The Perseverance of the Saints

by

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(July, 2004)

(Updated - September, 2018)

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The Deception

In line with Roman Catholic dogma and Arminianism, millions of Christians worldwide suffer under the burden of believing that their salvation is not assured. And they have been taught so from a vast number of pulpits across the Protestant denominations.

This, in spite of overwhelming scriptural statements to the contrary. Throughout the churches a confused and shallow theology has allowed what was once considered heresy to become an accepted position on this subject.

Pentecostalism and Charismatism have been much to blame in this apostasy. They have been the single most damaging catalyst in the setting aside of Reformational doctrine and building the 20th century ecumenical bridge to Rome. Some Baptist fellowships also hold to this error and in so doing they shun the teachings of one of their greatest divines, Charles Haddon Spurgeon.

Many accuse those that hold to the eternal security of the believer of promoting 'Cheap Grace' or 'Easy Believism'. But to label Grace as 'cheap' is to say that too little a price was paid. That's a denial of Grace. Grace comes as a free gift and cannot involve any payment on man's part...the price paid by God Himself is infinite! Therefore for anyone to think that the works of man can play a part in either earning, or keeping Grace, is to devalue this infinite gift to the level of human effort. Paul declares '*...if by Grace, then is it no more of works; otherwise Grace is no more Grace. But if it be of works, then it is no more Grace, otherwise work is no more work*' (Rom.11:6). Salvation is not any combination of works and Grace.

We must come to the point of realisation that our works have nothing to do with Justification - that state of being made eternally right with God in the courts of Heaven. Salvation cannot be purchased even in part, because it requires a payment we cannot make. If our Justification and ultimate salvation cannot be bought by good deeds, then it naturally follows that it cannot be lost through bad deeds! The penalty must be satisfied infinitely. Unlike God, we are finite beings.

Some would agree with us that salvation is not earned, but insist it must be 'kept' once received. This overlooks the fact that we received the gift when 'enemies' of God and yet we were immediately acquitted of the penalty for all our sin - past, present and future (Rom.5:10). If Christians have to pay further for the just penalty now fully satisfied, then we are surely the most miserable and deluded of all people?

But What About Hebrews 6?

The argumentation mainstay has always been Hebrews 6 - misread and taken out of context. The text '*if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance...*' follows a dissertation regarding sound doctrine or 'strong meat'. The author is at pains to show that it is '*impossible*' (vs.4) for a believer to fall from Grace and be renewed again by another crucifixion.

But doesn't the word '*again*' mean they had already fallen away and repented at least once? No! This passage is actually one of the strongest for showing that a believer cannot be lost! The phrase, '*to renew them again unto repentance*' does not mean that they have fallen away and are being renewed again. The '*again*' refers to being saved after having fallen away. That this could not happen even once, let alone multiple times, is clear from the phrase, '*...impossible for those who were once enlightened...if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance...*' (vs.4-6).

The author doesn't say '*when they shall fall away*' but '*if*'. This '*if*' precedes an 'hypothetical clause' from verses 4-6 with the supposition in verse 6. The nature of the impossibility is tied directly to the phrase in verse 6 '*to renew*'. Why would it be impossible to be saved again if salvation could be lost? Two hypothesis are given: 1) '*they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh*'; and 2) '*put him to an open shame*'. In other words, if the crucifixion of Jesus 1,900 years ago was not enough to keep one saved, and if salvation could be lost, then Christ would have to be crucified again for one to be saved again. This is the hypotheses many miss in this passage! Furthermore, if Christ purchased salvation at a price we could never pay and gave it to us eternally, He would be held up to '*open shame*' for such folly. To expect someone with total inability to bring all this about and then endeavour to hold on to it would be absurd. If Jesus' dying in our place for our sin and rising from the dead is not sufficient to keep us in His hand then He died wasting His time!

This section about '*falling away*' is then proved to be hypothetical - something that could never happen. Look at the way it ends: '*BUT, beloved, we are persuaded BETTER things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak*' (vs.9). In other words, falling away does not accompany salvation!

