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The Perseverance of the Saints

“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any *man* pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave *them* me, is greater than all; and no *man* is able to pluck *them* out of my Father’s hand.” John 10:27-29

To do a doctrinal study of the perseverance of the saints and the eternal security of the “born again” (Jh. 3:3) believer in Jesus Christ, is like looking at identical twins. A true genuine believer will persevere to the end because he is eternally secure in Christ. The doctrine of final perseverance of the saints teaches that those who are effectually “called” (Rom. 8:30) of God to the exercising of a genuine “faith” (Eph. 2:8) in Christ will persevere unto final salvation. There are many in the ranks of Christendom today, like “Judas” (Matt. 27:3), who will make an outward profession of Christ, but will not possess a genuine inward saving “faith.” Since these were never “saved” (Rom. 10:9) to begin with, they will not persevere to the end. However, not a single believer who is given to Christ by the “Father” (Jh. 6:37) will ever apostatize or be eternally lost.

Before entering into this study any further, we need to mention the contrast between those who are truly adopted by God the Father into His family and those who merely claim adoption. There is a big difference between being a true child of God and being a false child of God. When we talk about eternal security, we are speaking about the perseverance of the true “sons of God” (Jh. 1:12), the security of a real believer who has been birthed into the family of God by the Holy Spirit, and not an unbelieving phony who only has a pretense of Christianity.

Judas is a classic illustration of one who professed Christ, but did not honestly trust Him as Savior, Lord, and Master (Jh. 6:70-71). He was an impostor the entire time that he tagged along after Jesus and while the other disciples were not aware of it, Jesus was. Judas did not fall from grace or lose his salvation, simply because he never came to experience saving grace in the first place and you certainly can’t lose something that you never had. He was not a child of God, but the “son of perdition” (destruction) from the very beginning (Jh. 17:12).

Many will pretend to be Christians, but will not be true “children of God” (Rom. 8:16) and genuine followers of Jesus Christ (Matt. 7:21-24, II Pet. 2:22, I Jh. 2:19). When “children of God” (Gal. 3:26) sin, they will be disciplined by their “Father” as “sons” (Heb. 12:8). False believers will not be disciplined nor will they “walk in the Spirit,” but they will walk after the “flesh” (Gal. 5:16-21) and will know nothing of what it means to be a “new creature ... in Christ” (II Cor. 5:17).

Eternal security of the believer (one who is truly “in Christ”) is explicitly taught in the “word of God” (Eph. 6:17). Although, it’s possible for a child of God to sin and backslide from the “faith,” it’s impossible for him to escape his Father’s “grace” (Rom. 5:15) and “mercy” (Rom. 9:16). Whenever a believer gets out of “fellowship” (I Jh. 1:3) with God, he is eventually rescued by God’s power which prevents permanent estrangement from Him.

Scripture Teaches the Final Salvation of Believers

Eternal security is not just a New Testament doctrine, but is even taught in the pages of the Old Testament Scriptures (Ps. 37:24-28). God never goes back on His word and what He promises is as good as done! When God says that something is “everlasting” (Jh. 3:16) or “eternal” (Jh. 4:14), He means just that. One of the best known verses in the Bible is a profound declaration that proves eternal security of the “born again” believer. Listen carefully to John 3:16, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” If life in Christ could come to an end, then it would not be “everlasting,” but only temporary. The believer doesn’t have to wait to someday receive “everlasting life,” but receives it the very moment of conversion by the Holy Spirit who births him into the kingdom of God, indwells him, and seals him “with the Holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance” (Eph. 1:13-14).

Absolutely nothing can “separate” a believer from the “love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 8:35-39). The good work that God has “begun” in His saints, He will complete (Phil. 1:6). God’s ultimate purpose is to conform us “to the image of his Son” (Jh. 8:29). All during our pilgrim journey, He watches over us so that He may usher us into His eternal presence and reward us at the end of life’s way (I Pet. 1:3-5).

Eternal security is inseparably connected with the other Doctrines of Grace found throughout God’s Word. This is so true that the Doctrines of Grace must be either all fully accepted or rejected. Just because Romanists, Lutherans, and Armenians reject this doctrine doesn’t change the truth that is taught in the “holy scriptures” (II Tim. 3:15). Scriptural evidence of the perseverance of the saints is undeniably clear in the teachings of God’s Word and to question it is to question God’s ability to not only save from the penalty of sin, but to keep saved.

Scripture Teaches that the Final Salvation of Believers is Due to the Power and Grace of God Alone

“The Lord knoweth them that are his” (II Tim. 2:19) and Christ has assured us that it “is the Father’s will ... that of all which he hath given” Him, He “should lose nothing” (Jh. 6:39). Because of the keeping “power” (I Pet. 1:5) of the “Father” over His own, nothing can “pluck them out of” His “hand” (Jh. 10:28-29). We need to notice the italicized words in these two verse as they appear in the KJV. I remind you that these italicized words are not found in the Greek text. Most of the time these italicized words are added for clarity in the text, but sometimes not. If we remove the italicized word, man, from these two verses, as should be done for a correct Greek translation, then we’ll discover that NOTHING, not even the devil and the demons of Hell, can “pluck” us out of the “Father’s hand.” A correct literal rendering of these verses should read, “And I give eternal life to them, and in no way

shall they perish for ever, and not anyone shall pluck them out of my hand. My Father who has given them to Me is greater than all, and no one is able to pluck out of My Father's hand."

