

WEDNESDAY EVENING FELLOWSHIP

LIFE OF THE BELIEVER

STARTING POINT

1. In examining your life, who do you seek to please?

God, my wife, my boys, the Body of Christ, family, and friends—all of those are gifts from God.

SALVATION

EXPLAIN YOUR UNDERSTANDING OF THE FOLLOWING VERSES

a. Matthew 7:22

“On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, didn’t we prophesy in your name, drive out demons in your name, and do many miracles in your name?’”

Jesus describes people who appear to have genuine faith and who perform extraordinary religious works, yet He ultimately says, “I never knew you.” The passage therefore raises an important question: Does outward evidence of faith necessarily demonstrate genuine regeneration, or can a person sincerely identify with Christ and engage in religious activity without actually belonging to Him?

These people clearly professed allegiance to Jesus and appeal to impressive religious works as evidence of their standing with Him. Yet Jesus responds in verse 23, “I never knew you.” The significance of that statement is important. Jesus does not say, “I knew you for a time, but you failed to persevere.” He says, “I never knew you.”

The passage therefore establishes at least one category of people who appear religious and may even point to extraordinary works performed in Jesus’ name, yet were never truly Christ’s. Their problem was not merely that they eventually stopped persevering; Jesus says He never knew them.

This passage strongly supports the existence of false professors, but it does not by itself explain every biblical passage concerning falling away.

b. 1 John 2:19

“They went out from us, but they did not belong to us; for if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us. However, they went out so that it might be made clear that none of them belongs to us.”

John is specifically discussing the people he has just identified as “antichrists” in 1 John 2:18. Their departure from the Christian community demonstrated something about these particular individuals: they did not truly belong to the Christian community.

Their departure and subsequent denial of Christ revealed their true position. The Calvinist reading takes this as evidence that those who permanently depart were never genuinely saved. The Provisionist reading can affirm the immediate observation—that their departure demonstrated something about their previous profession—while questioning whether the passage should be extended into a universal rule concerning every professing Christian who later falls away.

John is not explicitly saying, “Anyone who ever departs from Christianity proves that he was never genuinely saved.” He is explaining why these antichrists went out from the Christian community. This distinction matters because there is a difference between what the text explicitly states and a broader theological proposition constructed from it.

This is probably the strongest “never truly belonged to us” text, but its immediate context concerns specific antichrists and false teachers. The interpretive question is whether the statement can legitimately be applied universally to every professing Christian who later falls away.

c. Matthew 10:22b; 24:13

“You will be hated by everyone because of my name. [...] But the one who endures to the end will be saved.”

MATT 10 – Jesus warns His followers that faithfulness to Him will bring hatred, persecution, deception, betrayal, and pressure to abandon Him. He says that the person who endures to the end will be saved, presenting endurance as something the disciple is called to do rather than simply describing it as proof that regeneration has already occurred.

In Matthew 10, the warning occurs in the context of the disciples’ mission and persecution. Matthew 10 is primarily Jesus commissioning and warning His twelve apostles as He sends them out to proclaim the kingdom of heaven.

Matthew 10:1–4 — The Twelve are chosen. Jesus gives the apostles authority and names them.

Matthew 10:5–15 — They are sent out. Jesus tells them to go to the “lost sheep of the house of Israel” and proclaim, “The kingdom of heaven is at hand.” They are instructed to heal, cast out demons, and minister to people.

Matthew 10:16–25 — Jesus warns them about persecution. This is where the context of verse 22 becomes critical. He says that they are being sent out “as sheep in the midst of wolves”; they will be delivered over to councils, flogged, brought before governors and kings, and hated because of His name. Brother will betray brother, parents will betray children, children will rise against parents, and they will be hated “by all” because of His name.

Then comes the statement: “But the one who endures to the end will be saved.” Jesus immediately continues, “When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next...” (**v. 23**). The immediate subject is therefore perseverance through persecution while carrying out Christ’s commission.

MATTHEW 24 occurs in a related but distinct context. Jesus is responding to the disciples’ question concerning the destruction of the temple and “***the end of the age***” (24:3). The surrounding discussion includes persecution, death, betrayal, false prophets, deception, increasing lawlessness, the cooling of people’s love, the “abomination of desolation,” Judea, fleeing to the mountains, the Tribulation, and the coming of the Son of Man.

These passages clearly teach the necessity and importance of endurance in the face of persecution and opposition. The interpretive questions are what Jesus means by “the end” and what He means by “will be saved.”

The first question is straightforward: Does Jesus command and expect His followers to endure? Yes. The second question is more specific: Does Matthew 24:13 explicitly teach that everyone who ultimately fails to endure was therefore never genuinely regenerated? The verse itself does not say that.

The Calvinist interpretation connects this passage with the doctrine of perseverance of the saints: genuine regeneration produces inevitable perseverance, and perseverance therefore demonstrates that

a person was genuinely saved. The critique is not that Calvinists deny endurance or holiness; the critique is that Matthew 24:13 does not explicitly teach the full Calvinist chain. The verse says the one who endures will be saved. It does not say that endurance is guaranteed by prior regeneration, nor that failure to endure proves a person was never genuinely saved.

