

**THE FINAL PERSEVERANCE OF BELIEVERS
IN CHRIST JESUS**

by

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Is it possible for sincere Christians (truly regenerated persons) to be finally separated from Jesus, to lose the favor of God their Father, and be eternally shut out from His smile and home? This question is one of no small moment. It involves issues of the most momentous nature and cannot but be unspeakably interesting to every believer in Christ.

We say, with unfaltering tongue, that of all the dead, every one who was ever renewed in heart is now in heaven. Reconciliation with God on earth through Christ Jesus will, in every case, end in the everlasting salvation of the soul. When the roll of the finally saved shall be called, every one of his regenerated people will answer that call by saying, "Here am I, Lord. Thy right arm and the effectual operation of Thy Spirit and grace has done it all. Now I am to be forever happy, forever sinless, forever safe." It is hardly necessary to say that we believe this view of the case to be in entire harmony with the teaching of God's Book.

I will now direct attention to a few portions of the Divine Word that, we believe, fully establish the doctrine of the saints' final preservation and perseverance. On each of those texts my words must be few, as the time allotted to me is short.

Hear then the Holy Spirit's teaching when speaking by the prophet Samuel: "For the LORD will not forsake His people for His great name's sake, because it has pleased the Lord to make you His people" (1 Sam. 12:22). This, we think, is conclusive. What Christian does not know, and knowing, does not mourn over the untrustworthiness of his own heart? And feeling fully assured that it is impossible for him to vanquish "the world, the flesh, and the devil," how welcome to his heart is the declaration, "The LORD will not forsake His people." The Lord thought it proper to renew their hearts, to quicken them into spiritual life, and He will mercifully continue to carry on His good work in their souls till it shall be perfected in glory. The reason why "He will not forsake His people" is stated here most explicitly, just as much so as is the declaration of His unchangeable love: It is not that they were less sinful by nature or practice than others, or because of any moral qualities that were found in them, but "because it pleased the Lord to make them His people."

Hear another portion. God, speaking by his prophet Isaiah, says: "Can a woman forget her nursing child, and not have compassion on the son of her womb? Surely they may forget, yet I will not forget you. See, I have inscribed you on the palms of My hands" (Isa. 49:15,16). This we regard as a most interesting, as well as a most consolatory, portion of Scripture.

"Zion had said, the LORD has forsaken me, and my Lord has forgotten me." This was not only an error in creed, it was also a dishonorable estimate of the Divine character, and to it the Gracious One replied in those words: "Can a woman forget her nursing child, and not have compassion on the son of her womb? Surely they may forget, yet I will not forget you." The affection of a right-minded mother for her tender and helpless offspring is one of the strongest that is experienced by human beings. But, though very strong, it may, alas! give way. It is, at best, only a creature's love and therefore changeable. That love which is exercised by God toward His believing children is, like Himself, unchangeable. These words prove and were designed to prove most conclusively that the love of the Divine Father toward His adopted sons and daughters is not a fluctuating or changing thing. What other, or what lower interpretation can we put upon the words, 'YET WILL NOT I FORGET YOU?' And not forgetting them is, in this case, equivalent to His continuing to care for, to keep, and tenderly regard them.

Hear God again speaking by the same prophet: "For a mere moment have I forsaken you, but with great mercies will I gather you. In a little wrath I hid My face from you for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on you, says the LORD, your Redeemer. For this is like the waters of Noah to Me; for as I have sworn that the waters of Noah would no longer cover the earth, so have I sworn that I would not be angry with you, nor rebuke you. For the mountains shall depart and the hills be removed, but My kindness shall not depart from you, nor shall My covenant of peace be removed, says the LORD, who has mercy on you" (Isa. 54:7-10).

These words deserve to hold a prominent place among those which God has spoken for the comfort and joy of His people. Their obvious design is to sustain believers under the chastening hand of God, and to do this by considerations drawn from His own character and not from anything in themselves. Vain is it to trust or put confidence in our own false hearts. They are weak as helpless infancy. To lean on them will only be evidence of our folly and of our sin. We are not to find consolation in our gifts, in our graces, in our labors, in our resolutions, or in our experience; and by the grace of God we will not do so. But when chastised by the ever-loving and good Father, when smarting under his parental and deserved stripes, we may feast our souls on His blessed words--words that fire our souls with confidence, hope, and love. These are the words of One who is unchangeable in affection, of One who says, "For I am the LORD, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed" (Mal. 3:6).

