12).

As we have seen, Christians can actually move away from the free grace that He offers and not fully embrace it and believe it. As a result, they can lack the assurance of salvation, as the Hebrew saints apparently did (Heb. 6:11; 10:22) and Galatian saints (Gal. 1:6) because of their misunderstanding and disbelief in the finished work of Christ on their behalf. Yes, there is a real possibility that Christians can lapse into various forms of apostasy as it pertains to doctrine and living. But God's Word places limits on these acts of rebellion and apostasy which can occur in relation to the Christian life. It marks a clear distinction or delineation between apostates and God's children.

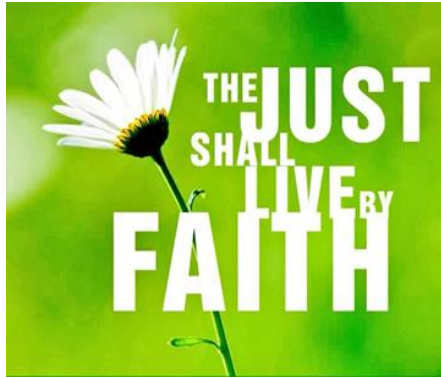
Can a Christian depart from the living God and to some degree and in some measure commit apostasy? As explained above, Christians can depart from God when they are exposed to wrong thinking, theology, ideologies, and carnal living. Christians can depart from God in relation to His teaching and His consecrated will

and purpose for their lives (2 Tim. 4:10). But it's interesting that God's people are never defined as apostates, those who totally and forever abandon the faith and Christian sanctification. The writer of Hebrews said that "we are persuaded better things of you (God's children), and things that accompany salvation" (Heb. 6:9). He clarifies that "we are not of them (apostates) who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul" (Heb. 10:39).

Note the parallelism in the "of them" (Heb. 10:39), twice repeated in this verse. There are they "that draw back" or shrink back into old traditions, or into an Old Covenant relationship with God, or into some other replacement for Jesus Christ. But we are not "of them." The writer identifies who we are when stating: "them that believe to the saving of the soul." This indicates that although there may be lapses in a Christian's faith and living, God's children will never totally abandon God, Christianity, the Gospel, Christ and their faith in Him. According to the writer of Hebrews, the permanent withdrawal was the evidence of an unregenerate heart, and their destination was the same as all lost men which is "perdition." This refers to the eternal separation from God in the Lake of Fire.



The term "perdition" is clearly related to the other descriptive words for the unsaved: the "lost" (Luke 19:10) and the "perishing" (1 Cor. 1:18). The word "perdition" is commonly used in the New Testament of the everlasting punishment or judgment of unbelievers (Matt. 7:13; Rom. 9:22; Phil. 1:28; 3:19; 1 Tim. 6:9). Judas and the Man of Sin are called "son of perdition" which means he was "perdition bound" (John 17:12) even as the Antichrist will be who lives during the End Time (2 Thess. 2:3). But the author then expresses his confidence that both his readers and he were truly saved.



They had believed to “the saving of the soul” which in this context means preservation from eschatological destruction. They were described as “the just shall live by faith” (Heb. 10:38) and as “them that believe” (Heb. 10:39; Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:11) which means they were justified by faith alone in Christ and were continuing to live by genuine faith in Christ. They had not totally abandoned the ship

and apostatized away from faith in Christ, the Gospel, Christianity, and the basic tenants of the Christian faith. The expression “them that believe” means that a justifying faith is a persevering faith. It does not result in total abandonment, apostasy, and unbelief. In faith and by faith we continue to espouse Christ as our only hope of Heaven.

God’s people may be side-tracked and they may backslide. They may even act like infidels at times and deny the basic aspects of the Christian faith as it relates to normal living.

1 Timothy 5:8 says:

“But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.”

Christians can reflect apostasy in relation to some odd beliefs and practices, but they can never become an apostate who rejects the clear revelation of the Gospel and Jesus Christ and who faces perdition (Heb. 10:39). The way to assure others that we are truly the Lord's is to live by faith in Christ and demonstrate this faith in our daily lives. "The Lord knoweth them that are his" and "Let everyone that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity" (2 Tim 2:19).

John Philipps remarks:

“It is faith that keeps a man from apostasy ... It is faith that draws the line of demarcation between the apostate and the true believer. The apostate has neither the faith nor the faithfulness to continue, so he draws back; and in so doing, he incurs God's active displeasure. The true believer takes a fresh look at the Lord Jesus and reaffirms his faith.”

