

Harvest Christian Fellowship
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Theology @ 9 Handout
Facilitator: Chad Seay

PERSEVERANCE

God Keeps His People Safe

Perseverance of the saints: The doctrine that all those who are truly "born again" will be kept by God's power and will persevere as Christians until the end of their lives, and that only those who persevere until the end have been truly "born again."

Note the two perspectives contained in that definition.

- 1) There is assurance to be given to those who are truly born again.
- 2) Continuing in the Christian life is one of the evidences that a person is truly born again.

Also referred to as: preservation of the saints, perseverance of the Spirit, eternal security, and preserving grace.

Let it first be said that in declaring the eternal security of God's people it is clearer to speak of their preservation than, as is commonly done, of their perseverance. Perseverance means persistence under discouragement and contrary pressure. The assertion that believers persevere in faith and obedience despite everything is true, but the reason is that Jesus Christ through the Spirit persists in preserving them.

Scripture emphasizes this. John tells us that Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd, is under promise to the Father to keep his sheep directly and to keep them so that they never perish.

John 6:37-40

37 *All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away. 38 For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. 39 And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. 40 For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day."*

Here, and elsewhere in the book of John, Jesus says that everyone who believes in him will have eternal life. Certainly there is a special quality about this life, but the emphasis in the adjective *eternal* is on the fact that it is the opposite of death; it is the opposite of judgment. It points to experiencing God's favor rather than his wrath.

Eternal Life: Eternal life speaks of quality and duration.

As the focus of this lesson is preserving grace, let's here consider duration.

First of all, eternal life begins now for those who believe/ trust in Christ.

John 3:15

15 that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.

Those who believe in Christ have received the life of the ages to come. In fact, that is why they believe in Christ; they have received this life and it is a mistake to think that if we can just hang in there until heaven, we will then be secure. Believers who are alive today are just as secure, if not as happy, as the saints who have died and entered heaven.

Never Perish:

John 3:16

16 "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

Never Thirst:

John 4:13-14

13 Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, 14 but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

Never Lost:

John 6:39

39 And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day.

Never Condemned:

John 5:24

24 "I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.

Romans 8:1

8 Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus,

Dr. Stephen Lawson says that if he were allowed only one passage from which to teach/ prove the eternal security of believers, it would be this:

John 10:27-29

27 My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. 28 I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. 29 My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand.

- 1) Jesus gives them eternal life.
- 2) They will never perish.
- 3) No one will snatch them from Christ.
- 4) No one will snatch them from the Father.

In his high-priestly prayer before his passion Jesus asked that those whom the Father had given him would be preserved to glory, and it is inconceivable that his prayer, which still continues, will go unanswered.

John 17:1-2, 6, 9, 20 & 24

1 After Jesus said this, he looked toward heaven and prayed: "Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. 2 For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him.

6 "I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word.

9 I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours.

20 "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message.

24 "Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world.

As for that prayer still continuing:

Hebrews 7:25

25 Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.

Paul, in his letter to the Romans, sees the sovereign plan of God for the salvation of his elect as a unitary whole, of which the glorifying of the justified is part.

Romans 8:29-30

29 *For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.*

30 *And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.*

Elsewhere he rejoices in the certainty that God will complete the “good work” that he began in the lives of those Paul addresses.

Philippians 1:6

6 *being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.*

Reformed theology echoes this emphasis. The 1689 London Baptist Confession of Faith declares,

Chapter 17: Of The Perseverance of the Saints 1. *Those whom God hath accepted in the beloved, effectually called and sanctified by his Spirit, and given the precious faith of his elect unto, can neither totally nor finally fall from the state of grace, but shall certainly persevere therein to the end, and be eternally saved...*

The doctrine declares that the regenerate are saved through persevering in faith and Christian living to the end, and that it is God who keeps them persevering. That does not mean that all who ever professed conversion will be saved. False professions are made; short-term enthusiasts fall away: many who say to Jesus, “Lord, Lord,” will not be acknowledged. Jesus tells these same people, “I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!” Note: he doesn’t say, “I knew you...but then you fell away.”

