

PERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS

- This is a very important doctrine to get right.
- **2 Peter 1:10-11** “Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble; {11} for in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you.”
- On the one hand, if there is a chance that those who are truly born again can lose their salvation, then believers need to know how they keep themselves saved. On the other hand, if believers can’t lose their salvation, how do they know they are being kept for their final day.
- “Perseverance of the saints is the name that is used to summarize what the Bible teaches about the eternal security of the believer. It answers the question, “Once a person is saved, can he lose his salvation?” Because the term “perseverance of the saints” can cause people to have the wrong idea about what is meant, some people prefer to use terms like “preservation of the saints,” “eternal security,” or “held by God.”¹
- “A sincere (and often vexing) question among professing Christians concerns whether or not salvation in Christ is eternally secure. Do those who truly know Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord by faith persevere in that faith to the very end of their lives? Or is there a possibility that a genuine Christian could lose his salvation? Can those who genuinely trust Christ for salvation later abandon their faith and thus ultimately lose their eternal life? The unified teaching of the whole Scripture answers with an emphatic *no* to each of these questions. All those who are truly born of the Spirit and united to Christ by faith are kept secure in him by God’s power and thus will persevere in faith until they go to be with Christ in death. This doctrine is often labeled the perseverance of the saints.”²
- “The doctrine of the perseverance of the saints is to the effect that they whom God has regenerated and effectually called to a state of grace, can neither totally nor finally fall away from that state, but shall certainly persevere therein to the end and be eternally saved.”³
- “Preservation and eternal security are synonymous. The perspective of *preservation* is from God’s viewpoint. God keeps the believer saved and safe. A kindred doctrine, *perseverance*, looks at it from the believer’s viewpoint; that is, the believer will progress in the Christian life until the day of final redemption.”⁴

¹ <https://www.gotquestions.org/perseverance-saints.html>

² John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue, eds., *Biblical Doctrine*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 644.

³ L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans publishing co., 1938), 545.

⁴ Rolland McCune, *A Systematic Theology of Biblical Christianity: The Doctrines of Salvation, the Church, and Last Things*, vol. 3 (Allen Park, MI: Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary, 2010), 159.

- The term *preservation* has been used in more modern days so that the “pressure” is not on the saved person to keep themselves in a state of grace.
- In reality, while God is **preserving** the believer, the believer is also, at the same time, **persevering** until the end. Without God’s work, the believer will not make it and show himself to be no believer at all.

Against Perseverance of the Saints

- I find it helpful to think through common arguments from those who believe it is possible to be born again from above and lose that position before God.
- Throughout church history and even in our modern day, there are many who have made a shipwreck of their faith, walked away from the God whom they once proclaimed to love and worship, and went back to their old worldly ways.
- Does not experience, and perhaps even the Bible, point us to the fact that those who have been born again can ultimately walk away from Christ?
- **1 Corinthians 15:1-2** “Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, {2} by which also you are saved, ***if*** you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain.”
 - Chapter 15 is in the overall context of the resurrection of Jesus and the gospel message. Paul is not warning them that they were going to lose their salvation, he was warning them their faith was shallow. If they did not hold to what he has preached about the resurrection, then they were in danger of not having true faith.
- **Colossians 1:21-23** “And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds, {22} yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach-- {23} ***if*** indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard, which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, was made a minister.”
 - Again, this is not about becoming un-saved.
 - “Of all the marks of a genuine Christian presented in Scripture, none is more significant than the one Paul mentions here. People give evidence of being truly reconciled when they **continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast**. The Bible repeatedly testifies that those who are truly reconciled will continue in the faith”⁵

⁵ John F. MacArthur Jr., *Colossians*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1992), 66.