Can a Christian, one of God's children, apostatize theologically and morally in his living? Yes. But the writers of Scripture are very clear that they cannot totally and forever abandon the truth of the Gospel, Jesus Christ, repudiate God, and live like one the devil's children who are said to be "without God in this world" (Eph. 2:12) and "Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others" (Eph. 2:2-3).

Apostasy, or the total abandonment to heathenism, idolatry, and the rejection of Christ and the Gospel is not descriptive of God's children. Just the opposite is true for the Bible states in Revelation 2:13: "I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, *even* where Satan's seat *is*: and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith, even in those days wherein Antipas *was* my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth." Christians "earnestly contend for the faith" (Jude 3) – they do not totally and forever repudiate the faith as apostates do. The true characteristics of Christians is that they embrace the basis tenants of Christianity. They do not finally and forever deny the faith.

Apostasy and Little Children



Apostates can live among God's children (2 Tim. 3:6; Jude 4) but they are not God's children for "they went out from us, but they were not of us" (1 John 2:19). Apostates are like "the tares among the wheat" (Matt. 13:25-30). It's interesting that genuine Christians and believers are always addressed as "little children" (1 John 2:1; 12=13, 18, 28; 3:7, 18; 4:4; 5:21) or the children of God in contrast to the "children of the devil" (1 John 3:10). They are never addressed as "little apostates" even though Christians can backslide into idolatry which is a form of apostasy (1 John 5:21). This means only the devil's children are the actual apostates. As "little children" they are never identified as "little antichrists" but the unsaved fall under the category of

antichrists (1 John 2:18). By definition, God's children cannot morph into apostates and become antichrists, who totally abandon "the faith which was once delivered unto the saints" (Jude 3) and who are identified as those who "resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, reprobate concerning the faith" (2 Tim. 3:8).

According to John, all Christians do possess regenerating signs that relate to manifesting fruit and maintaining truth (1 John 4:1-12). They cannot become apostates or antichrists and they are never identified by these titles or names. Jesus also speaks of God's true children possessing signs of transforming life when He states: "But he that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth *it*; which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty" (Matt. 13:23). In the parable of Jesus, this was the only soil type that brought forth lasting fruit. This means that fruitfulness, in varying degrees, is the hallmark of every child of God. Jesus never referred to His true followers as "little apostates" but as His "little flock" (Luke 12:32).

Every born-again believer will manifest a certain amount of change and fruitfulness in his life that contrasts with his previous unregenerate way of living (Matt. 7:20; 12:33; 13:23; John 8:44; 2 Cor. 3:17-18; 5:17; Eph. 2:1-3, 10; Titus 1:16; 1 John 3:6-9; 5:18). To deny this would be to ignore the plain sense and understanding of many Bible passages. Genuine fruit (spiritual transformation) occurring in one's life, which includes continuing to embrace fundamental and evangelical truth, not abandoning key doctrinal truth (1 John 2:24; Col. 1:23; John 8:31; 1 Cor. 15:2; Heb. 3:6, 14), places Christians into a different category than the apostates who "depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron" (1 Tim. 4:1-2), and whose "damnation slumbereth not" (2 Pet. 2:3).

The repeated testimony of Scripture is that God will always continue to perform a transforming work in the hearts and lives of His children (Phil. 1:6; 2:13) so that they are distinguished in some measure from *actual* apostates in their doctrine and deeds (2 Peter 3; Jude). Jesus taught, "by their fruits ye shall know them" (Matt. 7:20). In the case of apostates, it is their rotten fruit of false doctrine and depraved deeds which mark them as being "without God in the world" (Eph. 2:12).

So I ask the question again for emphasis. Can a Christian in his theology and actions reflect apostasy to some degree and in some measure? The answer is yes. The New Testament writers do present specific believers who departed from various aspects of God's truth and will for an undetermined period of time (1 Tim. 1:20; 2 Tim. 2:17–18) and Christians who can live carnally in their Christian life (1 Cor. 3:1; 5:5; 2 Tim. 4:10). God's children can depart from the living God (Heb. 3:12) which essentially is an act of apostasy. They can possess "and evil heart of unbelief" (Heb. 3:12) which means they can fail to believe certain things that God has said and revealed in His Word on creation and other important topics. They can backslide and ignore certain truths related to salvation, the Christian life, and fail to live an exemplary Christian life.

