

Preservation of the Saints vs. Perseverance of the Saints

I. One of the Calvinistic "doctrines of grace" and petals of the TULIP is *Perseverance of the Saints*.

1. Definitions

A. Perseverance - 1. The fact, process, condition, or quality of persevering; constant persistence in a course of action, purpose, or state; steadfast pursuit of an aim; tenacious assiduity or endeavour. 2. *Theol.* Continuance in a state of grace leading finally to a state of glory.

final perseverance, perseverance of the saints: the doctrine that those who are elected to eternal life, justified, adopted, and sanctified, will never permanently lapse from grace or be finally lost: one of the 'Five points of Calvinism', and thus stated in the Westminster Confession of Faith xvii. §1: 'They whom God hath accepted in his Beloved, effectually called and sanctified by his Spirit, can neither totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace, but shall certainly persevere therein to the end, and be eternally saved'.

B. Persevere v. - 1. *intr.* To continue steadfastly in a course of action (formerly, also, in a condition, state, or purpose), esp. in the face of difficulty or obstacles; to continue staunch or constant. *Const. in, with.*

C. The doctrine of the Perseverance of the Saints can be summed by the following: all of the elect will all come to faith in Christ and will persevere in that faith until their death, though they may for a short time fall out of faith before repenting.

2. Statements from confessions of faith concerning Perseverance of the Saints.

A. Westminster Confession

CHAPTER XVII. - *Of The Perseverance of the Saints.*

I. They whom God hath accepted in his Beloved, effectually called and sanctified by his Spirit, can neither totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace; but shall certainly persevere therein to the end, and be eternally saved.

II. This perseverance of the saints depends, not upon their own free-will, but upon the immutability of the decree of election, flowing from the free and unchangeable love of God the Father; upon the efficacy of the merit and intercession of Jesus Christ; the abiding of the Spirit and of the seed of God within them; and the nature of the covenant of grace; from all which ariseth also the certainty and infallibility thereof.

III. Nevertheless they may, through the temptations of Satan and of the world, the prevalency of corruption remaining in them, and the neglect of the means of their perseverance, fall into grievous sins; and for a time continue therein: whereby they incur God's displeasure, and grieve his Holy Spirit; come to be deprived of some measure of their graces and comforts; have their hearts hardened, and their consciences wounded; hurt and prevalency others, and bring temporal judgments upon themselves.

B. Second London Baptist Confession of Faith - 1689

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, seeing the gifts and callings of God are without repentance, whence he still begets and nourisheth in them faith, repentance, love, joy, hope, and all the graces of the Spirit unto immortality; and though many storms and floods arise and beat against them, yet they shall never be able to take them off that foundation and rock which by faith they are fastened upon; notwithstanding, through unbelief and the temptations of Satan, the sensible sight of the light and love of God may for a time be clouded and obscured from them, yet he is still the same, and they shall be sure to be kept by the power of God unto salvation, where they shall enjoy their purchased possession, they being engraven upon the palm of his hands, and their names having been written in the book of life from all eternity. (John 10:28, 29; Philippians 1:6; 2 Timothy 2:19; 1 John 2:19; Psalms 89:31, 32; 1 Corinthians 11:32; Malachi 3:6)

2. This perseverance of the saints depends not upon their own free will, but upon the immutability of the decree of election, flowing from the free and unchangeable love of God the Father, upon the efficacy of the merit and intercession of Jesus Christ and union with him, the oath of God, the abiding of his Spirit, and the seed of God within them, and the nature of the covenant of grace; from all which ariseth also the certainty and infallibility thereof. (Romans 8:30 Romans 9:11, 16; Romans 5:9, 10; John 14:19; Hebrews 6:17, 18; 1 John 3:9; Jeremiah 32:40)

3. And though they may, through the temptation of Satan and of the world, the prevalency of corruption remaining in them, and the neglect of means of their preservation, fall into grievous sins, and for a time continue therein, whereby they incur God's displeasure and grieve his Holy Spirit, come to have their graces and comforts impaired, have their hearts hardened, and their consciences wounded, hurt and scandalize others, and bring temporal judgments upon themselves, yet shall they renew their repentance and be preserved through faith in Christ Jesus to the end. (Matthew 26:70, 72, 74; Isaiah 64:5, 9; Ephesians 4:30; Psalms 51:10, 12; Psalms 32:3, 4; 2 Samuel 12:14; Luke 22:32, 61, 62)

3. The Calvinistic doctrine of the perseverance of the saints is founded on three core ideas.
- A. Firstly, that the "state of grace" (regeneration, eternal life) is synonymous with faith and conversion.
 - B. Secondly, that *all* of the elect will hear and believe the gospel during their lives on earth.
 - C. Thirdly, that while the saints can fail to persevere in the faith for a time during their lives, they will *all* eventually "renew their repentance" prior to their death.
 - D. All three of these ideas are false.

