

Perseverance of the Saints

I. THE REALITY OF PERSEVERANCE.

The Christian life is *running, enduring, striving, holding fast, fighting, and guarding*. The English word, perseverance, is defined in one dictionary as follows: *to continue doing something in spite of difficulty and opposition*.

A. Perseverance is necessary because the Christian's life is a 'fight' (2 Tim 4:7).

- 1.) At the end of Paul's life, he speaks of having persevered: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith" (2 Tim 4:7).
- 2.) There are many enemies who seek to keep us from being saved in the end. The world, the flesh, and the devil all oppose the Christian's progress toward glory. Therefore we must not be surprised when our Christian life seems filled with resistance, setbacks, and sins. True believers persevere to final salvation in spite of these obstacles (Waldron, p. 218).

B. Perseverance is a gift of God's grace to the elect.

- 1.) It is because of God's grace that the truly saved will persevere to the end. Those given the gift of perseverance are described in several ways: the redeemed are *accepted in the Beloved* (Eph 1:3-6). They are the *effectually called* (Rom 8:30). They are *sanctified* by God's Spirit (Rom 15:16). They are given the precious *gift of faith* (Phil 1:29). They cannot lose their salvation—"For the gifts and calling of God are *irrevocable*" (Rom 11:29).
- 2.) Believers are eternally secure because God preserves His saints and keeps them secure by means of perseverance in faith (1 Pet. 1:5). It is God's power that does the keeping, but that divine power is manifested in the saints' endurance and obedience (2 Thess 2:13).

C. The doctrine of the believer's security is often called 'eternal security'. This is an unfortunate term because it suggests that security is NOT joined to perseverance.

- 1.) The Bible stresses the believer's security, while at the same time calling for diligence and perseverance. "So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for God is at work in you both to will and to work for His good pleasure" (Phil 2:12-13).

- 2.) God has provided believers with all the resources necessary to make growth possible (2 Pet 1:2-4). In light of these divine resources; Christians are commanded by God to match their calling and resources with growth in practical holiness. To “*apply all diligence*,” is to persevere in godliness; it is to keep striving for growth in Christian character (2 Pet 1:5). God requires that our faith be translated into moral excellence (2 Pet 1:3-8).
- 3.) In Scripture, God’s *preservation* of believers is never separated from the believer’s *perseverance*; there is an unmistakable link between the two. The person savingly joined to Jesus Christ will persevere in faith, holiness, and obedience; and he will not neglect the *means of grace* (prayer, the Word, corporate worship, fellowship, and the Lord’s Table).
- 4.) *Preservation* and *perseverance* operate together. “And I will make an everlasting covenant with them that *I will not turn away from them*, to do them good; and I will put the fear of Me in their hearts so that *they will not turn away from Me*” (Jer 32:40). God’s promise is to *preserve*, “I will not turn away from them.” His promise to preserve is joined to the gift of perseverance—“they will not turn away from Me.” In John 10:26-29, the believer’s safety is joined to a disposition to *know the will of God*—“they hear His voice.” And it is linked to a disposition to *do the will of God*—“they follow Me.” (Ernest C. Reisinger, *The Faith of the Saints, The Assurance of the Saints, the Perseverance of the Saints*, pp. 46-47, Mt. Zion Publications).

II. WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO PERSEVERE?

A. To persevere is to continue in faith, hope, repentance, and joy in the Gospel.

- 1.) It is ongoing faith in the truth of God’s Word that sanctifies us (Jn. 17:17). When God’s truth is believed and loved, it translates into ethical action. Faith in action makes the believer an *overcomer*. “For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that overcomes the world—our faith” (1 John 5:1-3; **4-5**).
- 2.) The believer’s relationship to God’s truth goes far beyond agreement and admiration. The true Christian loves the truth so as to be transformed by it (Rom 12:1-2). When the truth is central in one’s life it governs thoughts, affections, and decisions. True believers are constantly renewed by the truth—they practice *ongoing repentance* (Eph 4:23).
- 3.) “Overcoming the world” is the final condition of conquest in the Christian life. “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God” (Rev 2:7).

B. To persevere is to continually put sin to death (Rom 8:12-13; 6:11-14; Col 3:1-5).

- 1.) Christians are under *obligation* to be active at putting sin to death by the power of God (Rom. 8:12-17). They are to *put to death* the deeds of the flesh and reckon themselves *alive* to God and *dead* to the misdeeds of the flesh (Rom. 6:11-13).
- 2.) The Holy Spirit sanctifies us. He communicates the benefits of Christ's life and death to us. The power of the cross is active in both our *justification* and *sanctification*. Faith accepts Christ's work as the ground of both (See Romans 6, 1 Cor. 1:30, Heb. 2:11; 12:2).
- 3.) We are dependent upon Christ for our sanctification (See Romans 6, 1 Cor. 1:30, Heb. 2:11; 12:2). As we cry to Him who is our merciful High Priest, He gives us new measures of mercy, sanctifying grace, and power to resist temptation (Heb 4:15-16; 2:18; 1 Cor 10:13).