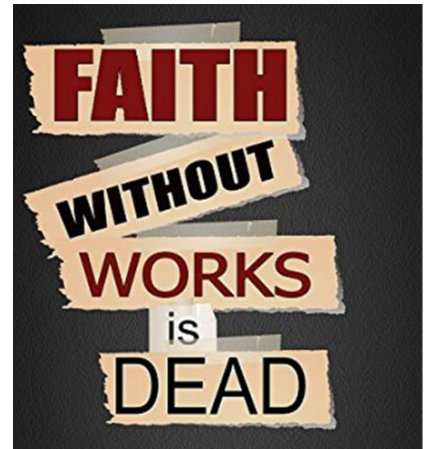
Of course, many reformed interpreters of Scripture deny this, even denying the existence of carnal Christians, and take the teachings of Jesus and the apostles farther than what Jesus and the apostles went with them. They say that bad works will never characterize the life of a true believer. Of course, this quickly turns into a question of how many bad works must a Christian commit before they are characterized as practicing bad or evil works, which the New Testament does not answer. Nor can anyone else answer these questions.

Here is the point. Christians can commit various types of apostasy in relation to the truth and living. Nevertheless, the Bible does not reference true believers as unbelievers and as someone who will finally and forever abandon God, truth, and righteous living. Again, life begets life and death begets death. Christianity does not breed atheists who possess a "reprobate mind" (Rom. 1:28), who "resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, reprobate (*worthless, unapproved*) concerning the faith" (2 Tim. 3:8) and who "profess that they know God; but in works (*sinful works of degradation and disobedience*) they deny him (*his will and authority over their lives*), being abominable, are disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate" (rejected and unapproved - Titus 1:16). Genuine Christians are not part of the company of people who are described as apostates, nor are they addressed as apostates in Scripture who totally abandon God, the Gospel, and godliness.

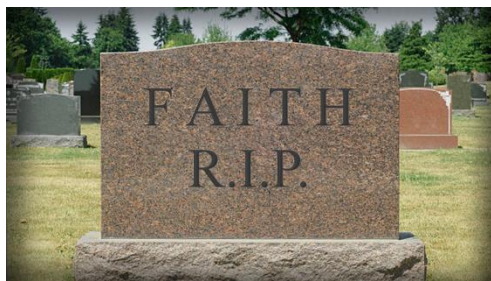
Apostasy and Faith Without Works

Ephesians 2:10 reminds us of God's work in us because of the New Birth: "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them."

Works are the natural outflow from the new birth or the spiritual recreation that occurs at conversion. New life produces righteous works, or different aspects of fruitful living, which are directly related to the new birth and nature received from God (2 Cor. 5:17). This leads to the conclusion that genuine faith in Christ does eventually result in transforming works or expressions of new life. In spite of the Scripture twisting that some in the Free Grace Movement do with the epistle of James, we learn that "faith without works is dead" (James 2:26). If a



person consistently lives without the regenerating signs of life, if he only lives and acts like the devil's children without every demonstrating new life, if he becomes an apostate who denies Christ and Christianity, then he gives outward evidence that he was never saved and his faith is a sham. It is counterfeit.



A dead faith is the kind of faith that demons possess (James 2:19). It is a spurious and non-saving faith (John 2:23; Acts 8:13; 1 Cor. 15:2), not because it did not produce enough works, but because it never produced any fruit or works that were genuine and lasting. This is what Jesus,

Paul, James, and John taught. Faith should never be mixed with works in the conversion response of the sinner, neither should works be integrated with faith to acquire the assurance of one's salvation (John 3:14-16; 6:47; 1 John 5:10-13). However, this does not mean that when a person has expressed genuine faith in Christ alone for his salvation that he will never exhibit or express good works or fruitful living as the result of his faith in Christ and regeneration.

