

The Doctrine of the Perseverance/Preservation of the Saints

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Richard D. Phillips: *TULIP begins with man's problem: total depravity. It answers this problem with three gracious doctrines, each focused on a different person of the divine Trinity: the Father's unconditional election, the Son's limited atonement, and the Spirit's enlivening work of irresistible grace. We need now to return to the life of the believer to see how grace works out in practice. This is the issue with the P of TULIP: the perseverance of the saints.*"

David Steele: *The doctrine of the perseverance of the saints does not maintain that all who PROFESS the Christian faith are certain of heaven. It is SAINTS- those set apart by the Spirit- who persevere to the end. It is BELIEVERS- those who are given true, living faith in Christ- who are secure and safe in Him. Many who profess to believe will fall away, but they do not fall from grace, for they never were in grace. True believers do fall into temptations, and they do commit grievous sins, but these sins do not cause them to lose their salvation or separate them from Christ.*

The Westminster Confession of Faith (Chapter 17)

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, (Phl 1:6; 2Pe 1:10; Jhn 10:28-29; 1Jo 3:9; 1Pe 5:9).

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, (2Ti 2:18-19; Jer 31:3); upon the efficacy of the merit and intercession of Jesus Christ, (Hbr 10:10, 14; Hbr 13:20-21; Hbr 9:12-15; Rom 8:33-39; Jhn 17:11, 24; Luk 22:32; Hbr 7:25); the abiding of the Spirit, and of the seed of God within them, (Jhn 14:16-17; 1Jo 2:27; 1Jo 3:9); and the nature of the covenant of grace: from all which ariseth also the certainty and infallibility thereof, (Jer 32:40; Jhn 10:28; 2Th 3:3; 1Jo 2:19).

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 preservation, fall into grievous sins, (Mat 26:70, 72, 74); and, for a time, continue therein, (Psa 51:14): whereby they incur God's, displeasure, (Isa 64:5, 7, 9; 2Sa 11:27); and grieve His Holy Spirit, (Eph 4:30); come to be deprived of some measure of their graces and comforts, (Psa 51:8, 10, 12; Rev 2:4; Sgs 5:2-4, 6); have their hearts hardened, (Isa 63:17; Mar 6:52; Mar 16:14); and their consciences wounded, (Psa 32:3-4; Ps 51:8); hurt and scandalize others, (2Sa 12:14); and bring temporal judgments upon themselves, (Psa 89:31-32; 1Co 11:32).

The Westminster Larger Catechism

Q 79: May not true believers, by reason of their imperfections, and the many temptations and sins they are overtaken with, fall away from the state of grace ?

A 79: True believers, by reason of the unchangeable love of God,[1] and his decree and covenant to give them perseverance,[2] their inseparable union with Christ,[3] his continual intercession for them,[4] and the Spirit and seed of

God abiding in them,[5] can neither totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace,[6] but are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation.[7]

1. Jer. 31:3, 2. II Tim. 2:19-21; II Sam. 23:5, 3. I Cor. 1:8-9, 4. Heb. 7:25; Luke 22:32, 5. I John 2:27; 3:9, 6. Jer. 32:40; John 10:28, 7. I Peter 1:5

Q 80: Can true believers be infallibly assured that they are in the estate of grace, and that they shall persevere therein unto salvation?

A 80: Such as truly believe in Christ, and endeavor to walk in all good conscience before him,[1] may, without extraordinary revelation, by faith grounded upon the truth of God's promises, and by the Spirit enabling them to discern in themselves those graces to which the promises of life are made,[2] and bearing witness with their spirits that they are the children of God,[3] be infallibly assured that they are in the estate of grace, and shall persevere therein unto salvation.[4]

1. I John 2:3, 2. I Cor. 2:12; I John 3:14, 18-19, 21, 24; 4:13, 16; Heb. 6:11-12, 3. Rom. 8:16, 4. I John 5:13

Q 81: Are all true believers at all times assured of their present being in the estate of grace, and that they shall be saved?

A 81: Assurance of grace and salvation not being of the essence of faith,[1] true believers may wait long before they obtain it;[2] and, after the enjoyment thereof, may have it weakened and intermitted, through manifold distempers, sins, temptations, and desertions;[3] yet are they never left without such a presence and support of the Spirit of God as keeps them from sinking into utter despair.[4]

1. Eph. 1:13, 2. Isa. 50:10; Psa. ch. 88, 3. Psa. 22:1; 31:22; 51:8, 12; 77:1-12; Song of Sol. 5:2-3, 6, 4. I John 3:9; Job 13:15; Psa. 73:15, 23; Isa. 54:7-10

Westminster Shorter Catechism

Q. 36. What are the benefits which in this life do accompany or flow from justification, adoption and sanctification?

A. The benefits which in this life do accompany or flow from justification, adoption and sanctification, are, assurance of God's love, peace of conscience, joy in the Holy Ghost, increase of grace, and perseverance therein to the end.

