

CHAPTER 17

OF THE PERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS

Statement of the doctrine

“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.”

All those who are truly saved will continue as saved all the way through life and will go to heaven at death. But notice that this security belongs only to those who are of the elect—those who are actually effectually called and justified—not to all those who think they are saved or who have given some outward testimony that they are saved. Also notice that “they shall persevere,” that is, they will remain faithful to the Lord. This doctrine does not lead to carnal security.

The causes of perseverance

“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; 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.”

This certainty of our perseverance does not depend on our own free will, which often changes, but on the faithfulness of God, who has already begun his work in us and will complete it.

All the members of the Trinity work together in keeping us in the state of grace:

- The **Father** sets his free and unchangeable love on us (Jer 31:3; 2 Tim 2:18-19)
- The **Son** determines to save us and prays for us (John 10:28; Rom 8:33-39; 1 John 3:9; John 17:20-26; Heb 7:25)
- The **Holy Spirit** abides in us (John 14:16-17; 1 John 2:27)

Actually, the salvation of the elect cannot fail, because it is guaranteed by the covenant of grace, sealed with the blood of Christ (Jer 32:40; Heb 9:12-15; 10:14; 13:20-21).

Setbacks

“3. 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 preservation, 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 scandalize others, and bring temporal judgments upon themselves.”

It is possible for a true Christian to fall into terrible sins, and even to continue living in that manner for some time. If a Christian dies in that condition, his testimony is clouded. However, such times should be the exception in the Christian life, not the rule.

Many things may bring this backsliding about:

- Temptation of Satan
- Temptation of the world
- Remaining corruption in ourselves
- Neglect of the means of grace

We should be on the alert to minimize all the above causes for falling into sinful patterns of life. We never should be overconfident, as Peter was (Matt 26:70, 72, 74; cf. vv. 33-35).

It is possible for a Christian to continue in this sad state for a long time. Apparently David continued for a year in rebellion against God (2 Sam 11:27; 12:14).

To backslide is not a playful thing, but is tragic. Here are a few of the consequences of such spiritual setbacks:

- God’s displeasure (2 Sam 11:27; Isa 64:5, 7, 9)
- Holy Spirit grieved (Eph 4:30)
- Loss of graces and comfort (Ps 51:8, 10, 12)
- Heart hardened (Isa 63:17)
- Conscience wounded (Ps 32:3-4)
- Others hurt and scandalized (2 Sam 12:14)
- Temporal judgments (2 Sam 12:14; Ps 89:31-32)

We already have seen the blessings that come from living a consistent Christian life. Having now seen the results of falling into a sinful life, let us more diligently strive to please God daily in all things.