

they'll never lose that pardon. Once joined to Christ by living faith, that union shall never be broken. In a word, every man, woman, and child on earth that receives saving grace shall sooner or later receive eternal glory. Every soul that is once justified and washed in the blood of Christ shall at last be found safe at Christ's right hand. This is the perseverance of *the saints*, the security of *the sheep*.

Perseverance has nothing to do with the *ungodly* and *worldly*. Except they repent, they shall perish. *Hypocrites* and *false professors* have nothing to do with this precious truth, either. It doesn't belong to the many unhappy souls whose religion consists in talk and words, who merely have a "form of godliness" (2 Tim 3:5). Christ said of these, "They honor me with their lips, but their heart is far from me" (Matt 15:8). Except they repent of their empty, religious professions, and truly surrender to Christ as Lord, Master, and King, they'll perish.

Perseverance is the peculiar privilege of true, spiritual Christians. It belongs to the sheep of Christ who hear His voice and follow Him. It belongs to those who are washed, justified, and sanctified. It belongs to those who repent and believe in Christ, and live godly lives. It belongs to those who have been born again and made new creatures. It belongs to those who are of a broken and contrite heart, and bring forth the fruit of the Spirit. It belongs to the elect of God, who cry unto Him night and day. It belongs to those who know the Lord Jesus by experience, and have faith, hope, and love. It belongs to those who are fruit-bearing branches of the vine. These are they whom the Bible calls saints. And it is the saints, and the saints alone, of whom it is written, "They shall never perish."

Now, while the Bible says that true believers shall persevere to the end, it does not say that they shall *never fall into sin*. They may sadly and shamefully to their own deep and bitter sorrow fail the Lord. Noah fell into drunkenness. David committed horrible adultery. Solomon lost his first love and was led away by his many wives. Hezekiah forgot God and boasted of his riches. Peter denied his Lord three times with an oath.

These are proofs that Christians may fall. But God's true children shall never fall totally,

finally, and completely away. They'll always rise again from their fall through repentance, and renew their walk with God. They may be overtaken by a fault and carried away by temptation, but they'll never lose God's grace. They may lose the *comfort* of grace, but they'll never lose the *being* of grace. Like the moon under an eclipse, their light for a season may be turned into darkness. Like trees in winter that look totally barren, it's only for a short season, the life is in the roots.

Another thing, too, perseverance does not mean that God's people will have *no doubts and fears* about their safety in Christ. They see so much weakness in their own hearts, and find their practice falls so short of their desires, they often doubt their own interest in Christ. True believers often say with David, "I shall one day perish at the hands of Saul" (1 Sam 27:1). To *be safe* is one thing; to *feel safe* is quite another.

Nor is *full assurance* necessary to salvation. The absence of it is no argument against a man's perseverance to the end. That master of theology, John Bunyan, knew well what he wrote in *Pilgrim's Progress* when he told us that "Despondency" and "Much-afraid" got safe to the Celestial City at last, as well as "Mr. Valiant-for-the-truth." It is as true of the most doubting child of God, as it is of the strongest—"They shall never perish."

Something else, too, the doctrine of perseverance does not free believers from the necessity of *watching, praying, reading God's Word, and using every means of grace*; for it is by the use of such means that God enables them to continue in the faith. Those who ignore these means that God has appointed for our growth in grace only prove that they have no grace at all!

And don't say that this doctrine of perseverance has a tendency to encourage careless and ungodly living. Such a charge is utterly void of the truth! Perseverance has nothing to do with those who live in willful sin, however high their profession may be. They're deceived. They have none of the marks of God's elect. Scriptural perseverance is not that of *sinner*s, but of *saint*s. It is not a perseverance in carnal and ungodly ways, but a perseverance in the way of faith, grace, and holiness.

Show me a man that deliberately lives an unholy life and yet boasts that he is converted and shall "never perish," and I'll show you a man that's deceived and bound for the pit.

The Scriptural Grounds for the Doctrine of Perseverance

The Bible is the only test by which the truth of every doctrine can be tried. One plain verse of Scripture outweighs the most logical conclusion of human reason.