There is also a contextual question concerning the meaning of “saved.” The Greek word *sōzō* can refer to salvation in the ultimate spiritual sense, but it can also refer to deliverance or preservation from danger. Because Jesus is discussing persecution, tribulation, deception, and coming judgment, the immediate context should be considered before automatically assuming that “saved” here means eternal spiritual salvation or that endurance functions as proof of prior regeneration.

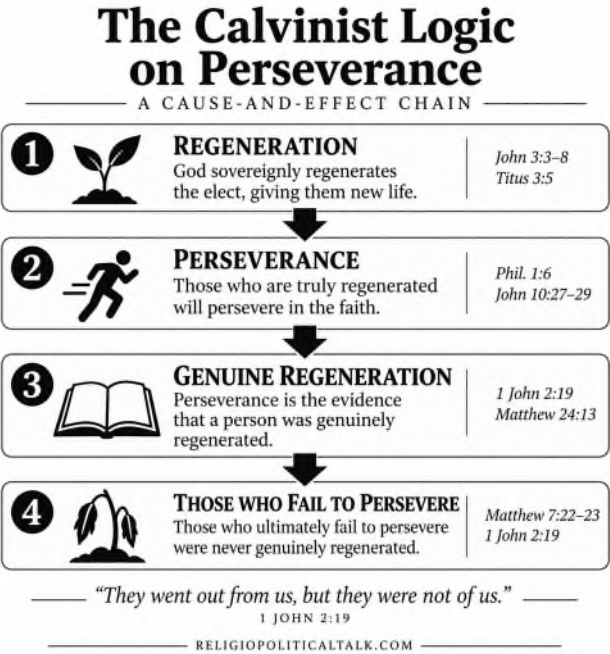
QUESTION

“Where in Matthew 24:13 does Jesus say that perseverance is evidence that a person was previously regenerated?”

The verse itself gives us:

“The one who endures to the end → will be saved.”

A Calvinistic theological formulation may expand this into the following chain:



The issue is whether this entire chain is actually derived from Matthew 24:13 or whether the chain is being brought to the text from a broader systematic theology. A Calvinist may defend that broader theology from other passages, but this particular verse should not be made to say more than it says. The Provisionist critique is that Calvinism often treats an inferred theological sequence as though it were the plain meaning of the text.

THE NATURE OF THE WARNING

The nature of Christ’s warning raises a sharper question: if God has already decreed that the elect will certainly persevere, and if their perseverance is unchangeably guaranteed, then what is the actual force of the warning? Does the warning genuinely call disciples to endure, or does it merely function as one of the predetermined means by which the elect inevitably do what they were already decreed to do?

A Calvinist can answer that God uses warnings as the means by which He brings the elect to their predetermined perseverance. But that answer reveals the very point under dispute: the warning is being interpreted through a prior doctrine of exhaustive divine determination. The text itself presents the warning as a real summons to endure, not as an explanation of how an irresistible decree secures inevitable perseverance.

Christ clearly expects His followers to endure faithfully. The critique of Calvinism is that it adds a further proposition: final perseverance is guaranteed by regeneration, and therefore final failure proves the person was never genuinely saved. That proposition may be systematic, but it must be proven exegetically. It should not be assumed every time Scripture warns believers to continue, endure, abide, or hold fast.

Matthew 7:23 says Jesus “never knew” those people; 1 John 2:19 specifically concerns people whose departure and denial of Christ revealed their opposition to Him; and Matthew 24:13 says that the one who endures to the end will be saved. Each passage should first be allowed to speak in its own context before being used to establish a larger systematic doctrine.

MACARTHUR’S INTERPRETATION

John MacArthur understands Matthew 24:13 in connection with perseverance. The one who endures is the same one who is genuinely saved. Perseverance does not earn salvation; rather, God secures the perseverance of genuine believers. Those who ultimately fall away demonstrate that they were never truly believers.

“The ones who persevere are the same ones who are saved—not the ones whose love grows cold (v. 12). This does not suggest that our perseverance secures our salvation. Scripture everywhere teaches precisely the opposite: God, as part of His saving work, secures our perseverance. True believers ‘are protected by the power of God through faith for ... salvation’ (1Pe 1:5). The guarantee of our perseverance is built into the New Covenant promise. God says: ‘I will put the fear of Me in their hearts so that they will not turn away from Me’ (Jer 32:40). Those who do fall away from Christ give conclusive proof that they were never truly believers to begin with (1Jn 2:19). To say that God secures our perseverance is not to say that we are passive in the process, however. He keeps us ‘through faith’ (1Pe 1:5)—our faith. Scripture sometimes calls us to hold fast to our faith (Heb 10:23; Rev 3:11) or warns us against falling away (Heb 10:26–29). Such admonitions do not negate the many promises that true believers will persevere (Jn 10:28, 29; Ro 8:38, 39; 1Co 1:8, 9; Php 1:6). Rather, the warnings and pleas are among the means God uses to secure our perseverance in the faith. Notice that the warnings and the promises often appear side by side. For example, when Jude urges believers, ‘keep yourselves in the love of God’ (Jude 21), he immediately points them to God, ‘who is able to keep you from stumbling’ (Jude 24).”