I quote another passage: "For there shall arise," says Jesus, "false christs and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders, insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect" (Matt. 24:24). The plain and obvious meaning of this latter clause is that it is not possible to deceive, or allure to their final ruin, the adopted sons and daughters of God--those whom He has chosen to be His. Nothing less, we believe, was intended by the Gracious Speaker, and we see not how any other meaning can be consistently given to the language which He here uses. The words, "if it were possible" only say, in another form, "*It is not possible.*"

I now quote some texts that connect faith, or believing in Christ, with salvation.

"God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." (John 3:16)

"Verily, verily, I say to you, he that hears My word and believes on Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation, but is passed from death to life." (John 5:24)

"I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If any man eats of this bread, he shall live forever." (John 6:51)

"The Gospel is the power of God unto salvation to every one who believes." (Rom. 1:16)

The plain teaching of these, and many similar passages, is that every believe in Jesus *has* everlasting life. They teach this or they teach nothing. If this be not their meaning, what is? Can that which is everlasting cease to be? Can it come to an end? No words can more plainly assert than these do, that whosoever *believes* in Jesus SHALL NOT COME INTO CONDEMNATION; that all believers in him shall enjoy "everlasting life."

We take these gracious assurances as proving, to the fullest extent, the doctrine for which we plead. If the belief of the Gospel be not followed in every instance, then what did Paul mean when he said, "The Gospel is the power of God unto salvation to *every one* who believes?" If at the last day a single one be unsaved of those who had believe the Gospel, who had been united to Christ by faith in His name, then the apostle's words must needs be false; his teaching is not true. This, at least, is our opinion. No amount of adverse criticism can set aside the evidence that such verses as these support the blessed doctrine which we now defend.

Hear Christ again: "My sheep," he says, "hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give to them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone pluck them out of My hand. My Father, who gave them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to pluck them out of My Father's hand" (John 10:27-29). We regard this entire passage as one of the most delightful and consoling in the Scriptures. In teaches most unequivocally--in the plainest, strongest, and most conclusive terms--that Christ's believing ones "SHALL NEVER PERISH." No enemy, human or hellish, shall be able to wrench them out of His or His Father's covenanted and secure grasp. Infinite power, no less than infinite love (both existing in their God and Savior), stand guarantee for their security. Neither men nor demons shall be able to defeat or overturn the purpose of Divine grace concerning them! Difficulties many and sharp may surround them, and temptations fierce and fiery may assault their souls, but Divine love, wisdom, grace, and power shall be ever on their side. Jesus, the "faithful and true witness," says, "THEY SHALL NEVER PERISH."

Elsewhere He says, "Because I live, ye shall live also" (John 14:17). The spiritual life of believers is in His keeping, and He here declares that it is as secure as His own. If He dies and continues not to be their

"advocate with the Father," (1 John 2:1), their Intercessor "at the right hand of God" (Rom. 8:34), then may they die also; but not otherwise.

In perfect keeping with his Lord's words are those which Paul uses, when referring to the same subject. "For if," he says, "when we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life" (Rom. 5:10). That is, we shall be preserved in that state of reconciliation by Christ's intercessory life at God's right hand in heaven. He, the God-man, lives there as Mediator for them. He holds and exercises "all power in heaven and on earth" for the welfare and safety of His church. And they cannot die while He lives. The power that is to destroy the spiritual life of the weakest saint must first destroy the life of that saint's Head. "Their life," as the Holy Spirit by Paul elsewhere teaches, "is hid with Christ in God" (Col. 3:3). Where could our life be safer, or as safe? In whose care or keeping could it be so secure? It is "hid with Christ in God."

The Apostle goes on to say: "When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him IN GLORY." This, to say the least, is a glorious statement and declaration. Can language, we ask, go beyond that which is used in these texts to guarantee the eternal salvation of every believer in Jesus? The Head and members shall never be separated. They are bound up in an inseparable and an unchanging union.

Hear a Divine lesson given in another place: "Moreover, 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).

When it is said, "Whom He did predestinate, them He also called," we must interpret the word "called" to mean very much more than *invited*; for the Apostle goes on to say, "Whom He called, them He also justified." We know that this is only true of those who believe in Jesus--who are effectually called or drawn by the combined operations of the Word and Spirit of God into the blessed fellowship and joys of the Gospel (1 Cor. 1:9). That those, and only those, who *believe* in Christ are justified, is the uniform lesson of the Divine Word (see John 3:16,36; Acts 13:39,40; Rom. 1:16, 3:22,28).