There is a vast difference between linking faith and works together *for* salvation and the assurance of eternal life (Matt. 19:16; Rom. 3:28; 11:6; Titus 3:5) and connecting a type of faith that *results* in works within the Christian life, which serves as a secondary proof and reminder of a person's salvation. We must also dogmatically assert that our faith does not persevere in works at the time of conversion. This is a Scriptural absurdity since faith and works are contrasted in relation to a person's salvation (Eph. 2:8-9; Titus 3:5). The reformed teaching that states how a person's faith, at the time of conversion, must include promises to serve God, making Jesus Lord over one's life, allowing Christ to be a person's master, and giving up sins, so that faith can be seen to persevere in good works is nothing less than a legalistic approach to salvation. *Works follow faith – they are not part of faith.*

The Bible makes this clear distinction when it comes to justification and salvation. Faith is always juxtaposed with works in regard to a person's salvation (Rom. 3:28; Gal. 2:16; 3:24). Furthermore, the reformed idea that God regenerates a man first before he can express faith, so that his faith can then persevere at the time of conversion and not be deemed as legalistic works, is nothing but a theological hoax. This is because faith always precedes regeneration and salvation (John 3:16; Acts 16:31; 1 Tim. 4:10; Titus 1:16; Heb. 10:39; 1 John 5:1).

Titus 2:14 gives us the correct order of faith and works:

“Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.”

This verse teaches that good works are the result of our faith and redemption in Christ. The very thought of redemption from the power of sin and Satan naturally results in good works or righteous living. Why? It's because we have been redeemed from the power and mastery of Satan. Redeemed how I love to proclaim it! This means that as we pass through our Christian life, expressing faith in Christ alone for our free justification, eternal life, and redemptive salvation, we can also thank God for gradually (Phil. 3:13-14) and sometimes drastically changing our hearts and lives to conform to His will and righteous standards. Paul exclaimed, “But by the grace of God I am what I am” (1 Cor. 15:10). Every one of God's children can say the same thing. Although the change may be greater in some and lesser in

others, there is transformation that occurs in all of God's children and God will get all the glory for this change.

Here is the point. There is no such thing a dead, fruitless, and nonliving faith. Of course, we should understand that James was not teaching in his epistle that the foundation of one's assurance is based upon self-examination for "Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness" (James 2:23). However, he was teaching that a person's faith in Christ would be proven genuine as they demonstrate newness of life and acts of transformation that reflect Christ.

Apostasy and Self-Examination

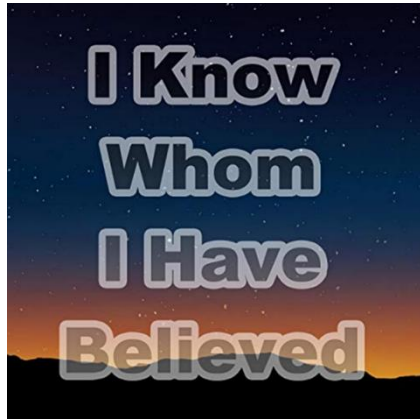
This brings up the question once again of self-examination which proves our faith is not spurious and defective, and how this relates to Biblical assurance. James teaches that faith results in works to prove the genuine nature of our faith since "faith without works is dead" (James 2:26). Faith translates into good



works in varying degrees and ways to authenticate itself and verify that a person is truly saved. Once again, James is not advocating a rigorous, meticulous, and legalistic observation to determine one's salvation, but is teaching that when a person makes a general observation of his life, he can sense and see God at work in various ways. He knows that the Holy Spirit indwells him and is working in relation to his heart and life. There is some evidence of fruit that verifies the genuine nature of a person's faith that they have placed in Christ.

Let me confirm something at this point. James does not side with some of the Reformed Theology being promoted today, which basically teaches that a person must live a legalistic life, continually examining himself, so he can determine if his faith was genuine or real, when he trusted Christ as Savior. In this scenario, works are highlighted above grace as it relates to a person's salvation. God's Word does not teach that we must look back on our conversion experience and question our

faith, when we know that with sincerity of heart (Rom. 10:10) and out of deep conviction we have trusted in Christ to be our Savior.



Paul exclaimed, “I know whom I have believed” (2 Tim. 1:12). Let’s get is straight. Paul did not say, “I know the good works that I have been doing in my life” but “I know whom I have believed.” Knowing that we believed on Christ is enough! Christ is enough! Our faith is to be Christ-centered and our confidence must be in Christ alone to save us and maintain our salvation (“I am persuaded” - Rom. 8:38). Christ is to be the sole object of our faith – not our good works. When we “first trusted in Christ” (Eph. 1:12) is to be our primary assurance that we are saved. We “believe to the saving of the soul” (Heb. 10:39) and know that we are saved because of our belief in Christ (“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved” - Acts 16:31).