The contextual objection is that Matthew 24:13 is not discussing the later systematic formulation of the perseverance of the saints. The Calvinist reading moves quickly from “the one who endures will be saved” to “the regenerate will inevitably endure, and non-endurance proves non-regeneration.” The Provisionist critique slows that move down and asks whether the immediate context actually supports it. Andy Woods argues that enduring “to the end” refers to enduring through the future Tribulation and that “saved” refers to physical deliverance at its conclusion. His broader interpretation depends upon a dispensational understanding of prophecy, but the basic challenge remains: What does Matthew 24:13 establish before either system is brought to the text?

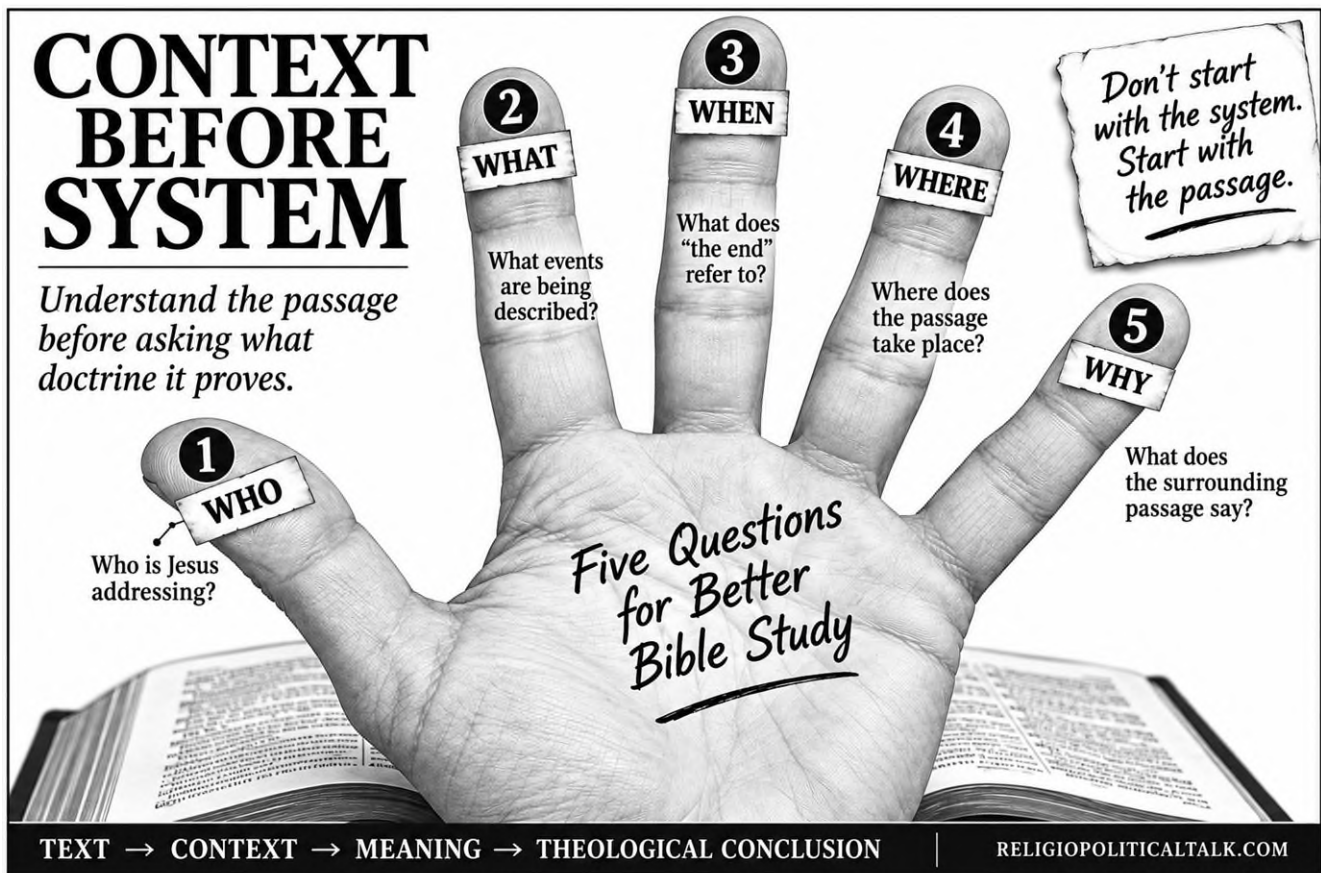
The question can therefore be stated this way: Are there three distinct biblical concepts—justification, sanctification, and glorification—or is sanctification/perseverance being made a necessary condition for receiving final salvation?

CONTEXT BEFORE SYSTEM

Do not begin with “What verse proves perseverance of the saints?” Begin with the text itself:

- Who is Jesus addressing?
- What events are being described?
- What does “the end” refer to?
- What does “saved” mean here?
- What does the surrounding passage say?