Let it be noted that Paul affirms three things here. The first is--"Whom He did predestinate, them He also called." The second is--"Whom he called, them He also justified." And the third is--"Whom He justified, them He also glorified." What, then, does he mean by the expression "glorified?" Does he, or can he mean anything less than the enjoyment of everlasting life? We say, then, that if only one individual out of the whole number of those who have been or shall be "justified" by faith in Jesus should come short of heaven, the declaration would not be true that "Whom he justified, them He also glorified."

Hear another Divine proclamation relative to the security of God's people: "For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor power, 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. 8:38,39).

These are words of the most triumphant character, relative to the ultimate blessedness of believers in Jesus. The terms that are used here are such as leave no doubt as to what the Holy Spirit, speaking by Paul, meant to teach. We deliberately affirm that language has no power to assert the doctrine for which we contend more conclusively than is here done. Words have no meaning, nor are they of any use in communicating thought, if these words were not used by a man who believed as we do on the matter in hand. And we are entirely willing to believe or disbelieve with the Apostle Paul, neither more nor less.

I quote Paul again. Hear what he wrote to the Church at Philippi: "Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ." I well remember how greatly this passage strengthened my own soul when, in the morning of my religious life, I was passing through much mental conflict. And are not these words well calculated to comfort the hearts of those who, through grace, have believed in the Savior? Is there any room for objecting criticism here, or is there any ambiguity in the language employed? No, there is none whatever. The Apostle is "confident of this very thing." What "very thing?" Why, that wherever the Divine Spirit had commenced this "good work" of grace in the soul, He would complete it. No other power could have begun it, and no other power is competent to carry it forward to completion. That He who commences that "good work" is **able** to finish it, no professing Christian will deny. That He **will** finish it, this verse most clearly teaches. The Apostle Paul was confident of THIS VERY THING; and so are we.

Let us give attention to other words of the same sacred penman. Addressing one of the primitive churches, he says: "We are bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God has from the beginning chosen you to salvation, through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth" (2 Thes. 2:13). This is a most important portion of Scripture in relation to the question, "What is the end of election?" In what does it, or is it to terminate? What does it secure? Are its subjects merely chosen to enjoy the light of the gospel, the means of grace, and no more? Or are they chosen to enjoy, in its full measure, everlasting life, the priceless favor and blissful fellowship of God here and forever?

This question is definitely settled by the language of inspiration employed here. The Apostle declares that the choice is "to salvation," or, in other words (which he also uses in this place) "to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ." This means, of course, eternal life in heaven as well as all that precedes and prepares for it on earth. But how can this be realized? How can it be said they were "chosen to *salvation*" if they may all apostatize finally from Jesus, fall out of the Divine favor, and be forever numbered with the lost? The thing is, of course, impossible. If not *saved*--fully and forever--it would not be true to say they were chosen "to salvation."

I beg to quote one passage more. Speaking of believers, a divinely inspired teacher says: "Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation" (1 Peter 1:5). Here we are distinctly taught what the Divine

Being is doing and will continue to do for His believing people. The Apostle asserts that they are "kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation." If so, nothing is more certain than that they shall reach it and enjoy it forever. Had Peter believed that it was possible for any number of them to become outcasts from God and die in their sins, he would never have employed the language which is found here. The declaration that believers are "kept" or garrisoned in (for such is the meaning of the term here employed) "by the power of God through faith unto salvation" settles the point with us, and leaves us nothing more to desire in the shape of statement or promise. This is, indeed, a glorious declaration. Fellow pilgrims, let it fill you with the highest joy as it gives you the fullest assurance that you are safe in the grasp and guardianship of Jehovah of hosts.

We hold and teach too that the certain enjoyment of everlasting life is inseparably connected with continued faith in the Divine testimony concerning sin, Jesus, and His salvation. They shall be preserved in the exercise of faith in the Redeemer until they shall enter upon the possession of the heavenly inheritance. This is clearly taught here, and nothing less.

I have now referred to a few out of the many portions of God's word which teach the doctrine for which we contend. God's people shall be preserved and will persevere to the end, for they were given to Christ in the everlasting covenant, that covenant which is "ordered in all things and sure," the stability of which is safe as the oath, promise, and power of God can make it. He has said that He will never leave them nor forsake them (Heb. 13:2), that they shall never perish (John 10:28), and that He will confirm them unto the end (1 Cor. 1:8).