- When people read the *if* in these verses (and many more like it), they believe that they must be the one who keeps themselves in Christ or saved.
- The fact of the matter is, Paul was writing to churches. He was, in many cases, writing to people who he thought were born again.
- So why the *if* statements like these? They can serve two purposes in people's lives.
- For those who are born again, when you read these you have the opportunity to look and make sure you are still heading in the right direction.
 - This is what Peter said to make sure you are born again. Do you still believe the hope of the gospel, or have you been persuaded to start to believe something else? Are you able to recognize false teaching when it is held up against the Bible?
- For those who read this passage and have professed faith in Christ but are not born again, it can act as a "wake-up call."
 - They come to realize they have their hope in worldly things and ways. They love the world more than they love Christ. They have long lost their passion for Biblical truth and have come to a place not just of compromise with the world but actually loving the world.
- I believe that these passages in Scripture are there because of God's grace towards all who profess to know and love Christ.
- **Galatians 5:1-5** "It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery. {2} Behold I, Paul, say to you that if you receive circumcision, Christ will be of no benefit to you. {3} And I testify again to every man who receives circumcision, that he is under obligation to keep the whole Law. {4} You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace. {5} For we through the Spirit, by faith, are waiting for the hope of righteousness."
- Remember, when we read a text we must ask *to whom was Paul writing* and *what was the context in which he was writing*.
- Since Paul is writing to churches in the Galatia region, in his mind these are men and women who have professed faith in Christ.
- The overall context of the letter is to combat legalism as many of those who professed faith in Christ had come from Jewish backgrounds which emphasized law keeping and self-effort for a positive position before God.
- One of the heresy's which presents itself in these churches was taught by the Judaizers. They claimed that faith in Jesus was important, it was not fully sufficient to complete one's salvation.
- In fact, they taught that it was Jesus plus Moses that made a person fully saved.

- Circumcision being chiefly what they were teaching to the church.
- Here's what Paul is saying in these verses to the churches:
 - Trying to keep the law is slavery...Christ has set you free.
 - Circumcision as a means to keeping the law means nothing...Christ has no benefit then.
 - It is not about keeping one aspect of the law but the whole law.
 - If you seek your justification from the law you have denied grace and you have declared that you no longer need Jesus.
 - Paul here, nor the Bible anywhere uses the term **un**justified with regards to salvation.
- **So, what does Paul have in mind?** Those in the church heard the true gospel. If they chose to follow after law keeping, turning their back on Christ, there were apostate (willfully abandoning their previously professed faith in Christ).
 - They didn't lose anything because by their choice to go back to their old lifestyle they show that they never had anything to begin with.
- **Hebrews 6:4-6** "For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, {5} and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, {6} and then have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame."
- "The individuals addressed here had five great advantages because of their association with the church: They had been enlightened, had tasted Christ's heavenly gift, had partaken of the Holy Spirit, had tasted the Word of God, and had tasted the miraculous powers of the age to come (vv. 4–5). ***There is no reference at all to salvation.*** In fact, no term used here is ever used elsewhere in the New Testament for salvation, and none should be taken to refer to it in this passage. The enlightenment spoken of here has to do with intellectual perception of spiritual truth. It means to be mentally aware of something, to be instructed, informed. It carries no connotation of response—of acceptance or rejection, belief or disbelief. The tasting or partaking implies something similar: a mere sampling of truth. It was not embraced or lived, only examined."⁶
- If this passage did teach that one can lose their salvation, it means they would never be able to be born again...again.
- I believe that it is not about salvation being lost, but about the opportunity for unbelievers to hear the gospel and be saved that is lost.

⁶ John MacArthur Jr., *Saved without a Doubt*, MacArthur Study Series (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1992), 29.