Only then should the question be asked: What theological doctrine, if any, does the passage establish? Matthew 24:13 should not be interpreted in isolation. Verse 15 immediately identifies the “abomination of desolation” spoken of by Daniel, followed by references to Judea, fleeing to the mountains, and the coming Tribulation.



FIVE FINGER LIFE PUNCH:

MATTHEW 24:13 — CONTEXT BEFORE SYSTEM

“But the one who endures to the end will be saved.” — Matthew 24:13

Before using Matthew 24:13 as a proof text for the perseverance of the saints, the first question should be what Jesus is discussing. The “Five-Finger Life Punch” emphasizes a simple principle: establish the meaning and context of a passage before drawing theological conclusions. Define the terms, examine their usage, consider the surrounding context and historical setting, and follow the evidence where it leads.

THE CONTEXTUAL QUESTION

Matthew 24:3 identifies the subject as Jesus' teaching concerning His coming and "the end of the age." The surrounding passage speaks of deception, persecution, tribulation, false prophets, the "abomination of desolation," Judea, fleeing to the mountains, and the coming of the Son of Man.

Most importantly, verse 15 follows verse 13 with the "abomination of desolation" spoken of by Daniel. Jesus then specifically refers to Judea and fleeing to the mountains. Therefore, verse 13 should not be isolated from the larger discourse.

This raises two important questions:

- What does "the end" mean in this passage?
- What does "saved" mean in this passage?

The contextual argument presented by Andy Woods is that Matthew 24:13 concerns endurance through the future Tribulation and physical deliverance at its conclusion—not the later theological formulation of the perseverance of the saints. His broader interpretation depends upon a dispensational understanding of prophecy, but his basic challenge is worth considering: What does the immediate context establish before a theological system is brought to the verse?

THREE CONCEPTS TO KEEP DISTINCT

The discussion of Matthew 24:13 depends partly on whether justification, sanctification, and glorification are kept distinct. The Calvinist framework can blur these categories when perseverance and sanctifying fruit become necessary for "final salvation." The Provisionist concern is that this risks shifting assurance away from Christ's completed work and God's promise and toward the believer's ability to verify enough transformation over time. That distinction must be demonstrated from Scripture rather than assumed from a theological system.

- 1. JUSTIFICATION** — God declares the believer righteous through faith in Christ.
- 2. SANCTIFICATION** — The believer's ongoing growth in holiness and conformity to Christ.
- 3. GLORIFICATION** — The believer's final transformation and completion of salvation.

The important question for the Matthew 24:13 discussion is whether perseverance/endurance is simply an aspect or evidence of sanctification, or whether it is a necessary condition for ultimately receiving "final salvation."

"Final salvation" is John Piper's term for the believer's ultimate salvation at the last judgment—glorification, eternal life, and entrance into God's kingdom. Piper distinguishes this from initial justification, which he affirms is by faith alone, yet teaches that the believer must persevere in faith and produce sanctifying fruit because, as he puts it, "we are finally saved through sanctification." Thus, sanctification does not earn justification, but it becomes a necessary condition for final salvation. This raises a significant sola fide question: If faith alone justifies, but persevering faith and sanctifying fruit are necessary to finally receive salvation, in what sense is salvation ultimately by faith alone?

The basic issue is this: if justification is by faith alone, but final salvation requires persevering faith and sanctifying fruit, then faith alone is sufficient for justification but not, in that framework, sufficient for final salvation. The critique is not that sanctification is unimportant; the critique is that sanctification is being made necessary to reach the final state of salvation. That creates pressure to measure one's future perseverance as part of one's assurance, rather than resting assurance primarily on Christ's promise to the believer.

That creates the question: If a person must persevere and be sanctified in order to finally be saved, in what meaningful sense is salvation ultimately “by faith alone”? Calling sanctification the *fruit* or *evidence* of faith does not by itself resolve the issue if that fruit is also said to be **necessary for final salvation**.

MATTHEW 10:22b; 24:13

“You will be hated by everyone because of my name. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. [...] But the one who endures to the end will be saved.”

Matthew 10:22 should first be read within Jesus’ commissioning of the Twelve, where the immediate issue is faithfulness under persecution while carrying out His mission. The chapter’s progression is clear:

- **Matthew 10:1–4** — Jesus chooses and authorizes the Twelve.
- **Matthew 10:5–15** — He sends them to Israel to proclaim the nearness of the kingdom.
- **Matthew 10:16–25** — He warns that the mission will bring hostility, betrayal, trials, and hatred because of His name.

Against that backdrop, Jesus says, “But the one who endures to the end will be saved.” Verse 23 confirms that the subject remains persecution in the mission: “When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next...” Therefore, the immediate subject is perseverance through persecution while carrying out Christ’s commission. Matthew 10:22 clearly teaches that Jesus’ disciples must endure under opposition; what it does not explicitly say is that endurance functions as evidence of prior regeneration or that failure to endure proves a person was never genuinely saved.

