

Perseverance of the Saints (2)

Recap

- The doctrine of the Perseverance of the Saints basically teaches that a true child of God can never fall from grace.
- There are three aspects to this doctrine, 1) Preservation, 2) Persevering, and 3) Assurance
 - **Preservation** – God preserves us to the end; He will keep us forever; God keeps believers in the faith, preserves them from straying, and ultimately perfects them (1Peter 1:5; Jude 24; Heb. 12:2)
 - **Perseverance** – Man will persevere to the end because of God’s preservation; our perseverance is the fruit of God’s preservation; perseverance is man’s life-long activity; the use of the means of grace such as reading, hearing, searching, meditating on, praying over, and practicing the Scriptures is necessary to flee sin and promote holiness (John 5:39; 8:31-32; Heb. 10:25-26; 12:14)
 - **Assurance** – 1) perseverance opens the way for assurance; objective perseverance makes possible subjective assurance; 2) perseverance increases assurance; those who persist in works that spring from faith will increase their assurance; 3) encourages the believer to live in hope; G.C. Berkouwer says, *“The perseverance of the saints is unbreakably connected with the assurance of faith, in which the believer faces the future with confidence – not with the idea that all dangers and threats have been removed, but rather with the assurance that they shall be conquered indeed.”*

Christopher Love writes, “If the elect should perish, then Jesus Christ should be very unfaithful to his Father, because God the Father hath given this charge to Christ, that whomsoever he elected Christ should preserve them safe, to bring them to heaven.”

Charles Spurgeon said, “If God lights the candle, none can blow it out.”

Augustus Toplady (poet)
*My name from the palms of His hands,
Eternity will not erase;
Impressed on His heart it remains,
In marks of indelible grace;
Yes, I to the end shall endure,
As sure as the earnest is given;
More happy, but not more secure,
The glorified spirits in heaven*

Problems with Perseverance

Antinomianism

- We are not to presume on the perseverance of the saints and continue in sin (**Hebrews 12:14**)
- *Antinomianism (anti-against; nomos-the law)* says that once you are saved, you are always saved, regardless of how sinfully you live
- **John Murray**, *“it is utterly wrong to say that a believer is secure quite irrespective of his subsequent life of sin and unfaithfulness.”* (*Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, 154.)
- The believer is not inherently indestructible, but when God has begun a work in him, He will continue to provide His Spirit for the believer’s preservation until He finishes His redemption (Phil. 1:6).
- **Spurgeon**, *“it is a glorious truth that God will keep His people, but it is an abominable falsehood that sin will do them no harm.”*
- **John Gill**, *“Can a man believe he shall persevere to the end and yet indulge in sin, as if he was resolved not to persevere?”*
- **Anthony Burgess**, *“Nothing will darken thy soul more than dull, lazy, and negligent walking.”*
- **Thomas Schreiner and Ardel Caneday**, *“Those who desire assurance while they are turning away from the Lord are like runners who quit running in the middle of the race but inquire of the official if they will still receive a prize for running. Our assurance in the faith is strengthened as we continue to run the race, persevering until the end to receive the prize.”*

Curt Daniel, *“The Reformed doctrine of perseverance is that a regenerate soul will certainly persevere through the trials of life and continue to believe and repent. He will slip and fall, develop bad habits, wrestle with doubts, but through it all he will keep on going even as he began...All believers slip and fall into sin, but no true believer stays down. Just as God gave him faith and repentance unto initial conversion, so He supplies him with faith and repentance all along the way to heaven.”*

Bruce Demarest: *In the final analysis, the hope of true believers resides not in our feeble hold of God but in his powerful grasp of us. The stability and constancy of our spiritual lives rests not in our human powers but in God’s eternal purpose and infinite resources.*

The “Problem” of Hebrews 6

Hebrews 6:4-6 For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, ⁵ and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, ⁶ and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt.

Arminian Position

- See this passage as teaching that a Christian can lose his/her salvation.
- The people described were Christians who fell away and cannot regain their salvation

Reformed Positions

1. Evangelical Usage of the Law (Luther coined that term) – R.C. Sproul

- Sees this passage as a strong argument to Christians, but not something that can actually happen
- The author of Hebrews nowhere states that a true believer does in fact do what he is warning believers not to do
- Sees this as an *ad hominem* argument; where the person adopts the other person's premises and takes them to their logical conclusion...which is an absurdity
 - **1 Corinthians 15:17** and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.

2. Not Describing Christians

- The language in Heb. 6 is not describing a genuine Christian based on the language used
 - “once been *enlightened*” – this person merely understands the truths of the gospel; says nothing about them responding to the gospel with saving faith
 - “have *tasted* the heavenly gift” and “have *tasted* the goodness of the word of God” – tasting is a temporary word
 - Same Greek word is used is used in Matthew 27:34
 - **Matthew 27:34** they offered him wine to drink, mixed with gall, but when he *tasted* it, he would not drink it.
 - It is also used in a figurative sense meaning, “to come to know something”
 - Since this text is not describing literal tasting then it means that they have come to know something of the Word of God and the Holy Spirit's work
 - Doesn't mean they had saving faith
 - “have *shared* in (or become *partakers* of) the Holy Spirit
 - The word can mean to merely be associates or companions
 - **Luke 5:7** They signaled to their *partners* in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink.
 - These people have been associated with the Holy Spirit; had their lives influenced by him...but not necessarily a genuine work of conversion by the Holy Spirit
 - “impossible...to restore them *again to repentance*”
 - How can someone who is not a Christian have already had repentance?
 - Repentance does not need to refer to salvation
 - Hebrews 12:17 uses this word to speak of Esau's change of mind
 - **Hebrews 12:17** For you know that afterward, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no chance to *repent*, though he sought it with tears.
 - Sometimes the word is used to refer to sorrow for an offense
 - **Luke 17:3-4** Pay attention to yourselves! If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he *repents*, forgive him, ⁴ and if he sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times, saying, 'I *repent*,' you must forgive him."

- The author of Hebrews does not specify if whether he speaks of genuine saving repentance or not
- This passage can be better understood in light of Matthew 12 (the unforgiveable sin)

Context Is Everything – Read On.

- **Hebrews 6:9** Though we speak in this way, yet in your case, beloved, we feel sure of better things--things that belong to salvation.
- The *better things* is contrasting the *good things* mentioned in vs. 4-6

One Other Passage – 2Peter 2:1

2 Peter 2:1 *But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction.*

- This is a reference to Deuteronomy 32:6 where Moses tells the rebellious people of Israel who turned away from God,
 - **Deuteronomy 32:6** Do you thus repay the LORD, you foolish and senseless people? Is not he your father, *who created you*, who made you and established you? (“Is not he your Father *who has bought you?*” NAS)
- **Peter is drawing an analogy between the past false prophets who arose among the Jews and those false teachers in the church**
- Peter also alludes to the fact that the rebellious Jews turned away from God who *bought* them out of Egypt in the Exodus
- This would have been a common understanding for a Jewish person to see himself as one who was *bought* by God in the Exodus
- Christ’s atonement is not in view; Christ did not redeem the false teachers