

THE PERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS

Our Reformed fathers never called the safe keeping of the believers eternal security, but perseverance of the saints, for the secure Christian will persevere in the faith. They believed that the God who started salvation would complete it *“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”* (Phil. 1:6). [See CHART #1]

Eternal security must be balanced by perseverance. While it is true that a saved person can never be lost, it is also true that **once a person is saved, he can never be the same again.**

The Christian perseveres because God is working salvation **in** the Christian and the Christian is working **out** salvation in his daily experience (Phil. 2:12b-13): *“Continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.”*

PERSEVERANCE AND THE PRESERVATION OF CHRIST

If the Christian first works, then expecting God to work, this is human effort, which leads to legalism. If God works first in the Christian, then the Christian works, this is grace, which leads to gratitude and true spiritual works.

Perseverance is made possible because the Christian is preserved by Jesus Christ. *“To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy. . .”* (Jude 24).

PERSEVERANCE DEFINED

“Those whom God has accepted in his beloved Son, called to faith and sanctified by his Holy Spirit, can neither totally nor finally sever themselves from God’s gracious love. The gift of faith endures to the end of life, eternally saving the believer” (Westminster Confession of Faith – Contemporary Edition: 17:1).

“That continuous operation of the Holy Spirit in the Christian by which the work of divine grace that was begun in the heart is continued and brought to completion” (Jack Arnold).

“That constant working of God in the Christian which causes the Christian to voluntarily continue in faith and well doing until he goes home to be with the Lord in death or is alive at the second coming of Christ” (Jack Arnold).

PERSEVERANCE TAUGHT IN THE BIBLE

Luke 21:19: *By standing firm (persevering) you will gain life.*

Romans 5:3: . . . *suffering produces perseverance; perseverance character.*

Colossians 1:11: . . . *being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance (perseverance) and patience . . .*

Hebrews 10:35-36: *So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised.*

James 1:3-4: *Because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.*

Matthew 10:22: *All men will hate you because of me but he who stands firm (perseveres) to the end shall be saved.*

PERSEVERANCE AND EXTREMES

There are two extremes when dealing with eternal security and perseverance. The first extreme is to overly emphasize eternal security so that a person feels he will go to heaven without holiness, living to please himself. The second extreme is to emphasize perseverance so that a person is working for his salvation, falling into severe legalism. The Biblical position is stated in 1 Peter 1:5: . . . *who (Christians) through faith are shielded (kept) by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. The Christian is kept by God's power through faith and not apart from faith.*

PERSEVERANCE AND MYSTERY [See CHART #2]

There is a mystery (antinomy) about eternal security and perseverance that we will never put together with our human minds. Both are true and neither can be neglected.

Jude 24: *To him who is able to keep you from falling . . .*

Jude 21: *Keep yourselves in God's love . . .*

John 10:27: *My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.*

John 10:28: *I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish. . . .*

Hebrews 12:1: . . . *let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out before us.*

Hebrews 12:2: *Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith . . .*

Philippians 2:12 . . . *continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling . . .*

Philippians 2:13 . . . *for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.*

John 6:47: *I tell you the truth, he who believes has everlasting life.*

1 Timothy 6:12: *Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called . . .*

PERSEVERING FAITH

Tenses of Faith

The aorist tense expresses an event in past time and, if the context warrants it, can be a once and for all event (Acts 16:31). One initial act of faith brings salvation immediately to a person.

The present tense stresses continual, habitual and repeated action in present time (John 3:16; 5:24; Rom. 1:16). A person believes once for salvation, but he also continues to believe as a result of being saved. Faith may fluctuate but it can never be lost. Faith will always manifest itself to some degree in every Christian.

Necessity of Faith

Faith is not optional for a Christian. It is a necessity. The Christian is kept by God's power for salvation but the means God uses to keep a believer is faith (1 Pet. 1:5). The Christian is kept through faith, not apart from faith. [See CHART #3]

Elements of Faith [See CHART #4]

Intellect (mind). Faith cannot begin in a vacuum of knowledge. One must know something before he can trust in that thing (Rom. 10:14, 17).

Sensibility (emotions). Facts are not enough for true faith but one's emotions must be involved, so as to love Christ with the heart (Rom. 10:9-10).

Volition (will). Inherent in the word "faith" is commitment. If something is believed, one commits himself to it and acts upon it (Mark 8:34-38).

Unless mind, emotion and will (the total personality) is involved in exercising faith, it has never taken place. A person who has really trusted in Christ will act upon this decision by demonstrating with the life that he has trusted Christ.

Reality of Faith

It is possible to believe intellectually and not be saved (John 2:23-25).

It is possible to be in a local church and not be saved (1 John 2:19).