Selected Scripture Passages:

- Jeremiah 32:40 *I will make with them an everlasting covenant, that I will not turn away from doing good to them. And I will put the fear of me in their hearts, that they may not turn from me. (ESV)*
- Matthew 18:12–14 *What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray? [13] And if he finds it, truly, I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that never went astray. [14] So it is not the will of my Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish. (ESV)*
- John 3:16 *“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. (ESV)*
- John 3:36 *Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him. (ESV)*
- John 10:27–30 *My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. [28] I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. [29] My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. [30] I and the Father are one.” (ESV)*
- Romans 8:35–39 *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? [36] As it is written, “For your sake we are being killed all the day*

long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.” [37] No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. [38] For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, [39] nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (ESV)

- Ephesians 1:11–14 *In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, [12] so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. [13] In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, [14] who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory. (ESV)*
- Philippians 1:6 *And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. (ESV)*
- Colossians 3:3–4 *For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. [4] When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. (ESV)*
- 1 Thessalonians 5:23–24 *Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. [24] He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it. (ESV)*
- 1 Peter 1:3–5 *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, [4] to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, [5] who by God’s power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. (ESV)*
- Jude 24–25 *Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, [25] to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen. (ESV)*

Simply Put Podcast: Perseverance of the Saints (Transcript): Full disclosure I may not be the best equipped to talk about perseverance. I have an unfortunate habit of ordering books and never getting around to reading them. And then I order more books before I’ve started reading the books I ordered previously. And sometimes, even when I do start reading them, I don’t make it to the end. But thankfully, the kind of perseverance we’re talking about today is more about God’s perseverance than ours. It’s the biblical doctrine known as “perseverance” or “the perseverance of the saints.” It’s the idea that once a person is saved, they cannot fall away finally from that salvation.

In the opening lines of Paul’s letter to the believers in Philippi, he says: I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. In other words, what God starts, He finishes. People who are saved cannot lose their salvation. It is possible for true believers to fall into grievous sin and even to walk away for a time. But the salvation of all those whom God has truly regenerated and united to Christ will be brought to completion. No one, not even ourselves, can snatch us out of the hand of God if we belong to Him.

But of course, for that to be any comfort, you’d need to know that you are in fact saved in the first place. And dangerously, when some of us hear the phrase “once saved, always saved,” we think it means “because I once prayed a prayer or once went to the front at a meeting, then regardless of how I live in the meantime, I’ll always be saved.”

That is categorically not what the Bible teaches, and if you're resting in that idea, please don't. First Corinthians chapter 15, verse 2 is clear: You are being saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you.

Jesus says something similar in Mark chapter 13: You will be hated by all because for my name's sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. We have to endure in "holding fast" to Christ in order to be saved. That means more than just paying lip service to Him; it means obeying Him. The Apostle John puts it like this: By this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. Whoever says "I know him" but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him.

Now that doesn't mean that only people who perfectly obey all His commands all the time are true believers. Even the true believer will be engaged in an ongoing wrestling match with sin. But the wrestling is the point. If a person isn't interested in wrestling with their sin, and wrestling to the very end, then it's questionable whether that person is a believer at all. They would have no grounds to confidently say, "He who began a good work in me will carry it on to completion," because it's not clear that God has begun a good work in them at all.

Some have pointed to Hebrews chapter 6 as a challenge to this idea that true believers cannot lose their salvation. Hebrews says this: It is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance.

So is Scripture here talking about believers who lose their salvation? Jesus' parable of the soils in Mark chapter 4 sheds some light on the situation. There are people, says Jesus, who immediately receive God's word with joy. They look just like genuine believers. They endure—for a while. But when they face opposition for what they believe, they fall away. Those people seem to be the ones that the author of Hebrews has in mind.

It's also important to say that the reference to "sharing in the Holy Spirit" doesn't mean that these people who fall away had previously been regenerated by the Spirit, as happens to all true believers. The Greek phrase means literally that they "have become [merely] companions of the Holy Spirit." In other words, they've witnessed the power of the Holy Spirit in the church and have perhaps even done apparently miraculous things themselves. But the Spirit hasn't indwelt them the way He does the believer. And sooner or later, they walk away.

First John speaks of the same kinds of people when it says: They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. To put it another way, if their faith had been genuine, they would have stuck around. But they didn't. Or we might put it like this: If you have faith, you will never lose it. If you "have it" and then lose it, you never really had it. Saving faith is not the kind of thing you can lose, because what God starts, He finishes.

The truth that God finishes what He starts ought to be a great encouragement to those who love and seek to obey Christ. It is a sweet thing to understand, in the thick of suffering or persecution, or even in battling personal sin, that none of it can rob you of your salvation. To know, as Jesus says in John chapter 10, that "no one is able to snatch [you] out of the Father's hand"—that has the power to replace our anxiety with the deepest assurance. As the Bible tells us, God the Father really is "able to keep you from stumbling and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy." "He who calls you is faithful, [and] he will surely do it."