For this purpose the ever-availing intercession of Jesus is employed. He is at the right hand of God as their Brother, Representative, and Advocate. He prays for them that their faith fail not (Luke 22:32). They are, each and all, borne on His heart and pleaded for in His gracious and ever-successful intercession. "Father," says he, "I will that they also, whom thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory" (John 17:24).

Oh, what priceless joy do these words afford to the believer's heart! No weapon that is formed against them shall prosper. Their Almighty King will vanquish all their spiritual foes. He will so aid them that they shall contend victoriously against "the world, the flesh, and the devil." They shall be more than conquerors through Him who loved them (Rom. 8:37). They shall be the saved of His right arm, and the everlasting monuments and trophies of His grace, love, and power. They are "sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise which is *the earnest* of their inheritance, until the redemption of the purchased possession" (2 Cor. 1:21,22; Eph. 1:13,14). Having received the "earnest," the pledge that guarantees the fulfillment of their Heavenly Father's covenant to save them, they are perfectly and forever secure.

We build our faith in this doctrine on God's plain teaching. We extort no meaning from His word which cannot be found there by the simple and

ordinary reader of it. We take its statements in their plain grammatical sense, just as they would be interpreted by any unprejudiced expounder of language. We should be content to abide by the interpretation of them which would be given by any man, infidel or other, who felt no interest in our controversy and who was entirely careless relative to our differences of opinion. One unequivocal passage teaching this doctrine would be, or should be, sufficient to establish it and to bring our opinions into harmony with Divine teaching. But we are not confined to one, or five, or ten; we have line upon line, promise upon promise, assurance upon assurance, and declaration upon declaration to this effect, so that we would fain ask: If the doctrine be not taught in the portions of Scripture that I have quoted, what is taught in them? What is their import? What do they teach? Or, what language or terms would be thought sufficient to teach it? It is our firm conviction that no doctrine of religion is more clearly taught in the Bible than is this. It is expressed as plainly as words can possibly do it.

Are we, with these inspired declarations before us, to suppose it possible for wicked men or demons to say, when pointing to numbers of the lost, "The Most High began to build up His kingdom in their souls, but He was not able to finish it! He quickened them into spiritual life--renewed, pardoned, justified, and sanctified them--but now they are torn from His grasp. His enemies were able--contrary to the words of Jesus (John 10:21)--"to pluck them out of His hand," *and they have done it.*"

This would, indeed, make short work of many plain and positive declarations found in the Bible. It would prove, beyond doubt, that its promises and assurances and declarations are of very little value.

Let me say with the fullest emphasis possible that we believe as firmly as any man living, as firmly as we believe any truth taught in the Bible, that "without holiness no man shall see the Lord" (Heb. 12:14). We know no other evidence of being in Christ, or of being a Christian, than that which is furnished by a life and behavior becoming the Gospel. And though holiness is not the cause of God's first or continued love to His people, it is the effect and fruit of that love and a main part of the salvation which is in Christ Jesus--that salvation to which they are chosen (Eph. 1:4).

He who is satisfying himself with the notion that he is safe for eternity, while he is living in any known sin, is turning the grace of our God into licentiousness and is a deadly enemy of the Cross of Christ. The blessed doctrine which the Bible teaches, and in which we glory, is the doctrine of the *saints'* final perseverance. That doctrine was never designed to comfort any man who is not living a life of faith in the Son of God, intensely anxious to please God in all things, and to be the holy and happy subject of that mind which was in Jesus.

Very interesting, then, is the question (when asked in no wrong spirit), "Are there few that be saved?" If God does not hold up His people, if He does not keep them by His grace and power, they will be very few indeed. A child may count them, and, in fact, have none--not one--to count. But let no man charge *our* views with being "narrow" or "embracing only a few" or

contemplating the eternal salvation of "a very limited number" of our race. According to the view which we hold and teach, they will be a numberless number! We believe, and our hearts swell with high and holy joy in believing, that every child of man who loved God--every one of Adam's race who was renewed in heart, all who were ever on the Lord's side--will be found among the saved. Not one will be lost. Not one will be missed from the eternal banquet. Not one will be outside the gates of the holy city. All, all shall be there, and there forever and ever!

*The soul that on Jesus has leaned for repose,
He will not, He cannot, give up to His foes.
That soul, though all hell should endeavor to shake,
He'll never, no never, no never forsake!*