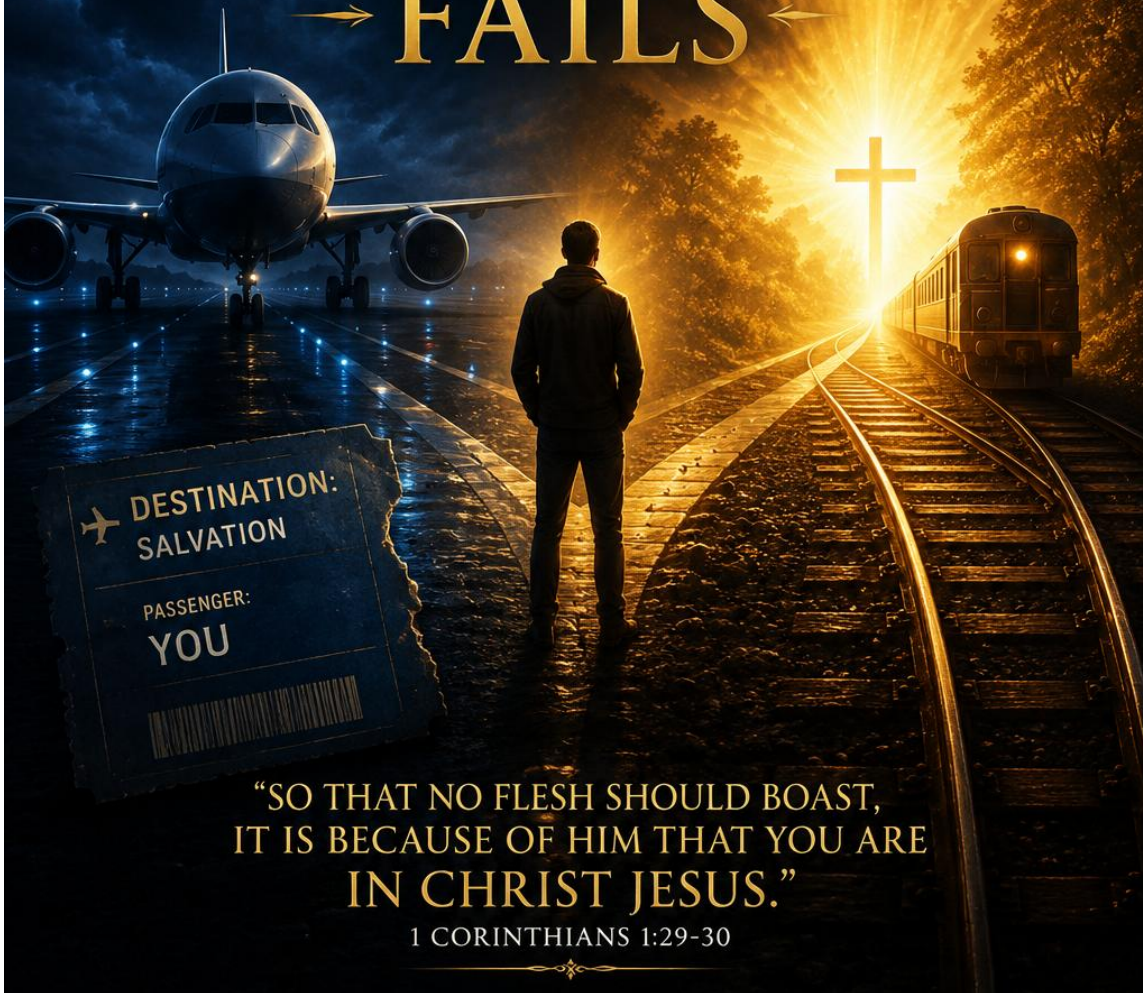


BOARDING CHRIST?

WHY THE
PLANE / TRAIN
ANALOGY
→ FAILS ←



✈ DESTINATION:
SALVATION

PASSENGER:
YOU

“SO THAT NO FLESH SHOULD BOAST,
IT IS BECAUSE OF HIM THAT YOU ARE
IN CHRIST JESUS.”

1 CORINTHIANS 1:29-30

The Plane / Train Analogy — And Why It Fails

During my Bible college years at an Arminian Pentecostal school, I was taught an analogy often used to explain salvation. God, it was said, predestined the destination — salvation — but not the passengers. Christ is the “plane” or “train.” Whoever freely chooses to board by faith will arrive safely, provided he does not later disembark.

For years this satisfied me. Later, however, scripture itself dismantled the analogy at every material point.

I. The Analogy Misunderstands Saving Faith

The analogy assumes that man first decides to “board Christ” by autonomous faith. Scripture presents the reverse.