Yes, we do look back to our faith in Christ and continue to look to faith in Christ as the basis of our assurance and eternal life (John 3:16; 5:24). We have looked to Christ in order to live (John 3:14-16) and should continue to look to Christ throughout our Christian life for the assurance of salvation since “he is able to keep that which I’ve committed unto him” (2 Tim. 1:12). We are saved on the basis of Christ’s work and this becomes the only ground for our salvation and resting place for our assurance. Our faith effectively applies the benefits of Christ’s work to us and we are confident that Christ gives us eternal life (John 6:47).

I was doing some blogging regarding the subject of “perseverance in good works” and was not surprised how many Christians are steeped in Reformed Theology, basing assurance of salvation on a person’s lifestyle and good works, which is said to prove the genuineness of a person’s faith in Christ. In other words, many Christians think they must look to themselves to gain the assurance of their salvation. They are very adamant about it. Here are some of the blogs.

“Over and over, John is relying upon present realities in the book (1 John). NEVER does he ask us to rely upon a past decision or look to a past decision. That ‘looking’ to a past decision is really a recent invention within Christianity.”

“Assurance, however, is not rooted in a past decision, but in a present reality. Never does the Bible say to rely upon a past experience to prove your salvation.”

“Our salvation is a state we live in and it is verified by how we live in that state each day. It is impossible to be in the state of being saved unto good works and living in the practice of sin at the same time.”

“What I'm saying is that if a person never shows any fruit, but bases his salvation on some kind of experience (conversion), he may not be saved. I think this is the point of James. Not that works saves you, but that works reveal salvation.”

All of these comments are saturated in Reformed Theology and the extreme view on perseverance of the saints which says a Christian must persevere in good works to KNOW that they are saved. If this is the case, how many good works are necessary? What is the ratio of good to bad and who makes this decision regarding where perseverance begins and ends so a person can know they are saved? The bottom line is that a large segment in Reformed Theology teaches that Christians cannot possess *absolute* assurance of salvation for they are basing their salvation on the performance of Christians in order to

Think about this. If we are relying merely on today (our perseverance in good works today), as some have suggested, our salvation and assurance actually becomes a works-oriented salvation. We must do something, persevere in good works and behavior, to know or make sure that we have been saved by Christ. Again, what comfort is to know that Christ died to save us without ever being sure that we are saved, if we lack in our perseverance of good works? Is this not the bondage of Galatians 5:1?

We must remember that justification is an event that happens in a moment of time (Rom. 3:28; 5:1, 9; 1 Cor. 6:11; Gal. 2:16; Tit. 3:7). The same is true regarding expressing belief or faith in Christ which results in our salvation at a specific point

of time (John 10:9; Acts 16:31, Rom. 5:9; 10:9, 13; 1 Cor. 15:2; Eph. 2:8; 1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Tim. 1:9; Tit. 3:5; Heb. 10:39; Rev. 21:24). We rely on Christ's work at the very moment we believe on Him and what He promises to give us immediately and forever (salvation, eternal life, justification). The same must be true as we continue to live out our Christian life. We should persevere in our faith alone in Christ alone in order to possess the absolute assurance of eternal life for this is what Jesus promised to give us on the basis of faith alone (John 6:47).