Not only is the power of God exercised in keeping us saved, but it is graciously exercised. Our salvation, all the way from being "justified" to being "glorified" (Rom. 8:30), can only be ascribed to God's "grace." The fulfilling of God's promises to us are on the basis of His "grace" and not merely out of duty or obligation. He has a plan and purpose for His elect that can only be accomplished by His grace. Man is not only totally incapable of saving himself from sin, but he has no ability within his own merits to keep himself saved.

Since the believer still lives in a body of "flesh," with the "old man" (Eph. 3:22) of sin not yet eradicated, he is subject to sin and spiritual failure. The very best person on earth, according to our own estimation, is a sinful creature and fallible. Perfect "holiness" (Heb. 12:10) will not be attained by any believer in this life, but only in the life to come. Therefore, the constant tendency to sin is present with us as long as we are housed in our earthly bodies (I Jh. 1:8-10, 2:1). If we were free from sin, there would be no need for us to pray, as Jesus taught his disciples, "lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil" (Matt. 6:13).

Scripture Teaches the Final Salvation of Believers Regardless of Their State of Sanctification

Regardless of spiritual age all "babes in Christ" are part of God's family of believers just as much as the most mature (I Cor. 1:4-7, 3:1-2). Even those of highest privilege can falter and fail the Lord, like "Peter" (Mk. 14:66-72). As Jesus faced the cross, He was deserted by all His disciples, with the exception of John (Mk. 14:50). These instances do not teach that these men were not true believers or that they lost their salvation, but how susceptible we are to sin as followers of Jesus Christ.

When Paul wrote about believers falling "away," he wasn't talking about losing one's salvation, but the loss of rewards (Heb. 6:4-6). These to whom Paul wrote were true Hebrew believers who were in danger of losing their rewards by turning back into some of the Old Testament practices of Judaism. It's possible for Christians to sin and lose their assurance and confidence. But, it's impossible for them to ever fall from the loving arms of their Redeemer. This is one of the most difficult verses to deal with in the entire Bible, but it's totally inconsistent with the rest of Scripture to believe that this is teaching the losing of salvation.

Another passage that is often confused with the loss of salvation is the one referring to falling "from grace" (Gal. 5:4). Once again, Paul is writing to believers who had removed themselves from the sphere of grace to law. Instead of enjoying their privileges and "liberty" under grace, they were trying to put themselves under the "bondage" of legalism (Gal. 5:1). Unfortunately, many today not only try to bring believers under the legal system of works, but there are some who misinterpret this passage to mean the loss of salvation, which it does not teach in any way whatsoever. Those who believe that salvation can be lost must also believe that it can only be attained by works which is contrary to Scripture (Eph. 2:9). To believe such a thing is to deny the "grace" of God that saves the sinner from the penalty of his sin and keeps him saved.

Closing

The “new covenant” (Jer. 31:31-34) made in Christ to His people establishes the conditions upon which His blessings rest (Heb. 8:10). If a person were left to himself, then there could be no guarantee of persevering to the end. However, the fact is that no believer is ever abandoned by God nor left to himself to wing it on his own. Although, a believer may get out of fellowship with God, he will never get out from under God’s preserving power and grace.

In closing and in summary of the doctrine of eternal security, it can be stated this way. We believe that such only are real believers as endure unto the end; that their persevering attachment to Christ is the ground mark which distinguishes them from superficial professors; that a special Providence watches over their welfare; and that they are kept by the Providence of God through faith unto salvation. No person perseveres in order to be saved, but he will persevere because he is saved. The providential work of grace that brings a sinner to salvation is the same which continues to work afterwards enabling him to persevere to the end.

The doctrine of final perseverance gives no genuine believer a reason to become spiritually sluggish or negligent in his duty to God, much less to live sinfully. To look for such a loophole to get by with sin indicates that one’s nature has not been changed and the heart is not right with God. Unless one has a desire to please God and live “holy” (Rom. 12:1) unto the Lord Jesus Christ, he gives no evidence of ever being saved. A believer is aware of his own human weaknesses and by faith has confidence only In Christ rather than himself as he confronts the world, the flesh, and the devil. In our spiritual combat with the devil, the doctrine of eternal security gives great consolation in knowing that the battles we face today will be worth it all tomorrow.

A Word From the Ministry

I’d like to remind everyone that our weekly radio broadcast over WDZY in Richmond, VA, can be heard live stream over the internet every Sunday at 12:45 PM. To listen, all you have to do is go to www.wilkinsradio.com, click on live stream, and select the Richmond station. Currently, WTRU in Winston-Salem, NC, continues to play our previously aired broadcast without charge at 1 PM on Sunday. You may also listen to this live stream by going to www.wtru.com, click on live stream and select station 830AM. We have no idea how long the management of WTRU will continue to do this, but their act of kindness is greatly appreciated.

Of course, all of our programing can be heard at any time on the audio page of our web site at www.covenantofgraceministries.com. Also, all prior years editions of our quarterly Bible Studies can be read on the publications page of our web site. So far this year, we’ve had 6,994 hits on our web site from around the world. A few weeks ago, I received a phone call from a gentleman in Detroit, MI, that did not have a printer and requested copies of our quarterly Bible Studies. It was a privilege to furnish copies and mail it to him in his study of God’s Word. Only God knows the outreach of this little ministry. To Him be all the Glory.

I’d like to thank each one of our supporters for making this ministry possible. May the Lord bless you in a very special way.

Because of His Sovereign GraceBWM