Other Misconceptions

Some of the Arminian persuasion also attack the perseverance of the saints by confusing it with 'Calvinism'. The late Dave Hunt of the '*Berean Call*' was

an example of this. Although he professed to believe in 'eternal security', Dave stated that he once thought of himself as a 'one point Calvinist', in that he held to the doctrine of the perseverance of the Saints as one of the 'points' of 'Calvinism'. But historic 'Calvinism' taught that a believer is secure because of his election to salvation, whereas Dave believed that our perseverance is brought about by our clinging to the promises of God. If, as Dave stated, we have a 'freewill' ability to choose God in salvation by making a 'decision', surely we don't lose that 'freewill' at regeneration? Therefore what is to stop us from falling away from that position? That's not 'eternal security'.

Our eternal security rests in the work of Christ at Calvary, not in our performance as Christians. We must not confuse Justification with Sanctification.

The Doctrine of Campbellism prominent in some denominations (such as the Church of Christ) and Weslyianism holds to the idea of the 'possibility' of the believers falling away and losing salvation.

With such Cambellism is another misconception - in connecting baptism with salvation (Baptismal Remission for sins) which also thus implies strongly that the security of the believer is not eternal. At its core it denies the preservation of the saints and that God has Justified and Glorified his people (Rom.8:29,30) and '*sealed*' them '*unto the day of redemption*' (Eph.4:30).

If our sin still holds power to affect our standing in Justification then what amount and what sin would it take for us to be discarded? No scripture is given to inform us of this. Scripture simply states that '*if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness*' (1Jn.1:9) - therefore we can be forgiven all sin! Rarely do you hear a Christian say they were 'saved again' - rather, they confessed their sin and were forgiven.

As if anticipating such teachings the Apostle John wrote in His Gospel account to clear any misconceptions: '*Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that hears my word, and believes on him that sent me, has everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life*' (5:24)...*All that the Father gives me shall come to me; and him that comes to me I will in no wise cast out* (6:37)...*And this is the Father's will which has sent me, that of all which he has given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day* (6:39) *And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which sees the Son, and believes on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day* (6:40) *No man can come to me, except the Father*

which has sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day (6:44) *Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believes on me has everlasting life* (6:47).

More Scriptures

One of the cardinal tenets of interpretation of scripture is that *scripture interprets scripture*. When there is a point of controversy it is wise to search the scriptures used on both sides of the argument. But on this issue of whether one can lose one's salvation, the scriptures that teach that this is impossible and that salvation is eternal are *clear* and very *numerous*, far outweighing the one or two that people might use against the final preservation of the saints.

There are of course many more scriptures which clearly speak of the preservation of God's saints (Jn.10:28; Phil.1:6; Jude 24). One of the most compelling is Paul's Ephesian statements on the sealing of the saints '*until the redemption of the purchased possession...until the day of redemption*' - speaking of the surety of our glorified body (Eph.1:13,14; 4:30).

The Bible also speaks of an '*inheritance…reserved*': '*To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fades not away, reserved in heaven for you, Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time*' (1Pet.1:4,5).

In Romans 8:29,30 is a verse that, although not often used to prove the preservation of the saints or eternal security, dispels the falsehood that our salvation can in any way be lost. '*For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified <u>them he also glorified</u>*'. Paul speaks of this glorification as something God has already decreed in the past as finished! Many miss the tenses here which irrefutably show an unbroken chain of salvation. The Greek tense of the verbs and that of the word 'glorified' is Aorist Indicative Active - it is a snapshot of something God sees as having already happened (aorist); it has been done once in time and is unrepeatable (indicative mood); and the action is done by God (active voice). Paul speaks of a 'glorification' here as something God has *already* decreed in the past as being finished! However, in our time we know that on this earth 'glorification' has yet to come to pass. This is a remarkable passage that irrefutably shows a salvation, a decree and a promise that is preserved until the very end of this life *and into eternity*!