Matthew 24 uses similar language, but it develops that language in a broader prophetic discourse rather than in the immediate mission of the Twelve. The repeated phrase “the one who endures to the end will be saved” therefore invites comparison, but the two passages should not be collapsed into one setting without first asking how each context defines the danger, the endurance, “the end,” and the meaning of being “saved.”

3. IS “ONCE SAVED ALWAYS SAVED,” A TRUE STATEMENT?

The central question is whether Scripture teaches that a person genuinely justified by faith is eternally secure, or whether perseverance to the end is necessary to demonstrate that the person was genuinely saved in the first place. Calvinism answers the second way: final perseverance becomes the necessary evidence that one was ever regenerated. The Provisionist critique is that this can make present assurance unstable, because the believer is pushed to ask whether his future perseverance will finally prove that his present faith is real.

If perseverance and good works are evidence that someone is truly saved, how do we distinguish a genuine believer who is temporarily failing from someone who was never genuinely saved?

A further question follows: If we cannot know whether someone’s faith was genuine until we see whether he perseveres to the end, on what basis can a person have present assurance of salvation?

THE REAL DISAGREEMENT

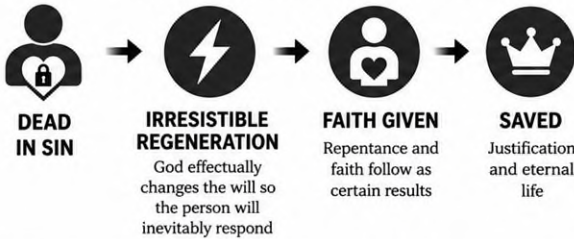


We agree: No one can save themselves.

Salvation is by God's grace alone through faith in Christ alone.

CALVINIST VIEW

God must first regenerate the person so that the response becomes inevitable.



"The will is changed first; then the person irresistibly believes."

VS.

TRADITIONAL STATEMENT VIEW

God's grace calls, draws, and enables the person to respond.



"Grace enables the response; the person truly believes."



"The disagreement is not about whether salvation is by grace, but about what grace does—change the will first, or enable a response."



SCAN TO READ:

Dead Men
Don't Grab the
Irresistible and
Effectual Call
religiopoliticaltalk.com

4. IF YOU CAN LOSE YOUR SALVATION, HOW?

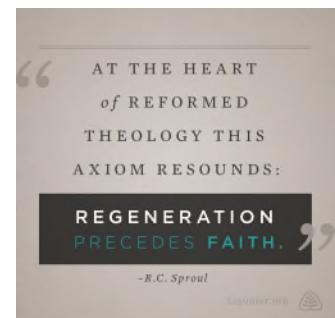
The biblical warnings about falling away raise an important question: If a person can genuinely lose salvation, what would cause it? The answer cannot simply be "committing a serious sin," because Scripture does not present salvation as something that disappears every time a believer fails. Peter denied Christ three times and was restored, while 1 Corinthians 3:15 describes a believer whose works are destroyed but who nevertheless "will be saved."

The actual question concerns apostasy—whether a person who has genuinely believed can subsequently renounce Christ and abandon the faith.

CLASSICAL ARMINIAN THEOLOGY answers that genuine salvation can ultimately be abandoned through apostasy; therefore, a person who was genuinely saved can later forfeit that salvation.

CALVINISM answers differently: genuine salvation cannot ultimately be lost because genuine regeneration necessarily produces perseverance. If a person finally abandons the faith, that abandonment is taken as proof that the person was never genuinely regenerated or elect. The critique is that this explanation can become circular: perseverance proves regeneration, and lack of perseverance disproves regeneration, so the doctrine is protected from counterexample by redefining every apostate as never truly saved.

But there is a deeper question concerning the Calvinist order of salvation. If God *unconditionally elects* an individual, then *irresistibly and effectually calls* that person (regenerates him, and grants him the faith that results in justification, then the person's eventual salvation is already guaranteed by God's sovereign determination. In that system, the



cross does not become the determining condition that makes salvation possible for that individual; rather, the cross becomes the means by which God accomplishes a salvation that He has already unconditionally determined to give. The elect cannot finally reject the effectual call, cannot fail to receive faith, and cannot finally fall away because God's grace guarantees perseverance. In that sense, the logical question becomes:

What actually makes the person's salvation certain—the cross and the person's faith in Christ, or the prior unconditional decree and irresistible call that guarantee that the person will believe?

This is why the distinction between *provision and application* matters. Calvinism teaches that Christ's atoning work is necessary, but the individual's salvation is ultimately secured by God's unconditional election and effectual calling. If the call is truly irresistible and the resulting faith is guaranteed, then the cross is not what makes the elect person's salvation *possible* or even what makes his response *uncertainly available*; the decree guarantees the outcome. The cross is the divinely ordained means by which that predetermined salvation is accomplished. The question, then, is whether Scripture presents salvation this way—or whether Christ's cross provides the basis of salvation that God genuinely offers through the gospel, with faith functioning as the response rather than as the inevitable result of an irresistible call.