Let’s revisit Jesus’ high-priestly prayer for a moment.

John 17:12

12 *While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name you gave me. None has been lost except the one doomed to destruction so that Scripture would be fulfilled.*

What are we to make of that? Did Jesus lose one? What can we learn from Judas?

So convincing was his conformity to the behavior pattern of the other disciples, that at the end of three years of Jesus’ ministry, when he said that one of his disciples would betray him, they did not all turn and suspect Judas,

but they rather "began to say to one after another, 'Is it I?'" (Matthew 26:22).

However, Jesus himself knew that there was no genuine faith in Judas' heart, because he said at one point, "Did I not choose you, the twelve, and one of you is a devil?" (John 6:70). John later wrote in his gospel "Jesus knew from the first who those were that did not believe, and who it was that would betray him" (John 6:64). But the disciples themselves did not know.

Judas was never saved. He was religious but lost. No one knew.

The faith that fizzles before the finish had a flaw from the first.

Only those who show themselves to be regenerate by pursuing heart-holiness and true neighbor-love as they pass through this world are entitled to believe themselves secure in Christ. Persevering in faith and penitence, not just in Christian formalism, is the path to glory. To suppose that believing in perseverance leads to careless living and arrogant presumption is a total misconception.

Sometimes the regenerate backslide and fall into gross sin. But in this they are out of character, do violence to their own new nature, and make themselves deeply miserable, so that eventually they seek and find restoration to righteousness. In retrospect, their lapse seems to them to have been madness. When regenerated believers act in character, they manifest a humble, grateful desire to please the God who saved them; and the knowledge that he is pledged to keep them safe forever simply increases this desire.

This doctrine, preserving grace, can and should be a great source of assurance and encouragement for the believer who can positively answer these questions.

- 1) Do I have a present trust in Christ for Salvation? This is more important than reflecting on a conversion experience that may have happened in the past.
- 2) Is there evidence of a regenerating work of the Holy Spirit in my heart? Is the Holy Spirit confirming in my heart that I am God's child (Romans 8:16)? Do I have a positive influence on others in the church? Am I continuing to believe and accept the sound teaching of the church? Do I have a continuing present relationship with Jesus Christ? Am I living in obedience to God's commands? A perfect life is not necessary, of course. But in general our lives ought to be one of imitation of Christ and likeness to him in what we do and say (1 John 2:4-6).
- 3) Do I see a long-term pattern of growth in my Christian life?

A few last nuggets!

What has been settled in eternity cannot be undone in time!

Salvation has been described as getting man out of hell and into heaven, and that is true. But salvation is also getting God out of heaven and into man. Once he moves in, he won't move out.

If you've been born again, you can't be unborn!

During a campaign in Toronto, Canada, young convert with whom I was dealing expressed the fear that he would not be able to "hold out." A day or two later in a letter to Miss Ada Habershon, of London, I mentioned the need for a song which would give definite assurance of success in the Christian life...

Robert Harkness

When I fear my faith will fail, Christ will hold me fast; When the tempter would prevail, He can hold me fast.

Refrain

He will hold me fast, He will hold me fast; For my Savior loves me so, He will hold me fast.

I could never keep my hold, He will hold me fast; For my love is often cold, He must hold me fast.

Refrain

I am precious in His sight, He will hold me fast; Those He saves are His delight. He will hold me fast.

Refrain

He'll not let my soul be lost, Christ will hold me fast; Bought by Him at such a cost, He will hold me fast.

* Most of the foregoing material was taken from "Concise Theology" by J.I. Packer, "Systematic Theology" by Wayne Grudem and an audio recording from "The Doctrines of Grace in John" by Stephen Lawson and produced by Ligonier Ministries.