As we view these texts that prove that the saints will perseverance, consider how deep and broad is the foundation on which this doctrine rests. It is not due to any strength or goodness of their own that the saints will continue to the end, and never fall away. They are in themselves weak, and frail, and liable to fall like others. Their safety is based on the promises of God which can never be broken, on the election of God which cannot be in vain, and on the intercession of Christ which cannot be overthrown. What does God's Word say?

- "I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father which gave them me, is greater than all, and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand" (John 10:28-29).
- "I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever" (John 6:51).
- "Whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die" (John 11:26).
- "By one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified" (Heb 10:14).
- "Sin shall not have dominion over you" (Rom 6:14).
- "Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life" (John 5:24).
- "Who shall also confirm you to the end, that ye may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor 1:8).
- "Kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time" (1 Peter 1:5).
- "Preserved in Jesus Christ, and called" (Jude 1).
- "He is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them" (Heb 7:25).
- "The Lord shall deliver me from every evil

work and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom" (2 Tim 4:18).

- "I pray God your whole spirit, and soul, and body, be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it" (1 Thess 5:23-24).
- "The Lord is faithful, who shall stablish you, and keep you from evil" (2 Thess 3:3).
- "This is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day" (John 6:39).
- "The foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his" (2 Tim 2:19).
- "Whom he did predestinate, them he also called; and whom he called, them he also justified; and whom he justified, them he also glorified" (Rom 8:30).
- "God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation" (2 Thess 2:13).
- "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, for thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom 8:35-39).
- "The vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory" (Rom 9:23).
- "The gifts and calling of God are without repentance" (Rom 11:29).
- "Able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy" (Jude 24).
- "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day" (2 Tim 1:12).
- "Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil 1:6).
- "The Holy Spirit of God whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption" (Eph 4:30; see 1:13-14).
- "He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee" (Heb 13:5). [See also: Matt 24:24; Luke 12:32; 22:32; John 14:17,19; 17:9,11,15,24; Rom 5:10; 1 Thess 5:9; 1 Cor 10:13; Heb 6:17-18; 1 Peter 1:23; 1 John 2:17,27.]

What an avalanche of Scriptures! The saint's perseverance is clearly taught in the Word of God.

There are other powerful points that could be raised. What about *the attributes of God*?—His power, wisdom, unchangableness, love, and honor are all involved in the perseverance of the saints. If the elect may finally perish, what becomes of the counsel of God about them from all eternity, and His mercies toward them in time?

What about *the offices of Christ*? What kind of Head would He be if He loses parts of His mystical body? What kind of Shepherd would He be if He loses some of His sheep to the wolf? What kind of Physician would He be if one of His patients should die? What kind of High Priest would He be if one of the jewels is missing from His breastplate? What kind of Husband would He be if He can't save His wife?

There is not a single example in all of Scripture that any of God's elect ever finally fell away and perished. We read of false prophets, false professors, shallow converts, and hypocrites. We read of fruitless branches, stony and thorny ground hearers, virgins without oil, servants who bury their talents. We read of Balaam and Lot's wife, Saul and Judas Iscariot, Ananias and Sapphira, and Demas, who didn't love Christ but "loved this present world" (2 Tim 4:10).

We see their hollow characters. We are told of their end. They have no root. They are rotten at heart. They endure only for a while. They go to their own place. But there is not a single instance in the whole Bible of anyone falling away who ever showed unquestionable evidences of grace. Men like Abraham, Moses, David, Peter, and Paul always hold on their way. They may slip. They may fall for a season. But they never entirely depart from God. They never perish. If the saints of God could fall away, why doesn't the Bible give us one single example of it?

While God never contradicts Himself in His Word, it needs to be understood that with every doctrine in Scripture there are *problem passages*. Such passages are to be studied in light of their context and in view of the whole of Scripture revelation. No text is to be isolated on its own.

The weakness of the position of those who deny the doctrine of perseverance is that

they have no text to prove that saints fall away which will at all compare with Christ's plain declaration, "*My sheep shall never perish.*"

Why Do So Many Reject the Doctrine of Perseverance?