Provisionism likewise affirms the eternal security of the genuinely justified but does not make perseverance the necessary proof that the person was genuinely saved. Thus, if a professing Christian later abandons the faith, the Provisionist framework does not require the conclusion that genuine salvation was lost. The person may be a genuinely saved but *backslidden Christian*, or the profession may ultimately prove not to have been genuine. The question then becomes how Scripture distinguishes apostasy, serious backsliding, false profession, and genuine saving faith—and what basis the believer has for *present assurance*.

Three Views on Salvation and Apostasy

Key Differences at a Glance

Question	Classical Arminianism	Calvinism	Provisionism / Eternal Security
Can a genuinely saved person lose salvation?	Yes, through apostasy.	No.	No.
If someone finally abandons Christianity, what does that mean?	Genuine believer lost salvation.	Person was never genuinely saved .	Could be backslidden genuine believer or evidence that the profession was never genuine .
Must genuine believers persevere?	Perseverance is required, but genuine believers can ultimately fail.	Yes — necessarily.	Perseverance is expected and commanded, but not the basis for establishing that justification occurred.
What is assurance based upon?	Can be complicated by the possibility of apostasy.	Often includes present faith plus evidence of regeneration/perseverance.	Christ, His finished work, God's promise, and present faith.
What happens when someone examines his life and sees inadequate fruit?	May raise concern about whether faith remains genuine.	Can raise the question of whether regeneration ever occurred.	Does not by itself prove the person was never saved; believer can be immature/backslidden .
Lordship Salvation emphasis	Varies among Arminians.	Strongly associated with Reformed/Lordship formulations.	Rejects making surrender/obedience/perseverance a condition for receiving justification.

Same Scriptures. Different Conclusions.

In Calvinist theology, Calvin's concept of **evanescent grace** provides one explanation for apparent conversion without regeneration. A person may experience temporary faith, receive spiritual illumination, respond positively to the gospel, and even appear to possess genuine faith; yet, because the person was never regenerated, that faith eventually withers. The critique is that this explanation may account for apparent conversions within Calvinism, but it also raises a pastoral problem: if temporary faith can look so much like genuine faith, how does the believer distinguish present assurance from a faith that might later be reclassified as merely temporary?

a. IF NOT, WHY NOT?

Calvinism and Provisionism generally deny that genuine justification can ultimately be lost, but they explain warnings and apostasy very differently. Calvinism typically resolves final apostasy by saying the person was never genuinely saved. Provisionism affirms that a genuinely justified person remains secure while also allowing Scripture's warnings to function as real warnings to believers, not merely as instruments that guarantee an already-decreed outcome.

Thus, the question is not simply, "Can a Christian sin?" but, "Can someone who has genuinely been justified by faith subsequently repudiate Christ and forfeit that justified status?"

Salvation is not something the believer has to wonder about until the end of his life to know whether he has truly received it. Christ saves the person who believes the gospel, and the believer can have confidence that he has been saved by Christ:

- "I know I am saved because I have believed Christ's promise; my assurance rests on God's testimony and Christ's finished work, not on successfully measuring my future perseverance" (Pastor Andy Woods)

NEVER OF US vs. BACKSLIDDEN

A Two-Column Framework

NEVER OF US	BACKSLIDDEN
Appeared to believe	Genuinely believed
Their profession/fruit initially appeared genuine	Their present fruit may contradict their genuine faith
Departure exposes what was already true of them	Failure/backsliding does not necessarily reveal loss of salvation
1 John 2:19 — "They went out from us..."	Peter — genuinely belonging to Christ despite his denial
Matthew 7:21–23 — "I never knew you"	1 Corinthians 3:1–15 — "brothers and sisters," yet carnal/immature
Never genuinely regenerated	Genuinely regenerated
Their final departure reveals their true status	Their present behavior does not allow us to determine their ultimate status

Key distinction: We see the fruit; God sees the root.

1 Corinthians 3:11–15 — "For no one can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. If anyone's work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire."

5. WHAT EVIDENCE IN A PERSON'S LIFE INDICATES THEY ARE SAVED?

A biblical answer should distinguish between the basis of salvation and the evidence of salvation. We are not saved because we produce good works; rather, good works, obedience, love, repentance, and perseverance can be understood as evidence that a person's faith is genuine.

Some of the evidence Scripture gives includes:

- Faith in Christ — John 3:16; Acts 16:31; Romans 10:9–10.
- Love for God and other believers — John 13:34–35; 1 John 3:14; 4:7–8.
- A desire to obey Christ — John 14:15; 1 John 2:3–5.
- Repentance and a changed direction of life — Luke 3:8; Acts 26:20.
- The fruit of the Spirit — Galatians 5:22–23.
- Growth in holiness — 2 Corinthians 7:1; Hebrews 12:14.
- Perseverance in faith — Colossians 1:21–23; Matthew 24:13.
- A willingness to confess and deal with sin rather than embrace it — 1 John 1:8–9; 2:1.
- Love for fellow Christians — 1 John 3:14.
- The testimony of the Holy Spirit — Romans 8:16.

a. WHAT MIGHT INDICATE THEY ARE NOT SAVED?

