

Perseverance Of The Saints

Introduction. Many sincere religious people believe that once a sinner has been redeemed by Christ, it is impossible for him to so sin as to fall from the grace of God and be eternally lost. Anyone who accepts Calvinism can understand why "once saved, always saved" is a necessary conclusion to the doctrines of Total Depravity, Unconditional Election, Limited Atonement, and Irresistible Grace. If salvation comes solely by God's election, then it is necessary to conclude that the same individual who is helpless to save himself would also be helpless to refuse God's election and so live as to be lost.

However, many religious people who espouse the doctrine of "once saved, always saved" do not believe the basic premise of Calvinism which claims man does not have the ability to choose good or evil. These people will agree that God is no respecter of persons and has given man a free will, yet they hold to the doctrine of perseverance which has roots in a system of theology that denies the truth of God's plan of election.

I. ***Perseverance Of The Saints Explained By Calvinists***

- A. God's elect are not only given faith but are kept in faith. Steele and Thomas, in *The Five Points Of Calvinism*, write, "The elect are not only redeemed by Christ and renewed by the Spirit: they are also kept in faith by the almighty power of God. All those who are spiritually united to Christ through regeneration are eternally secure in Him. Nothing can separate them from the eternal and unchangeable love of God. They have been predestined unto eternal glory and are therefore assured of heaven."
- B. Those who profess faith and then fall away were never in grace. "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 who are 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 fall away, but they do not fall from grace for they were never 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" (ibid.).

II. ***Proof Texts Examined***

- A. Before we list these passages, we wish to point out that the Bible teaches the security of the believer, and we need to draw much comfort and assurance from this fact. But the Bible also teaches that a believer may become an unbeliever, that the obedient can become dis-

obedient. The saint may voluntarily renounce the gospel and forsake Christ.

1. Ephesians 4:30 -- We are sealed with the Holy Spirit, but does this mean sealed indefinitely?
 2. John 10:28-29 -- No one can pluck the saved out of God's hand.
 3. 1 Peter 1:5 -- Apostasy would not be caused by a lack of God's power.
 4. Romans 8:35-39 -- Apostasy would not be due to any failure on God's part.
- B. Our disagreement is not over whether God is able to do what He promised. The question is, "Can a believer choose to quit obeying God and thereby cease believing?" The Calvinist denies man's ability to make such a choice, but his conclusions make God a respecter of persons (Acts 10:34-35; Romans 2:11). This denigrates man's will to the level of a robot.
- C. Man is a free moral agent who can choose to believe or to reject, and so long as he lives in the flesh man can change his spiritual condition and eternal destiny (Ezekiel 18:20-24).

III. ***The Possibility Of Apostasy***

- A. The case of Adam and Eve.
1. Adam was the son of God (Luke 3:38). He was made in the image of God (Genesis 1:26).
 2. Adam was uncorrupted by sin. Yet he was no more able to resist temptation than the one who, according to Calvinism, is totally depraved.
 3. It is not enough to evade the force of these Scriptures by saying that Adam and Eve were children by creation, but Christians are children by adoption. The same warning is given to us (2 Corinthians 11:3).
- B. When the righteous turns away (Ezekiel 18:26; 33:18).
- C. If you forsake God, He will forsake you (2 Chronicles 15:2).
- D. If you forsake Him, He will cast you off forever (1 Chronicles 28:9).
- E. The Lord departed from Saul.
1. God chooses Saul (1 Samuel 10:24).
 2. The Lord anoints him (vs. 1).
 3. He was turned into another man (vs. 6).
 4. God was with him (vs. 7).
 5. God gave him another heart (vs. 9).
 6. The Spirit of the Lord came upon him (vs. 10).
 7. Saul said, "I have sinned" (1 Samuel 15:24).
 8. The Lord departed from him and became his enemy (1 Samuel 28:16).