C. A summary of the reasons why the Scriptures call for perseverance:

- ***Perseverance is necessary*** because the Christian life is a fight (James 1:12; Heb. 3:6; Acts 14:21-22). We are called to be overcomers; living out Christ's victory in our life and walk (1 Pet. 2:21; Rev 2:11; 1 Jn 5:1-5; Heb 6:11-12).
- ***Perseverance is necessary*** because it is a vital safeguard against presumption (1 Cor 6:9-10). Believers are warned against the prospect of self-deception (Eph. 5:1-6).
- ***Perseverance is necessary*** because hypocrites walk for a time, become careless, then fall away (Matt. 13:18-23). Christ warned that only those who *endure to the end shall be saved* (Mt 24:10-13; Jn 8:30-32).
- ***Perseverance is necessary*** because God uses exhortations and warnings to admonish, to awaken diligence, and to instill holy fear in the saints (Heb 2:1-3; 3:12; 4:1-2).
- ***Perseverance is necessary*** because it is such a clear revealer of a person's relationship to God's truth (Col. 1:9-14; 2 Thess 2:8-12).
- ***Perseverance is necessary*** because it is the proof of genuine faith. Our faith is made visible through our perseverance in obedience (James 2:14-26).
- ***Perseverance is necessary*** because when Christ returns, He will find His people 'dressed in readiness' (ready to meet Him)—they will be pressing along the path of duty and using the means of grace (Luke 12:35; 21:34-36; 1 Pet. 4:7; 1 Jn 2:28).
- ***Perseverance is necessary*** because God has promised to keep us safe and preserve us through perseverance (1 Pet 1:5; 2 Thess 2:13-15; Rom 6:22).

III. THE FOUNDATION, OR GROUND, OF THE SAINTS' PERSEVERANCE.

A. Believers are called by God and given faith because of the unchanging decree of election.

- 1.) The Christian may draw great comfort from the unchangeableness of God's gracious choice of us in Christ. God's eternal gracious purpose in Christ *preceded* the action of our wills in receiving Christ (Matt 24:31; Jn 15:16).
- 2.) Our persevering does not rest upon our decision to choose Christ; our perseverance rests upon God's gracious choice of us (Eph 1:4). Every true believer is elected to glory; therefore he cannot finally fall away (2 Tim 2:19).

B. The elect have been *chosen 'in Christ'*—He is their covenant of life—in Christ all the conditions for life are satisfied.

- 1.) As our perfect Representative, Christ has assumed our debt to God's Law. In Him we are 'complete' (Col 2:10). We have a God-approved righteousness *in Him*; we have an unchanging status of *sonship* in Him (2 Cor 5:21). Christ *intercedes* for us (Rom 8:33-34).
- 2.) The New Covenant in Christ's blood *cannot be broken*; it guarantees the salvation or perseverance of those within it (Jer 31:33-34; 33:24; Heb 8:7-8; 10:11-18).
- 3.) Our union with Christ, once formed, can never be broken. The living power of Christ in the believer will cause the Christian to persevere. Believers are kept by the power of God; they cannot perish (Jn 10:28-29). Christ will lose nothing of what He has *purchased by His blood* (Jn 6:39; Heb 9:12; Titus 2:14) (Thomas Watson, *A Body of Divinity*, pp. 280-283).

C. Believers are permanently indwelt by God's Holy Spirit.

- 1.) The Holy Spirit has *sealed the believer* as God's own possession forever. We can never change 'owners' again (2 Cor 1:22; Eph 1:13; 4:30).
- 2.) The Greek idea of *sealing* contains several concepts: *authenticating as genuine* (Jn 6:27); *protecting from tampering* (Mt 27:66); *marking out as one's possession* (Rev 7:3-4; 9:4). When applied to perseverance, these 'dimensions' of sealing assist us in understanding the Holy Spirit's role in preserving us as God's own (Waldron, p. 219).
- 3.) The Spirit is also described as an *earnest*; a *deposit*; a *pledge*, or *down payment* (2 Cor 1:22; 5:5; Eph 1:14). These terms attest to God's promise of faithfulness—He will not allow a true believer to fall from grace. How marvelous is this promise, that to possess the Holy Spirit as *God's pledge*, or '*first installment*', is the guarantee of all the eternal blessings to follow (Rom 8:23; Eph 1:2:6-7).

IV. BELIEVERS ARE RESPONSIBLE TO EXERT EFFORT IN PERSEVERING.

A. God preserves us so that we may persevere.

1.) Believers must be diligent so as to avoid neglecting the means of their preservation.