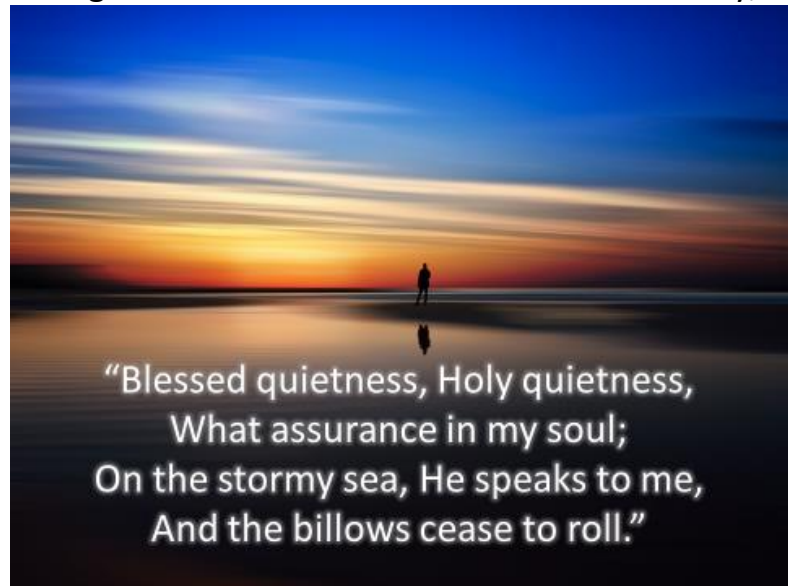
Only our continued faith in Christ will grant us “the full assurance of faith” (Heb. 10:22). So yes, we do look back to our salvation experience “when you believed” (Rom. 13:11) and “first trusted Christ” (Eph. 1:12) to be our Savior as the time when we passed from death unto life (John 5:24). We look back to when we were saved (Rom. 10:13) and from this point forward we continue to look to Christ as having paid the full penalty for our sins and providing us with salvation, justification, and everlasting life (John 3:16). We must cling to Christ, His sufficient death on our behalf, and His promise of eternal life, if we want to possess assurance. If we are obsessed with looking at ourselves, to prove if our faith in Christ is real, we will not only doubt the genuineness of our faith in Christ but also our salvation. This is because our life is filled with many spiritual pitfalls.

Let's me state this very clearly. You can possess the complete confidence that you are saved through the “gospel of your salvation” (Eph. 1:13), while at the same time you must not dismiss the work of God taking place in your heart and life since you have come to faith in Christ, which serves as a secondary way “to make your calling and election sure” (2 Pet. 1:10). As we have previously studied, making our election sure stems from living out Christian virtues and witnessing the change that God has made in our lives (1 Peter 1:5-8). It proves that our faith in Christ is real and genuine and that we are saved, which is something every Gospel believer should already know in view of their confident expression of faith in Christ (“Being confident of this very thing” – Phil. 1:6).

It has been repeatedly stressed throughout this study that self-observation is not the primary way to gain assurance (John 3:16), nor should it become a daily focus of our assurance. Self-examination is simply a secondary confirmation of our salvation which is something we already are confident that we possess through

faith in Christ. Transformation of living reminds us that God has come into our life to stay and is slowly reshaping us into Christlikeness (2 Cor. 3:18).

Since I can “know whom I have believed, and am persuaded” (2 Tim. 1:12), I can therefore testify of my salvation on the basis of when I placed faith in Christ, and continue to look to Christ for the complete confidence of my salvation. This means that any examination of my life is merely a reconfirmation of something I already know. It’s an added blessing that verifies I have placed genuine faith in Christ and am saved. This means that examining ourselves should never turn into a daily, grinding, meticulous, and legalistic experience that casts a shadow over our faith in Christ alone and the cross of Christ. Instead, it should actually be a joyful experience of inner quietness that occurs in our hearts, as we see God at work in our lives, and know that Christ has made a difference through our reliance upon His life-changing presence (Gal. 2:20).



We should not turn this general observation or overview of our life into a legalistic exercise to determine our salvation or to possess our essential assurance, since this only comes through faith in Christ (John 3:16). Once again, the assurance that is associated with self-examination (2 Cor. 13:5; 1 Pet. 1:10; 1 John 3:6-10, 14; 4:7, 15; 5:18) is *secondary in nature* and serves as a *complement to our faith in Christ* through which we receive absolute and unchanging assurance. The assurance that stems from self-evaluation is an added blessing that God gives to us within our Christian life. It is a secondary verification of what we already know – we have been saved by grace through faith in Christ (2 Tim. 1:9).



Self-evaluation is comparable to the icing on a cake. The cake is the main thing (our faith in Christ is what really matters and gives us assurance) but the chocolate icing on the cake is something that adds flavor and enjoyment. The same is true regarding our self-examination of how God has changed us. It brings a blessing to our heart to know that God has not only saved us by His grace but is also transforming us by His grace (Rom. 6:1-15).

2 Corinthians 13:5 speaks of this secondary assurance and confirmation of our salvation: “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?” (those rejected and unapproved by God).