9. Saul kills himself (1 Samuel 31:4-6).
- F. The example of the nation of Israel.
1. My people (Exodus 3:7).
 2. People of the inheritance (Deuteronomy 4:20).
 3. Children of God (Deuteronomy 14:1).
 4. A holy people (vs. 2).
 5. God favored them (Romans 9:4).
 6. The Lord warned them (Deuteronomy 11:26-28).
 7. A remnant will be saved (Romans 9:27).
 8. Natural branches broken off (Romans 11:21-22).
 9. Christians can fall after same example of unbelief (Hebrews 4:11).
 10. These things written for our admonition (1 Corinthians 10:11).
- G. Faith and unbelief.
1. Faith was overthrown (2 Timothy 2:18).
 2. Cast off faith (1 Timothy 5:12).
 3. Depart from the faith (1 Timothy 4:1).
 4. Have made shipwreck of faith (1 Timothy 1:19).
- H. The crown at the end.
1. If you hold fast in memory (1 Corinthians 15:2).
 2. If you hold fast unto the end (Hebrews 3:6, 3, 14).
 3. If you continue in the faith (Colossians 1:23).
 4. The end of your faith is the salvation of your souls (1 Peter 1:9).
 5. Be faithful unto death (Revelation 2:10).
- I. Warnings to Christians.
1. A falling away first (2 Thessalonians 2:3).
 2. Come short of the grace of God (Hebrews 12:15).
 3. Some blind and forgetful (2 Peter 1:9).
 4. Give diligence (2 Peter 1:10).
 5. Found of Him in peace (2 Peter 3:14).
 6. Being led away (2 Peter 3:17).
 7. Fallen from grace (Galatians 5:4).
 8. Save a soul from death (James 5:19-20).
 9. Turned aside after Satan (1 Timothy 5:15).
 10. Weak brother perish (1 Corinthians 8:11).
 11. Forsaken the right way (2 Peter 2:14-15).
 12. Latter end worse than beginning (2 Peter 2:20).
 13. Better not to have known the way (2 Peter 2:21).
 14. Your adversary the devil (1 Peter 5:8).
 15. Lest I should be cast away (1 Corinthians 9:27).
 16. Abide not in me, cast forth as a branch (John 15:1-6).
 17. Impossible to renew them again (Hebrews 6:4-6).
 18. God will take away his part (Revelation 22:19; 20:15).
 19. Watch therefore (Matthew 25:13).

- J. Individuals who turned away.
1. Simon (Acts 8:12-24).
 2. Demas (2 Timothy 4:10; cf. Colossians 4:14; Philemon 24; 1 John 2:15).
 3. Hymenaeus and Alexander (1 Timothy 1:19-20).
 4. Judas was called to be an apostle (Matthew 10:1); ordained to be with Christ (Mark 3:14); sent out to preach with the power to cast out demons (Mark 3:14-15). God gave him to Christ (John 17:12). None of them are lost but the son of perdition.
 5. It is true that some may fall away who were never sincerely committed as believers. They may have followed for family or social reasons instead of conviction (1 John 2:19). But the examples listed above do not fall into this category. It is quite a sobering and serious indictment to say that all who have fallen away were "pretenders." The advocates of once saved, always saved need to find a better argument than this.
- K. Churches who were in danger.
1. Ephesus (Revelation 2:1-7).
 2. Laodicea (Revelation 3:14-18).

Conclusion. As we conclude our studies in Calvinism, consider this illustration to help understand how man can act with a free will of choice and still serve under the reign of our sovereign God.

A famous department store advertises its plan for giving away \$1,000. A certificate appears in the newspaper stating that on the following Monday they would sound a trumpet at a particular moment of the management's choosing, and all who were in the store who also possessed a copy of the certificate would be given \$1,000. The certificate would serve as the store's assurance (earnest) this plan would be fulfilled. What would you do?

Having "heard" their offer, would you go? Having "believed" would you take the certificate with you and obey all the instructions (Ephesians 1:13)? Would the \$1,000 be earned by meritorious "works" or be given by "grace" (Ephesians 2:8-10)? Was the plan chosen or were specific individuals "elected," "predestinated," or "chosen" by the management? In other words, did the individuals who collected the money receive it because they were specifically chosen before the reward because they complied with the conditions (plan) which had been "chosen" (Ephesians 1:3-14)? Would you have any right to claim the \$1,000 if you did not follow the instructions? Even if you believed (mentally agreed with) the advertisement (Mark 16:16; John 12:42-43)? What if you went to the store with the certificate in hand but left before the trumpet sounded? Could you still claim the \$1,000 (Hebrews 3:12-14)?

The obvious answers to these questions should help us in understanding God's scheme of redemption. He is sovereign. By grace He extends salvation to all men. Just as the store's conditions of reward were predetermined and could not be altered by the public, likewise God has chosen the plan of salvation through Christ. However, God allows man to be a free moral agent, and whether we are saved or lost will be determined by our response of faith.