According to God's Word, some of these *means* of grace are: *prayer* (Eph 6:18; Luke 22:46); *hearing the Word* (Jn 15:5-7; James 1:21); *fellowship with believers* (Heb 10:24-27); *serving one another* (1 Pet 4:8-11); *abiding in Christ* (1 Jn 2:28).

2.) The believer's comfort and consistent assurance flow from a life of diligent attendance to one's calling (2 Pet 1:10-11; Eph 4:1ff.; 1 Thess 2:12; 2 Thess 1:11-12).

B. Believers 'backslide' when they neglect the means of their preservation.

- *A backsliding believer* grieves God's Holy Spirit and incurs God's displeasure (Ps 38:1-8; Is 54:5-9; 1 Thess 5:19). Our sins affect those around us (Titus 2:5; 1 Cor 8:9-13).
- *A backsliding believer* will find his comforts and graces are impaired (Ps 51:10-12).
- *A backsliding believer* will experience God's discipline and correction (Gen 19:30-38; 2 Sam 12:14-23; 1 Cor 11:27-32; Heb 12:4-13).
- *A backsliding believer* hardens his own heart and wounds his own conscience. He tends to lose his tenderness toward God and his sensitivity to sin (Ps 32:3-4; 73:21-22).

C. True believers are diligent; they are always *renewing* their faith and repentance in Christ.

To *renew faith and repentance* is to always be turning from sin to God with a determination to serve Him with all of our being.

- 1.) Our hearts are restless; it is our duty to engage in perpetual *watchfulness and prayer*; and to resolve to recover from any backsliding (Prov 4:23; 2 Jn 1:8; 1 Thess 5:17).
- 2.) We must not *become weary in well-doing* (1 Cor 15:58; Gal 6:9). The Lord requires of us that we be faithful; that we *run the race with endurance* (Heb 12:1-4; 10:36).
- 3.) We must be *active* and *not passive* in our fellowship with other believers. We are to *consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds* (Heb 10:24-25). We are to always be considering how to *edify* members of the Body of Christ (Eph 4:25-32).

D. Consider the great benefits of diligence:

- You will walk in step with the Holy Spirit and live consistent with your calling.
- You will take delight in God's gracious promises, and you will find that the world's allure and appeal is increasingly diminished.
- You will develop Christian character that will make you useful in Christ's service.

- You will enjoy confidence, comfort, and assurance in great measure as you make your election and calling sure.
- You will enjoy the Lord's presence as you commune with Him which will result in more spontaneous worship.
- You will greet the Lord in confidence instead of shame on the last day. Your works will survive the judgment seat of Christ.
- You will experience a clear conscience which is necessary to enjoy God's love.

QUESTIONS:

(I.A.1-2) 1.) Why is *perseverance* necessary? What obstacles oppose the Christian's spiritual progress?

(I.B.1-2). 2.) According to 1 Peter 1:5, through *what means* does God protect His people?

(I.C.2) 3.) Read 2 Peter 1:2-4. Write down the phrases from this passage which speak of the believer's resources for godly living.

(I.C.1-2) 4.) According to 2 Peter 1:5-8, what kind of growth does God expect in His people? Does this growth come automatically, or does it require diligence?

(I.C.3-4) 5.) What is the relationship between God *preserving* the believer, and the believer *persevering*? How would you answer someone who said, "God will save a person who believes in Christ—no matter how they live."

(II.A.1-3) 6.) What is the Christian to *overcome*? Do you think that it is possible to go to heaven without being an *overcomer*? Why or why not?

(II.B.1-3) 7.) Read Romans 6:11-13. In this passage Paul sets forth the strategy for *putting sin to death*. According to this passage, what are we to believe, and what action is to follow?

(II.C.) 8.) Review the reasons why *perseverance* is necessary (II.C.). Which of the reasons are new to you? Which reasons provide the strongest motive for you to persevere?

(III.A.1-2) 9.) Why doesn't our *security* ultimately rest upon our decision to accept Christ as Savior?

(III.B.1-3) 10.) How does Christ *preserve* believers from falling away? Name at least three reasons why the believer is safe in Christ.

(III.C.1-3) 11.) In what ways does the Holy Spirit secure, or claim, the believer as God's own?

(IV.A.1-2) 12.) Read 1 Thessalonians 2:12 and 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12. What do you think it means to attend diligently to one's calling?

(IV.B.) 13.) Read Psalm 38:1-8. Name some of the consequences of *backsliding* that the believer is experiencing in Psalm 38?

(IV.B.) 14.) Read Hebrews 12:4-13. List the benefits of God's discipline from this passage.

(IV.C-D) 15.) Which benefits of diligence are found in your Christian walk? Which benefits do you desire to experience more?