- No genuine faith in Christ — John 3:18; 1 John 5:12.
- Persistent, unrepentant practice of sin — 1 John 3:6–10.
- No love for other believers — 1 John 3:14–15.
- No desire to obey Christ — 1 John 2:3–4.
- No spiritual fruit — Matthew 7:16–20.
- Abandoning the Christian confession — 1 John 2:19.
- A profession of Christ without actually doing God's will — Matthew 7:21–23.
- Love for the world rather than love for God — 1 John 2:15–17.
- Falling away from the faith — Hebrews 3:12; 1 Timothy 4:1.

A person's persistent rejection of Christ, lack of genuine faith, refusal to repent, habitual unrepentant sin, absence of spiritual fruit, lack of love for other believers, or eventual abandonment of the Christian faith might indicate that the person was never genuinely saved. However, an individual Christian's failures, periods of backsliding, spiritual immaturity, or seasons in which the fruit of the Christian life is weak should not automatically be equated with being unsaved. *The Christian life itself can have seasons of spiritual strength and weakness—an ebb and flow in obedience, faithfulness, spiritual fruit, and even one's felt closeness to God.* Scripture contains repeated warnings and exhortations precisely because believers can stumble, become discouraged, grow cold, act carnally, or fail to live consistently with their confession.

This raises an important distinction between the reality of salvation and the visible evidence of salvation. Evidence can be strong or weak. A believer may demonstrate considerable spiritual fruit during one season and struggle significantly during another. Growth in sanctification is progressive rather than instantaneous, and Christians do not reach glorification during this present life. Therefore, the absence of a particular fruit at a particular moment does not necessarily establish the absence of saving faith. The broader pattern of a person's life may provide evidence worth considering, but *evidence should not be confused with the basis upon which a person is justified before God.*

LORDSHIP SALVATION

The detractors of Lordship Salvation, however, do not necessarily reject Christ's lordship, Christian obedience, discipleship, or the importance of spiritual fruit. Their objection is to making a person's surrender, obedience, or subsequent perseverance part of the condition for receiving justification. Charles Ryrie identifies the central question as whether “commitment of life (or the willingness to do so)” is actually a necessary component of saving faith and therefore of the Gospel.

This also creates an important question concerning *ASSURANCE*. If saving faith necessarily includes a particular degree of surrender, and if genuine salvation is demonstrated by perseverance and obedience, *how does a believer objectively know that he has surrendered enough or persevered sufficiently?* Charles Ryrie raises this problem by asking how much disobedience can occur before a person must question whether his original faith was genuine.¹

The question becomes especially significant when considered alongside the “ebb and flow” of the Christian life. If a believer can experience seasons of strong spiritual growth as well as periods of failure, weakness, backsliding, or diminished fruit, *what point on that continuum determines whether his faith is genuine?* How much obedience is sufficient evidence? How much failure is too much? At what point does spiritual weakness become evidence that the person was never truly saved?

The sharper critique is that assurance can subtly migrate **from** Christ's finished work **to** the believer's ongoing self-evaluation. Instead of asking, “*Has Christ promised to save the one who believes?*” the believer begins asking, “*Have I produced enough evidence to prove that my faith was real?*” *Have I surrendered enough? Have I obeyed enough? Is there enough fruit? Have I persevered enough?*

First Corinthians 2–3 provides an important example of why spiritual evidence must be interpreted carefully. Paul describes the Corinthians as “brethren” and “babes in Christ,” yet he also describes them as “carnal” and says they were not yet able to receive the deeper spiritual teaching he wanted to give them (1 Corinthians 3:1–3). Their condition was manifested in jealousy, strife, and division. Whatever one's interpretation of 1 Corinthians 2:14, chapter 3 demonstrates that a genuine Christian can experience significant spiritual immaturity and can temporarily lack characteristics we might expect to see in a mature believer. The presence or absence of spiritual maturity at a particular moment, therefore, should not automatically be treated as a binary test of whether a person is saved.

The Christian life can ebb and flow. Faith can be strengthened or weakened; obedience can be consistent or inconsistent; spiritual fruit can be abundant or diminished; and believers can experience seasons of maturity as well as seasons of serious failure. This does not make obedience or spiritual fruit unimportant. It means that the evidence of sanctification must be distinguished from the basis of justification.

EVANESCENT GRACE

“**Evanescent grace**” is a real Calvinist/Reformed category, and Calvin is unusually explicit about it. The key is that Calvin distinguishes **saving faith in the elect** from a **temporary faith / temporary illumination / evanescent experience of grace in the reprobate**.

1. John Calvin — *Institutes* 3.2.11–12

This is the **primary source** I would use.

[Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book 3, Chapter 2](#)

¹ Charles C. Ryrie (1925–2016) was an American theologian and professor best known for his dispensational theology, his Ryrie Study Bible, and his critique of Lordship Salvation in favor of salvation by faith apart from works or commitment to discipleship.