- i. The "state of grace" wherein the spirit and soul of a man is regenerated and is in possession of eternal life precedes the faith and conversion of the man and is what makes them (faith and conversion) possible.
 - ii. It is true that *many* of the elect will hear and believe the gospel during their life on earth, *but not all* of them will.
 - iii. It is true that *many* of the elect will "renew their repentance" after falling out of faith, *but not all* of them will.
 - iv. These statements will be proven in this sermon.
 - E. If the phrase "state of grace" means the "state of eternal life" or the "state of regeneration", then the statement in the Westminster Confession concerning Perseverance of the Saints is correct.
 - F. But if the phrase "state of grace" means the "state of faith" or the "state of conversion", then the statement in the Westminster Confession concerning Perseverance of the Saints is in error.
- 4. It is for the reasons given above that we use the term *Preservation of the Saints* instead of *Perseverance of the Saints*.
 - A. Much of what Calvinists say concerning Perseverance of the Saints in the confessions cited above is true concerning the "state of grace" (eternal life).
 - B. It is true that the elect can never "totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace", if the state of grace is understood to be eternal life.
 - C. The elect will persevere in the state of regeneration and eternal life by the sovereign power of God.
 - D. But the elect will not necessarily persevere *in faith and conversion* for their entire lives.
 - E. God will *preserve* their eternal life whether or not they *persevere* in faith.
 - F. This is why we believe in the *Preservation of the Saints*, nor the *Perseverance of the Saints*.

II. Preservation of the Saints

1. Definitions
 - A. Preservation - 1. a. The action of preserving or keeping from injury or destruction; the fact of being preserved (esp. with objective genitive, e.g. your preservation = your being preserved).
 - B. Preserve v. - 1. *trans.* To keep safe from harm or injury; to keep in safety, save, take care of, guard. 2. To keep alive, keep from perishing (*arch.*); to keep in existence, keep from decay, make lasting (a material thing, a name, a memory).
 - C. Preserved *ppl.* - 1. *gen.* Kept safe, protected; kept in existence, maintained, retained, etc.
2. God's saints are preserved forever by Him (**Psa 37:28**).
3. The reason for their preservation is that God gives them eternal life and will not allow them to perish (**Joh 10:28-29**).
 - A. Eternal *adj.* - 3. a. Infinite in future duration; that always will exist; everlasting, endless. ¶The New Testament expressions eternal life, death, punishment, etc. are here referred to sense 3, this being the sense in which the *adj.* in such contexts is ordinarily taken.
 - B. The fact that the elect have eternal life demands they that are preserved forever.

4. They are *preserved* in Jesus Christ (**Jud 1:1**).
5. Jesus will loose none of them (**Joh 6:39**).
6. God will destroy the earth and the heavens, but will preserve His people (**Isa 51:6**).
7. God will finish the good work that He began in His saints (**Php 1:6**).
8. If they do not persevere in faith until the end, God is still faithful to save them eternally (**2Ti 2:13; 2Ti 2:18-19; Rom 3:3-4; Rom 11:28-29**).

III. Addressing the errors in the *Perseverance of the Saints* doctrine.

1. Error #1: Conflating regeneration and conversion.
 - A. Regeneration is the act of God wherein He resurrects the dead spirit in a man and gives him eternal life (**Eph 2:1; Tit 3:5**).
 - B. Conversion is the process a child of God who is already regenerated goes through in which he turns from unbelief to belief in Christ and from living sinfully to living righteously (**Act 15:3 c/w Act 15:19**).
 - C. Regeneration precedes belief of the gospel (**Joh 5:24; 1Jo 5:1**).
 - D. The "state of grace" that the Calvinists speak of is the state of regeneration (**Eph 2:4-5**).
 - E. When a child of God is in the "state of grace" he has the ability to believe and obey the gospel, but he doesn't automatically do so as soon as he is regenerated.
 - F. If belief was automatic, then the elect would not be commanded to do it (**1Jo 3:23**).
2. Error #2: All of the elect will hear and believe the gospel during their lives on earth.
 - A. Babies, mentally retarded people, and heathen in remote jungles of the world do not hear and believe the gospel.
 - B. Some of the people in those groups are God's elect (**Rev 5:9**).
 - C. Therefore, not all of the elect hear and believe the gospel.
3. Error #3: If they fall out of faith, all of the elect will eventually "renew their repentance" prior to their death.
 - A. Several Biblical examples of God's elect who turned from the faith and never repented prove this fundamental tenet of the doctrine of the *Perseverance of the Saints* to be false.
 - B. Branches in Christ which bear no fruit
 - i. There are branches in Christ which bear no fruit which are taken away (**Joh 15:2**).
 - ii. Nevertheless they are still *in Christ* which means that they are elect and predestinated children of God (**Eph 1:4-5**).
 - C. Solomon
 - i. Solomon was an elect child of God; God *chose* him to be His son (**1Ch 28:6**).
 - a. All of the elect will be glorified (**Rom 8:29-30**).
 - b. Therefore Solomon will be glorified.
 - ii. The Lord loved Solomon (**2Sa 12:24; Neh 13:26**).
 - a. Nothing can separate us from the love of God (**Rom 8:38-39**).
 - b. Therefore, Solomon was never separated from the love of God.
 - iii. Solomon was a prophet who wrote three books of the OT: Proverbs (**Pro 1:1**), Ecclesiastes (**Ecc 1:1**), and The Song of Solomon (**Son 1:1**).
 - a. All the prophets will be in the kingdom of God (**Luk 13:28-29**).

