

Fundamentals, Study 17: Perseverance (John 10:22-30)

by BS Poh

o All who are truly God's people will persevere in the faith to the end of their lives.

1. The Bible refers to all true believers as *saints*, or holy ones.¹ (The Roman Catholic Church wrongly declares certain individuals with exceptional holiness as saints.) They have been washed clean by the blood of Christ and are accepted by God as His children. Despite many trials and temptations, they will not totally or finally fall away from the life of faith. God preserves them while they persevere in the faith.² As we exert effort to flee from temptations, to put to death remaining sins, and to pursue righteousness, God is at work in us to give us holy desires and the ability obey His word. This is known as the doctrine of *the perseverance of the saints*. (1. Rom. 1:7; 2. John 10:28-29; Phil. 1:6; 2:12-13; 2 Tim. 2:19.)

2. It is possible for true believers to fall into grievous sins because of the following: (a) the attacks of Satan; (b) the temptations of the world; (c) the remaining corruptions in their own nature; and (d) neglect of the means of grace.³ If they harden their hearts and continue in sin, the following will happen: (i) God will be displeased and the Holy Spirit will be grieved; (ii) they will lose the comfort of God's blessings; (iii) they suffer a hurt conscience; and (iv) others will be stumbled (i.e. grieved, confused, and discouraged).⁴ God will chastise them to bring them to repentance. They will be forgiven but may have to bear certain consequences of their sins - the thought of which should deter believers from sinning.⁵ (3. Luke 22:31; James 1:13-15; Rom. 7:18; 2 Tim. 2:22; 4. Eph 4:30; Psalm 51:10-12; Psalm 32:3-4; Matt 18:6; 5. 2 Sam 12:14; Heb 12:7-8)

3. The success in perseverance does not lie in the believers, but in God. If it were to depend on, say, their own free will, they will not have the power to continue to the end. Thankfully, it is God who preserves them by renewing in them faith, repentance, love, joy, hope, and all the graces of the Holy Spirit.⁶ God will certainly preserve the faith of His people because: (a) His decree of election cannot be changed;⁷ (b) Christ's death on the cross and His present intercession (i.e. acting for His people) in heaven are sufficient and effective in salvation;⁸ (c) the Holy Spirit in the believers will enable them to persevere;⁹ and (d) the covenant of grace requires that God's people shall never be lost.¹⁰ (6. 1 Cor 1:8-9; Rom 8:38-39; 11:29; Phil 1:6; 7. Rom 8:30; 9:11-16; 8. Rom 5:9-10; John 14:19; 9. Heb 6:19-20; Luke 22:32; 9. 1 John 3:9. 10. Heb 6:19-20; Jer 32:40)

4. What about professed believers who fall away completely from the faith? The Bible reveals that they were never true believers, despite having lived like believers. They had a *temporary faith*, which is not true faith in Christ at all.¹¹ A common objection is that this doctrine makes the many threats of eternal destruction, found in the Bible, unnecessary. The answer is that God has ordained not only the end but also the means to the end.¹² The threats, as well as the promises, are used by God to keep the true believers persevering, without which they can never be sure that they have true faith. At the same time, the warnings will confirm the justice of God in the damnation of the wicked. Finally, it should be noted that this doctrine is different from the Antinomian teaching of "once saved, always saved," in which it is claimed that once a profession of faith has been made, it

does not matter how you live. The Bible demands holy living in God's people.¹³ (11. Matt. 7:21-23; 13:18-23; 1 John 2:19; Heb. 6:6, 8; 12. Acts 27:22, 31; 13. 2 Tim. 2:19; Phil 3:12-14)

= Have you backslidden from the faith? Repent and seek forgiveness from God!

Review Questions

1. In the Bible, what are true believers also known as?
2. What does it mean *to persevere in the faith*?
3. State four reasons why true believers may fall into sin.
4. State the four things that will happen if they continue in sin.
5. State why believers will not want to fall into sin.
6. What will happen if perseverance in the faith were dependent on our free will?
7. State the four reasons why God will certainly preserve the faith of His people.
8. What does the Bible teach about professed believers who fall away completely?
9. Why are there threats of eternal destruction in the Bible?
10. In what way is the idea of "once saved, always saved" different from the doctrine of *the perseverance of the saints*?

Assignment/Discussion

The idea of "the carnal Christian" has been invented to explain why some professing believers live a worldly life. Is this a biblical teaching? See 1 Cor. 3:1-3 cf. Rom. 8:9-11; Gal. 5:19-26; Col. 3:1-17.

Memory Passage (Phil 3:12-14)

12 Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. 13 Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, 14 I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

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