- In other words, this is a warning passage to unbelievers who are constantly rejecting the gospel truth that is all around them.
- Once the gospel is presented to anyone, there are only two choices...believe the truth or reject it. There are only so many opportunities one has to hear and respond positively to the gospel.
- Especially in the case of **Hebrews 6**, it is imperative to keep reading in the chapter!
- **Hebrews 6:7-9** “**For** ground that drinks the rain which often falls on it and brings forth vegetation useful to those for whose sake it is also tilled, receives a blessing from God; {8} but if it yields thorns and thistles, it is worthless and close to being cursed, and it ends up being burned. {9} But, beloved, we are convinced of better things concerning you, and things that accompany salvation, though we are speaking in this way.”
- You see, we are given an illustration from the author about his warning *and* his encouragement to the people that he is writing to with this letter.
- **Verses 7-8** give the illustration of the rain falling...that’s the gospel coming down to all the earth...not discrimination as it is preached to all men.
- It’s not about the message, but about the response...there’s either vegetation and blessing from God *or* there are thorns and thistles and only a curse.
- The author says *but* in **verse 9**, he encourages them that he believes they are saved, that he has seen this good fruit in their lives (things that accompany salvation) ...even though he is speaking to them like this.
- While on the surface there may be some verses in the Bible that seem to speak to one losing their salvation, it is important to understand each verse in their proper usage.
- Then, there would have to be biblical evidence which shows one going from in Christ to out of Christ, unregenerate to regenerate to unregenerate, heart of stone to heart of flesh to heart of stone, no Holy Spirit to filled with the Holy Spirit to no Holy Spirit, from new creation to old creation...and so on.

What Perseverance of the Saints is not.

- Of the arguments against this most comforting doctrine is usually the statement, *if you believe in that, it means that someone can just profess to be a believer and then live how they want to.*
- While good works do not save anyone, they do play a part in our assurance of salvation.
- “The grace that does not change my life will not save my soul.” Spurgeon
- Perseverance does not teach that those who profess faith in Christ will then go on to live a licentious lifestyle that is completely void of anything holy or righteous.

- “That Christian is happy who, as he quits the world, can leave such testimony behind him. A good conscience will save no man,—wash away no sin,—not lift us one hair’s breadth toward heaven. Yet a good conscience will be found a pleasant visitor at our bed-side in a dying hour.”⁷
- It also is not a man who is free from sin or one that needs to be worried about their salvation every time they sin.
- As has been discussed throughout progressive sanctification, it is not the absence of sin that brings hope, but the desire to no longer sin and the effort put into holiness.
- It is also not a demand to live in constant introspection.
- **1 Corinthians 4:3-4** “But to me it is a very small thing that I may be examined by you, or by any human court; in fact, I do not even examine myself. {4} For I am conscious of nothing against myself, yet I am not by this acquitted; but the one who examines me is the Lord.”
- Paul’s not saying that he is doing whatever he pleases and does not have any regard for the church.
- “Only the owner of the household can determine if the steward has been trustworthy in the management of the estate. In the same way, only the Lord determines the faithfulness of his servant/steward. Ultimately Paul, all other Christian stewards, and all believers will give an account to God for their service.”⁸
- Instead of constantly looking inward or to others for security, seek to please the Lord. This desire, when fueled by the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit and directed by the Word of God, brings great assurance into the life of the follower of Jesus.
- Furthermore, it does not mean that those who profess faith in Christ can become spiritually neglectful, keeping one foot in the world and one foot in Christ.
- While progressive sanctification is a lifelong process and believers will have constant struggle with sin and even killing consistent sin patterns in their life.
- They should never be comfortable with sin or seek to take shortcuts in their life with regards to sanctification.
- To know this assurance, when confronted with active sin in their life, the believer is humble and seeks to kill the sin...even if it is a lifelong process.

⁷ J. C. Ryle, *Holiness: Its Nature, Hindrances, Difficulties and Roots* (London: William Hunt and Co., 1889), 144–145.

⁸ Mark Taylor, *1 Corinthians*, vol. 28, NAC (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2014), 113.

Biblical assurance for Perseverance of the Saints

- “The vast majority of the worldly and thoughtless Christians among ourselves oppose the doctrine of assurance. It offends and annoys them to hear of it. They do not like others to feel comfortable and sure, because they never feel so themselves. Ask them whether their sins are forgiven, and they will probably tell you they do not know! That *they* cannot receive the doctrine of assurance is certainly no marvel.”⁹
- Asd
- Asd

⁹ Ryle, *Holiness*, 148.