- b. Therefore, Solomon will be in the kingdom of God.
 - iv. Even though Solomon was an elect, beloved, justified child of God, he backslid into sin and worshiped other gods at the end of his life (**1Ki 11:4-8**).
 - a. He was beloved of his God: nevertheless outlandish women caused him to sin (**Neh 13:26**).
 - b. There is no indication in scripture that Solomon ever repented.
 - c. The last recorded act of Solomon was of him trying to kill Jeroboam (**1K 11:40**).
- D. Israel in the wilderness
 - i. Israel, our spiritual fathers (**1Co 10:1**), came out of Egypt by faith (**Exo 14:31; Heb 11:29**).
 - ii. They were spiritual partakers of Christ (**1Co 10:3-4**) who had eternal life (**Joh 6:53-58**).
 - iii. Nevertheless, they were overthrown in the wilderness for their unbelief of the gospel (**1Co 10:5-10 c/w Heb 3:17-4:2**).
 - a. They were begotten by God (**Deu 32:18**) and were children of God (**Deu 32:19**), yet they were children without faith (**Deu 32:20**).
 - b. Although the Israelites which came out of Egypt were elect, regenerate children of God, they lost out on the temporal blessing of the land of Canaan because of their unbelief.
 - c. Though they lost temporal blessings, being God's elect, they did not lose their eternal life (**Joh 10:28-29**).
 - d. Some will say that those who died in the wilderness were not elect (despite the plain teaching of scripture cited above).
 - (i) If that's the case, then Moses wasn't elect because he also died in the wilderness because of unbelief (**Num 20:12**).
 - (ii) Moses is obviously an elect child of God (**Mat 17:3**).
 - (iii) Therefore, losing the temporal promised land in this life doesn't necessarily mean one isn't elect.
 - iv. Paul used the history of Israel in the wilderness as a warning for NT Christians (**1Co 10:11-12**).
 - a. If those Israelites were reprobates, what would be the relevance to the born-again saints in Corinth?
 - b. If that were the case, Paul would have in effect been saying, "Listen up ye Gentile Corinthians, there were reprobate, hell-bound Jews who died in the wilderness for their unbelief."
 - v. But on the other hand, if those Jews were elect children of God like the saints in Corinth were, then their history is very instructive because it shows that God's children can rebel and be temporally judged for it by God in this life.
- E. Unconverted elect Jews
 - i. There were elect Jews who were enemies of the gospel, but were nevertheless beloved of God because of election (**Rom 11:28**).
 - ii. Many of these unbelieving Jews died in the destruction of Jerusalem in 70AD.

- iii. They did not persevere in faith until the end, but God preserved them eternally because His gifts and calling are without repentance (**Rom 11:29**).
- F. Saints that had their faith overthrown.
 - i. There were false teachers in Paul's day who had taught that the resurrection was past and had overthrown the faith of some (**2Ti 2:18**).
 - ii. Those that had their faith overthrown were believers who had fallen away from the faith.
 - iii. According to Arminians, they would have lost their eternal life.
 - iv. According to Calvinists, they were never elect in the first place.
 - v. According to the Bible, though they didn't know God because their faith was overthrown, nevertheless God knew them (**2Ti 2:19**).
 - vi. And if He knew them, they were saved eternally (**Rom 8:29-30**).
- 4. Question: What makes the last hour of a man's life more important than any other hour of it?
 - A. What if a child of God commits a grievous sin and doesn't repent of it for one year in the middle of his life?
 - B. What if another child of God commits a grievous sin and doesn't repent of it for the last year of his life prior to his death?
 - C. Why is the second man's non-repentance during the last year of his life any more proof that he is not a child of God than the first man's non-repentance during the middle of his life?
 - D. In both cases there was a year in each man's life that he continued in sin.
 - E. Why would a Calvinist conclude that the first man who continued in sin for a year of his life could be a child of God, but the second man who continued in sin for a year of his life is definitely *not* a child of God?

IV. The sin of unbelief

The Father imposed His wrath due unto, and the Son underwent punishment for, either:

All the sins of all men.
 All the sins of some men, or
 Some of the sins of all men.

In which case it may be said:

That if the last be true, all men have some sins to answer for, and so, none are saved.
 That if the second be true, then Christ, in their stead suffered for all the sins of all the elect in the whole world, and this is the truth.
 But if the first be the case, why are not all men free from the punishment due unto their sins?
 You answer, "Because of unbelief."

I ask, Is this unbelief a sin, or is it not? If it be, then Christ suffered the punishment due unto it, or He did not. If He did, why must that hinder them more than their other sins for which He died? If He did not, He did not die for all their sins!"

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