Once again, self-examination should not be construed to mean that we must establish a detailed and legalistic observation of ourselves in order to determine if we are saved or unsaved. This examination is designed to confirm what we already know to be true. We are one of God’s children. 1 John 3:1, “Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God ...” It must be stressed again that this personal examination of oneself does not imply that Christians must, as Reformed Theology teaches, constantly assess or evaluate themselves, their conduct, their living, day after day and year after year, in order to determine whether or not their faith is genuine and that they have been saved, so they can possess assurance. As a result of reading Reformed Theology, some Christians have developed what I have labeled as “Compulsive Examination Disorder” (CED). They are overly obsessed with examining themselves so they can be sure of their salvation.



This is not what Jesus, Paul, James, or John taught when they mention self-examination and the outward display of works (Matt. 5:3-10; 7:15-21; 2 Cor. 13:5; James 2:21-26; 1 John 3:9-10). They all taught that assurance stems from faith in

Christ alone (John 6:47; Rom. 3:28; James 2:23; 1 John 5:11-13). This examination is a general, natural, and non-legalistic observation that occurs in one's Christian life that gives added confirmation of what the believer should already know. Christ saves believers by His grace "on whom they believed" (Acts 14:23) and "when they believed" (Acts 8:12). Self-evaluation does not replace faith alone in Christ (the ground of assurance) but complements it and adds to the glorious transaction that occurred in one's life when they were saved. Self-evaluation should not be misconstrued as a legalistic exercise, but a blessing that attends the Christian life as one sees the grace of God at work in his or her life.

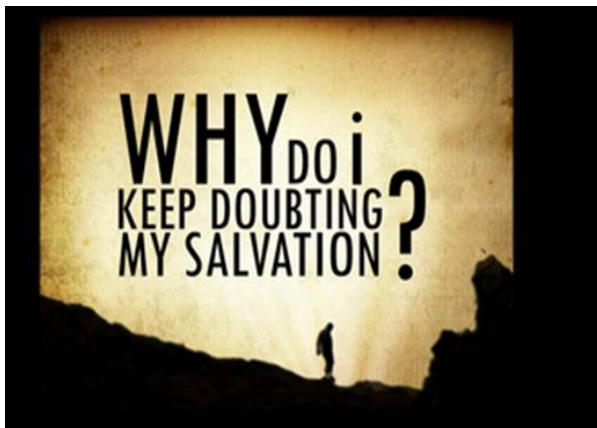
It should also be noted that the self-examination in 2 Corinthians 13:5 has to do with remaining in "the faith" (the objective fundamental teachings of historic Christianity) and it is dealing with "reprobates" or those who totally abandon truth and turn their backs on Christ and Christianity. In other words, we can in a general way examine our beliefs and manner of conduct, which can then be used as a secondary way to confirm our salvation, since we are not living as an apostate or reprobate that God has rejected.

We must remember that this secondary assurance that we receive only comes after we have already experienced assurance through placing faith in Christ, who paid the full penalty for our sins on the cross (Gal. 3:10), and through having confidence in His priestly ministry in Heaven, which maintains our salvation before the Father (Heb. 7:25). After we find security through Christ alone, we can then embrace the added assurance that comes when we see how God is sanctifying and transforming our lives through the ministry of the Holy Spirit (2 Cor. 3:18; Gal. 5:22-23).

Seeing God at work in our lives provides us with the added encouragement that we have already been saved but our change of life should never become the basis of our salvation. Again, we must remember that looking at the transformation in our life is only a secondary confirmation of the salvation we already possess through faith in Christ and should NEVER become the primary ground of our assurance. While looking at the things God is doing in our lives, when seeing our spiritual growth (2 Pet. 3:18) and observing the good works and new life we have been

demonstrating in our Christian living, we can gather some external evidence that we have been saved by God’s grace. However, the observance of our life should not become the basis of our assurance of salvation for we will eventually begin to doubt our salvation if we use the “look at me” method or approach to gain assurance. This is because none of us have reached perfection (Phil. 3:12) and have many faults and failures. Biblical assurance is based on Christ (2 Tim. 1:12) – not our good works, performance, and outward transformation, since this is flawed and inconsistent.

LÔÔK AT ME



If we become overly obsessed at looking to ourselves to receive assurance, we will find ourselves doubting our salvation. Why do you lack the assurance of salvation? It’s because whenever you divert your attention away from Christ alone as the only way of salvation and eternal life, when you transfer your eyes away from grace alone as the way of salvation (Eph. 2:8-9), you begin to cast doubt upon your salvation. Our focus is simple: “But we see Jesus” (Heb. 2:9) and we keep “looking unto Jesus” (Heb. 12:2). This is the only basis for our salvation and assurance.