It is possible for a person to have walked an aisle, prayed a superficial prayer, signed a card, be baptized and a member of a local church and not be saved (Matt. 7:21-23).

Christ's Teaching on Persevering Faith (Luke 8:4-15). Only those who persevere give evidence of salvation. They all do not produce the same amount of works, but they all produce some works (Matt. 13:23).

Wayside Soil (immediate fizzle): Not saved and doesn't care – **Devil**.

Stony Soil (quick fizzle): Thinks he is saved but is not – **Flesh**.

Thorny Soil (slow fizzle): Appears to be saved for a long while but is not – **World**.

Good Soil (no fizzle): Saved and he proves it by his spiritual fruit and good works – **Christ**.

"He who fizzles before the finish was faulty from the first."

PERSEVERING OBEDIENCE

Source of Obedience. Faith and obedience are not the same, but they can never be separated because all true obedience flows out of true faith (Heb. 11:8). *"By faith, Abraham . . . obeyed."* God gives the Christian power to believe and obey but He does not do these acts for the Christian. The Christian exercises his own will and is actively involved in every act of faith-obedience. [See CHART #5]

Commands and Obedience. There are many positive commands of Scripture (Rom. 12:1; 1 Tim. 6:11-12; 1 Pet. 2:2), and many negative commands (Rom. 12:2; Rom. 6:12-13; 1 Thess. 5:22). The Christian demonstrates his salvation by a desire to keep the commands of the Bible.

Eliminates Passivism. There are some Christians who teach, "Let go and let God," or "If it isn't easy, it isn't of God," or "Any victory attained by trying is of the flesh." This is called the "Victorious Christian Life," or "The Deeper Life," and it brings confusion into the life of the believer. The Bible, however, teaches the Christian must yield to God in an attitude of faith but this faith results in obedience and action. Submission to God involves spiritual activity not passivity. There is rest, submission and yieldedness in the Christian life and there is also obedience, struggle and warfare. This is the life of *faith-obedience* or *resting-activity*.

Obedience and the "IF" Clauses.

1. John 8:31. Christians are true disciples **IF** they continue to hold to Christ's teachings (the Word of God).
2. Hebrews 3:6, 14. We are Christ's **IF** we hold on to our courage and the hope of which we boast. Christians are to prove the reality of their faith by persevering to the end.

Obedience and the Warning Passages [See CHART #6]

1. Matt. 7:21-23
2. 1 Cor. 6:9-11
3. Eph. 5:5-8
4. Gal. 5:19-21

Warnings are given to mere professors in Christ in order to bring them to reality or weed them out from true believers. Warnings are also God's means to secure the end of perseverance in the case of the believer. God may use exhortations, promises, and even threats to secure His end for the believer.

PERSEVERING WORKS

Definition: When the Bible speaks of good works, it is speaking of spiritual good produced by the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23). The motivation for good works is to please Christ, not bring glory to self.

Necessity of Works. Good works are the necessary proof of true saving faith. Works do not save, but are a necessity in sanctification to demonstrate the reality of salvation. All Christians believe in the necessity of good works but all do not agree on the cause or motivation for good works. [See CHART #7]

Mystery of Good Works [See CHART #8]

Works are a Divine Act (Eph. 2:10; Tit. 2:14; Gal. 5:22-23). Works are planned by the Father, purchased by the Son and produced by the Holy Spirit. A Christian is to walk by faith in the works already prepared.

Works and a Human Act (Tit. 3:8; 2:7; Col. 1:10; 1 Tim. 2:10). Works must be learned as well as produced (Tit. 2:4-5). Doing good works is a lifetime process.

Source of Good Works. Faith is the source of all good works (Heb. 11:6). *But without faith it is impossible to please God.* Faith and works cannot be separated but they are not the same (James 2:17-18). Faith is the root (cause) and works are the fruit (result).

“Faith alone saves, but faith that saves is never alone” (John Calvin)

Importance of Works

Works are a Proof of Salvation (Tit. 1:16). A professing Christian without some works is not Christian at all. Those who desire to do the will of the Father are saved (Matt. 7:21-23).

Works are an Evidence of Election (1 Thess. 1:3-4; 2 Pet. 1:10). The Christian works because of his election and calling to salvation, but he proves and demonstrates the reality of his election and calling by his good works.

**“Do all the good you can,
By all the means you can,
In all the ways you can,
In all the places you can,
At all the times you can,
To all the people you can,
As long as you can.”** (John Wesley)

“The proof of election is that one perseveres to the end of life.” (Jonathan Edwards)

“It is not only important how one begins the Christian life, but it is doubly important how one ends the Christian life.” (Jack Arnold).