Apart from the scriptural proofs for this argument of preservation of God's elect, historically the great many of the church leaders, revivalists and

Reformers have attested strongly to the eternal preservation of the saint. Charles Spurgeon once stated: '*Numbers of persons think that the Lord Jesus is available for the pardon of passing but they cannot trust him for their preservation of the future. They trust the years past but not the years to come. Whereas no such subdivision of salvation is ever spoken of in Scripture as a work of Christ. Either He bore all our sins or none. And either He saves us once for all or not at all. His death can never be repeated and He must have made expiation for the future sin of believers or they are lost since no further atonement can be supposed and since future sin is certain to be committed. Blessed be His name! By Him all that believe are justified from all things. Salvation by grace is eternal salvation. Sinners must commit themselves to the keeping of Christ for all eternity. How else are they saved men? Alas, according to the teaching of some believers, some believers are only saved in part, and for the rest must depend on their future endeavours. Is this the Gospel? I think not. Genuine faith trusts the whole cross for the whole of salvation. Is it any wonder that many converts fall away when in fact they were never taught to exercise faith in Jesus for eternal salvation but only for a temporary conversion? A faulty exhibition of Christ begets a faulty faith. And when this pines away in its own...who is to blame for it? According to their faith so it is unto them. The preacher and possessor of a partial faith must unitedly bear the blame of the failure...[But] delivered from the fear...and inspired by gratitude to his redeemer the regenerate man becomes capable of virtue and is filled with an enthusiasm for God's Glory*'. (Spurgeon: '*The Soul Winner*').

The Terminology?

The writers of this article believe 'perseverance of the saints' or 'preservation of the saints' are better terminology than 'eternal security' or 'once saved always saved'. 'Once saved always saved' is arguably not a suitable term for God's promise to preserve His saints. It has been used by some to argue for a carnal life. But salvation is not a licence to sin. Paul issued this exhortation to Christians '*Wherefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling*' (Phil.2:12). There is human responsibility involved in this Christian life. Yet Paul then went on to say, '*For it is God which works in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure*' (vs.13). Here is divine sovereignty. Here is a similarity to the antinomy of divine election and man's responsibility. We can do nothing without God. All true believers are under God's preservation and thus they *will* persevere in their faith to the very end (Matt.10:22; Mk.13:13). A person who is truly born again will never be lost.

The terms 'perseverance of the saints' or 'preservation of the saints' express the scriptures that speak of an endurance to the end rather than any false security. The true believer is secure but a false security is dangerous. There is no doubt that many professing Christians are living in a false 'eternal security'. The scriptures teach this and the statistics show that there is currently a massive falling away rate of those making a 'decision' for Christ.

Perseverance encourages people to endure and guards against people saying they are secure without examination. The scriptures clearly teach to examine oneself concerning salvation as to whether it is true or not (2Cor.13:5). It is dangerous to assume that a professing believer is secure regardless of how they live. Any security is not inseparable to their persevering and preservation by God's Spirit. '*He that endures to the end will be saved*' (Matt.10:22). A true Christian is a '*new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new*' (2Cor.5:17). For this new person to lose salvation would mean that what God has created is reversed.

We have been '*redeemed…with the precious blood of Christ*' (1Pet.1:18-19). The word 'redeemed' means to purchase with a price paid. Does God make a mistake here in this transaction? For a Christian to lose salvation, God Himself would have to revoke His purchase that He paid for with the precious blood of Christ.

We have also been '*justified through faith…not of works…*[and] *counted for righteousness…we have peace with God*' (Rom.4&5). For a Christian to lose salvation, God would have to go back on His Word and annul his previous decree.

When the Bible speaks of God's '*life*' given to a person it is '*<u>eternal</u> life*' (26 times in New Testament). If this life can be lost then how can it be '*eternal*'? It is as God says 'eternal' and nothing can remove such a person from God's hands (Jn.10:28,29)

Our eternal security rests in the work of Christ at Calvary, not in our performance as Christians. We must not confuse Justification with Sanctification. Christ will lose none that the Father has given Him and no one will ever be able to snatch you out of His hand. And that's a promise.

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About the authors

Terry Arnold holds a Doctorate in Theology (Dth), a Masters degree (MABS) and several diplomas. He was founder and president of *South Pacific Bible Institute*, a Bible college training and equipping people for ministry. In addition he was the founder of Hervey Bay Bible Church in Queensland, Australia. He has for 25 years served as an elder and then pastor.

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