In **3.2.11**, Calvin says that the reprobate can be affected by grace in a way that is remarkably similar to the elect:

“the reprobate are sometimes affected in a way so similar to the elect, that even in their own judgment there is no difference between them.”

He then says that Scripture attributes to them a “**taste of heavenly gifts**” and Christ’s “**temporary faith**.” Calvin explains that God can give them “such a sense of goodness” that they experience something of God's grace **without the Spirit of adoption**. [Christian Classics Ethereal Library](#)

And this is especially important for what you're investigating:

“there is a great resemblance and affinity between the elect of God and those who are impressed for a time with a fading faith”

Calvin then says that the reprobate can recognize God's grace to some degree, but never receive its **full result or fruition**. The elect alone receive the living root of faith that enables them to persevere. [Christian Classics Ethereal Library](#)

Then **3.2.12** is where the terminology becomes extremely useful:

“there is nothing inconsistent with the fact of his enlightening some with a present sense of grace, which afterwards proves evanescent.”

Calvin describes this as an **evanescent impression**—something that can look like genuine faith for a period but eventually disappears. [Christian Classics Ethereal Library](#)

He compares it to a plant that **takes root, produces leaves, flowers, and even fruit for years, but ultimately withers because it was not planted deeply enough**. [Bible Study Tools](#)

2. Calvin's commentary on the Parable of the Sower

Calvin also applies the concept directly to **Matthew 13:20–21 / Mark 4:16–17 / Luke 8:13**.

The relevant category is the seed on rocky ground—the people who **receive the word with joy but have no root and fall away under testing/persecution**.

A scholarly source specifically identifies Calvin's commentary on **Matthew 13:20–21** as another place where he describes this as **temporary faith**. [Alopen](#)

So you have a very useful biblical progression:

Matthew 13 → temporary faith → Calvin → evanescent grace → reprobate who can appear remarkably similar to elect believers.

That is particularly relevant to your “**Never of Us vs. Backslidden**” discussion.

3. Calvin also used the concept elsewhere

There is another Calvin statement that is very striking:

“there are those who, on account of some arrogated or temporal grace, are called so by us, but are not so to God.”

A modern study of Calvin's doctrine identifies this as another expression of the same concept: people may **appear to us to be God's children**, because of what appears to be genuine faith and godliness, while God knows that they are not actually among the elect. [Evangelical Arminians](#)

Calvin also wrote that God:

“communicates it also to those whom he enlightens only for a time”

and afterward abandons them. [Evangelical Arminians](#)

That is important because **“temporary faith” isn't merely a modern caricature of Calvinism. Calvin himself explicitly developed the category.**

4. Francis Turretin

The doctrine didn't disappear with Calvin.

Francis Turretin explicitly distinguishes **saving faith** from **temporary faith** in his *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*.

A source quoting Turretin gives this distinction:

- Saving faith flows from **special grace associated with election**.
- Temporary faith depends upon **common grace**.
- That common grace can bestow upon the reprobate not merely external blessings but **“spiritual and initial gifts (although not saving)”**.
- These gifts serve, among other things, to testify to God's general goodness and increase culpability if the person persists in unbelief. [Calvin and Calvinism](#)

The citation given there is **Turretin, *Institutes*, 2:588**.

GOD DOES THIS!

Calvin says:

“the Lord ... instills into their minds such a sense of his goodness as can be felt without the Spirit of adoption.”

He then says:

“there is nothing to prevent an inferior operation of the Spirit from taking its course in the reprobate.”

And:

“Nor do I even deny that God illumines their minds to this extent, that they recognize his grace.”

So in Calvin's formulation, this isn't merely a psychological response that God passively observes. **God actively gives/produces an illumination or impression of grace in the reprobate.**

[....]

Calvin defines predestination as:

DEITY OF DECEPTION

Mark Talbot is a particularly useful case because he does not merely say that God permits the Holocaust. In his discussion of suffering, Talbot states that God “brought about the Nazis’ brutality at Birkenau and Auschwitz,” while maintaining that God does not commit the sin involved in those acts.

-- Mark Talbot, “All the Good That Is Ours in Christ: Seeing God’s Gracious Hand in the Hurts Others Do to Us,” *Desiring God 2005 National Conference*, Minneapolis, October 8, 2005, [Desiring God](#).

That position is consistent with the broader Reformed framework found in the Westminster Confession of Faith. The Confession states that God eternally “ordain[s] whatsoever comes to pass” and that His providence extends even to the first Fall and “all other sins of angels and men,” “not by a bare permission,” but through the “ordering and governing” of those sins toward His holy purposes. At the same time, it maintains that the sinfulness of those acts proceeds from the creature and not from God.

-- Westminster Assembly, *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, 3.1, 5.4, [Westminster Confession of Faith](#).

Slightly stronger version for your argument

The issue, then, is not simply whether God permits evil but whether, within this Reformed framework, God meticulously governs the entire causal chain through which evil occurs. Talbot describes God as having “actually brought the whole situation about,” while the Westminster Confession says God’s providence extends to “all other sins of angels and men,” not by bare permission, but through His “ordering” and “governing” of them