If we move one iota from the finished work of Christ (John 19:30) and place our primary assurance, as mentioned previously, on our subjective, variable, unpredictable, and imperfect Christian life, we will begin to doubt our salvation. We need to look to Christ for the assurance that we are saved (Isa. 45:22; John 3:15-16) and to His promise of eternal life (John 6:47), and only then can we look at ourselves, or our new life in Christ (John 10:10; 2 Cor. 5:17), to find additional confirmation of what we already know. We have already been saved by God’s amazing grace “since ye believed” (Acts 19:2) and “which have believed” (Heb. 4:3). There is no reason to doubt our faith in Christ for “with the heart man believeth

unto righteousness” (Rom. 10:10). We should not doubt the sincerity of our faith that was placed in Christ at the time of our personal conversion.

So, our transformation that we see occurring in our lives is only a secondary confirmation of the salvation we already know that we possess through faith in Christ. The order is very important to follow if a Christian wants to obtain assurance of salvation. Our faith in Christ comes before following Christ. Our belief in Christ comes before our behavioral changes. If we look at ourselves but have not confirmed that assurance only comes through faith alone in Christ, then we will eventually doubt our salvation.



We must be careful that we don't put the cart before the horse when it comes to possessing the assurance of our salvation. Yes, some of the saints become overly obsessed with looking at themselves, when espousing an extreme teaching on the perseverance of the saints, and they begin to doubt their salvation because of the many sins and failures that occur in their Christian life (1 John 1:9; 2:1). If

we look to Christ and our position in Him, we will gain complete assurance of our salvation (John 3:16; Romans 3:24; 5:2; 1 Pet. 5:2). Only when we look to Christ will our change of life be seen in its proper perspective, it will serve to complement our faith in Christ, and provide us with some added blessing along the way that God has saved us and is demonstrating this in our lives.

The old axiom is true: “Faith alone saves, but the faith that saves is not alone.” In other words, genuine faith which has been placed in Jesus Christ for salvation, and which only looks to Christ for eternal life, will eventually produce the fruit of transformation. The fruit will vary (Mark 4:8, 20) but there will be signs of regenerating life. Life does not beget death.



Philippians 1:6 gives us this wonderful promise:

“Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you (salvation from the penalty of sin - PAST) will perform *it* (sanctification - salvation from the power of sin - PRESENT) until the day of Jesus Christ” (Rapture – salvation from the presence of sin - PROPHETIC).

Yes, God “will perform” the work of salvation, as it relates to the sanctifying aspect of our salvation (Phil. 2:12-13). This means that Christians will never become full-blown apostates who reject Christ and His claims. They will not become unbelievers and live like the devil’s children their entire lives without any signs of the new birth or God’s regenerating life being reflected in their lives.

Reformed Theologians often talk about the perseverance of saints. In this study, I’ve tried to maintain a Biblical balance between the correct understanding of perseverance and the extreme teaching on this subject as it relates to Lordship Salvation, regeneration, and the assurance of one’s salvation. We often say that Christians will persevere in good works. However, it’s really not the perseverance of the saints but the perseverance of God working through our lives that changes us. And this change occurs after faith in Christ and after salvation.

Philippians 1:6 reveals that each one of us as Christians are a work in progress. We call this progressive sanctification. Yes, “we are his workmanship” (Eph. 2:10) or God’s handiwork and masterpiece through our new creation and positional union with Christ. However, at the same time, God is still working in our hearts and lives progressively on a daily basis, since He promised that the “good work” which He began in us will eventually be completed in our perfect glorification. Yes, “it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of *his* good pleasure” (Phil. 2:13). Praise God! The Lord never stops working to transform His children. The truth of God’s gradual and continual work in our hearts and lives can best be reflected in this older tune for children.

“He's still working on me
To make me what I ought to be.
It took him just a week to make the moon and stars
The sun and the earth and Jupiter and Mars.
How loving and patient He must be
'Cause He's still workin' on me.”

I must admit that the ending of this chorus chokes me up. If I try to quote it during a church meeting, I can hardly get through it. How loving and patient He must be! This is the story of every born again child of God! We are work in progress. Some are further along than others (much further!), but nonetheless, we are God's children – not apostates. "But, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation ..." (Heb. 6:9).