No one chooses a Savior he does not already believe in. Faith logically precedes the decision. Yet biblical faith is not a blind leap in the dark, but “the *assurance* / *certainty* of things hoped for, the *evidence* of things not seen” (Heb. 11:1).

This immediately raises the real question: Where does such certainty come from?

The plane/train analogy fails *because* airplanes and trains which complete their routes are externally observable, repeatedly verified realities. Millions board them daily with objective evidence that they work. Saving faith is different. No believer has physically observed Christ carrying souls into heaven and returned to verify the journey. Thus scripture says, “*By faith* we understand...” (Heb. 11:3). Faith precedes understanding. Or, it can be simultaneously both — the point is, there is no true understanding apart from faith.

This is why John 1:12 does not support autonomous self-generated faith: “But to as many as received Him — even to those who believe on His name...” Receiving Christ flows from believing in Him. Again, if this is a sequence then the believing had to occur before the receiving since no one would or could “receive” a Saviour they did not believe in.

But from where does this believing come? Scripture answers clearly:

“No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him” (John 6:44)

“No one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father” (John 6:65)

“The Lord opened Lydia’s heart to heed the things spoken by Paul” (Acts 16:14)

“*By His doing* you are in Christ Jesus” (1 Cor. 1:30)

Paul’s logic is decisive:

“**SO THAT** no flesh should boast...it is **because of HIM** that you are in Christ Jesus” (1 Cor. 1:29-30). Boasting is excluded precisely because our being “in Christ” is “of Him,” *not* ourselves. Otherwise, the decisive difference would still lie in man, and boasting would remain possible. And that is precisely the point of the purpose-clause as Paul wrote and intended. This one passage on its own merit demolishes the idea that we are “in Christ” – hence “in the plane / on the train” by *our* doing. But there is more!

II. Christ Is Not Merely External To The Believer

The analogy fails again because believers are not merely “in Christ”; Christ is *also* “in” them. And the force and meaning of this destroys the analogy completely.

A passenger may sit inside a plane, but the plane does not enter him, transform him, preserve him, or sustain him. Scripture, however, speaks of living union *with* Christ and preservation *by* Him:

“Christ *in* you, the hope of glory” (Col. 1:27)

“It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives *in me*” (Gal. 2:20)

The believer is not merely riding alongside Christ. He is united to Him in a metaphysical, spiritual – but no less real way, by grace through the means of grace-enabled, produced faith. Branches derive life from the Vine (John 15:1-5). Sheep are preserved by the Shepherd (John 10:27-29).

The analogy assumes the decisive power remains in the passenger. Scripture says the sinner is spiritually dead (Eph. 2:1-5). Dead men do not board planes. They must first be made alive. And here, Paul said God made us alive with Christ *while* we were still dead in sin! This again, demolishes the synergistic analogy because no believer is said to be “dead in sin”. Rather, “he who believes has passed from death to life” (John 5:24). So, *if* God waited until we first believed to unite us with Christ, then Paul’s terminology is both false and misleading which says God did so *while* we were still dead in sin. Both cannot possibly be true at the same time. This substantially reinforces the explicit truth in 1 Cor 1:29-30 – “*By His doing*, you are in Christ Jesus.”

III. The “IF — THEN” Passages

Yes, scripture uses conditional language:

“He who endures to the end shall be saved” (Matt. 24:13)

“By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly...” (1 Cor. 15:2)

But these passages do not teach autonomous self-preservation independent of grace. The same scripture commanding endurance also says:

“*He* will sustain you to the end” (1 Cor. 1:8)

“It is God who works in you *both* to will and to do...” (Phil. 2:13)

“You are kept *by the power of God* through faith” (1 Pet. 1:5)

“*Unto Him* who is able to keep you from falling...and present you faultless before the throne of His glory...” (Jude vs 24)

“God is *able to cause* him to stand” (Rom 14:4)

“Faithful is He who calls you, who also *will* do it” (1 Thess 5:23-24)

“Being confident of this very thing; that He who has begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil 1:6)

Further, Christ’s On-Going Intercession ensures that none “given” to him by the Father for salvation can fail to be “raised up on the last day” – not even one! (Rom 8:33-34; Heb 7:25)

Thus, perseverance is not man’s independent contribution to salvation. Perseverance itself is one of grace’s effects.

The plane/train analogy places the decisive factor in the passenger.

Scripture places the decisive factor in the Shepherd.

For all of these reasons – each of which on its own nullifies the analogy and all combined together demolish it at its structural level – the analogy is shown to be a falsehood. Repudiated by scripture, plain exegesis, cross-referencing and logic.

Sola Gratia – Grace Alone...*always*.