Perseverance is rejected by many believers simply because it's *too strong for them*. There are a lot of Christians whose spiritual constitution is so feeble, and their spiritual digestion is so weak, that they've got to be fed with "milk"; they cannot endure "strong meat" (Heb 5:12-14).

Many deny perseverance because they have a *basic ignorance of God's whole plan of salvation* from eternity past to eternity future. Don't talk to them about election, about man's spiritual death, about imputed guilt or imputed righteousness. The various doctrines of the gospel have no definite position in their minds. They have a floating misty idea that Christ has done certain things for them, and that they ought to do certain things for Him, and if they do them it will be all right at last. But beyond this they really know nothing.

Of the great systematic gospel doctrines in the epistles of Romans, Galatians, and Hebrews, they are profoundly ignorant. To ask them to give a clear account of justification, you may as well ask them to jump to the moon. They haven't even touched the subject with the tip of their fingers. And when a man cannot tell you what it means to be justified, he cannot tell you what it means to persevere to the end.

And those who have an *incorrect view of saving faith* will reject perseverance. They see a man come forward at the close of a service and repeat a prayer after the preacher—they pronounce him "saved" and "born again." They see him get baptized, clean up his life, start reading the Bible and coming to church. Everybody's happy. He may continue a few months or a few years—but then he falls away. What happened? Well, because he did all those things, and they said he was "saved," all they can say now is, "He lost his salvation." But that's not what happened. *He never had it!* He never was savingly joined to Christ! He merely had an *appearance* of salvation. His faith was not true saving faith. Saving

faith is to be a new creature in Christ; not in the church, but in Christ. "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2 Cor 5:17).

There are plenty of people who *seemingly* once knew the Lord, but who in time show no evidence whatsoever of genuine faith in Christ. Are we to assume that these are actually saved but just carnal, or that they had salvation and lost it? No! They once had the *appearance* of salvation, but in time it proved false and spurious.

Of those two houses, one built on the sand and the other on a rock, they both looked identical from the outside. Yet when the storms and testings came equally assaulting both of them, one falls while the other stands. The same storm that revealed one of the houses had *no* foundation, revealed that the other one did (Matt 7:24-29). And the one that fell did not lose its foundation, *it never had one!* It just *appeared* to have one. Had we gone by and looked at the house, we would have assumed that it had a foundation. But the trial proved that it didn't.

In like manner, the seed that fell and sprouted up quickly on the shallow ground, which withered away just as quickly when the hot sun and wind blew upon it, didn't *lose* its root—it *never had a root!* (Matt 13:6). So the apostle says, "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us" (1 John 2:19).

A person who is truly joined to Christ will never leave, nor be cast out—"All that the Father giveth me shall come to me, and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out" (John 6:37). □

—Adapted from the writings of J.C. Ryle

"THEY SHALL NEVER PERISH"

"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: and I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish"

—John 10:27-28

There are two points that the Bible is very plain and distinct about. One of these points is the fearful danger of the ungodly; the other is the perfect safety of the righteous. The difference between the man in Christ and the man out of Christ cannot be stated too strongly or too fully.

Perhaps you are not aware what a vast store of comfortable truths the Bible contains for the benefit of real Christians. There is a spiritual treasure-house in the Word which many never enter, and some eyes never see. There you will find in glorious array the everlasting election of the saints in Christ, the special love wherewith God loved them before the foundation of the world, their mystical union with their risen Head in heaven, His perpetual intercession for them as their High Priest, their liberty of daily communion with the Father and the Son, their full assurance of hope, and their perseverance unto the end. These are some of the precious things laid up in Scripture for those who truly love God.

We want to discuss one of these special privileges of believers: *the perseverance of the saints*—the doctrine that true Christians shall never perish or be cast away.

What is Meant by the Doctrine of Perseverance?

Half of the abuse which has unhappily been poured on perseverance has arisen from a misunderstanding of the doctrine. What do we mean by perseverance? The Bible teaches that true Christians shall persevere in the faith of Christ to the end of their lives. They shall never perish; they shall never be lost; they shall never be cast away. Once in Christ, they'll always be in Christ. Once made children of God by adoption and grace, they'll never cease to be His children by becoming children of the devil. Once pardoned and forgiven,