

# Perseverance of the Saints

## Two Old Questions:

- Why do some “fall away” from faith in Christ?
- Can a Christian lose his/her salvation?

Writing to the Philippians, Paul says, “He who has begun a good work in you will perfect it to the end” (Philippians 1:6). Therein is the promise of God that what He starts in our souls, He intends to finish. So the old axiom in Reformed theology about the perseverance of the saints is this: If you have it—that is, if you have genuine faith and are in a state of saving grace—you will never lose it. If you lose it, you never had it.

**R.C. Sproul**

*A Little Westminster...*

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.

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.

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.

Chapter 17  
Westminster Confession of Faith, 1646

# They Never Were

They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us. **1 John 2:19**

# Seeming to be Christian

“Lord, Lord, didn’t we do this in your name? Didn’t we do that in your name?”  
He will send them away, saying: “Depart from Me, you workers of iniquity. I never knew you” **Matthew 7:23**

# When Christians Fall

“Simon, Simon, Satan would have you and sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you, so that when you turn, strengthen the brothers” **Luke 22:31**

“Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall”

**I Corinthians 10:12**

# Eternal Salvation

“He is able to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.” **Hebrews 7:25**

# Is this really the case?

I think this little catchphrase, *perseverance of the saints*, is dangerously misleading. It suggests that the perseverance is something that we do, perhaps in and of ourselves. I believe that saints do persevere in faith, and that those who have been effectually called by God and have been reborn by the power of the Holy Spirit endure to the end...

...However, they persevere not because they are so diligent in making use of the mercies of God. The only reason we can give why any of us continue on in the faith is because we have been preserved. My confidence in my preservation is not in my ability to persevere. My confidence rests in the power of Christ to sustain me with His grace and by the power of His intercession. He is going to bring us safely home. **R.C. Sproul**

# Augustine on Perseverance

I HAVE now to consider the subject of perseverance with greater care; for in the former book also I said some things on this subject when I was discussing the beginning of faith. I assert, therefore, that the perseverance by which we persevere in Christ even to the end is the gift of God; and I call that the end by which is finished that life wherein alone there is peril of falling. Therefore it is uncertain whether any one has received this gift so long as he is still alive. For if he fall before he dies, he is, of course, said not to have persevered; and most truly is it said. How, then, should he be said to have received or to have had perseverance who has not persevered?

For if any one have continence, and fall away from that virtue and become incontinent,—or, in like manner, if he have righteousness, if patience, if even faith, and fall away, he is rightly said to have had these virtues and to have them no longer; for he was continent, or he was righteous, or he was patient, or he was believing, as long as he was so; but when he ceased to be so, he no longer is what he was.

But how should he who Has not persevered have ever been persevering, since it is only by persevering that any one shows himself persevering,— and this he has not done? But lest any one should object to this, and say, If from the time at which any one became a believer he has lived—for the sake of argument—ten years, and in the midst of them has fallen from the faith, has he not persevered for five years? I am not contending about words. If it be thought that this also should be called perseverance,

as it were for so long as it lasts, assuredly he is not to be said to have had in any degree that perseverance of which we are now discoursing, by which one perseveres in Christ even to the end. And the believer of one year, or of a period as much shorter as may be conceived of, if he has lived faithfully until he died, has rather had this perseverance than the believer of many years' standing, if a little time before his death he has fallen away from the steadfastness of his faith.

Augustine[†430]

*On the Gift of Perseverance*

# Summary of Augustine:

- Perseverance is a gift of God, and we are not certain that we/others have received this gift during our/their lives.
- Perseverance means perseverance to the very end.
- How we end this life makes all the difference.
- We cannot live in the past...

# Prayer for Perseverance

But God commanded that His saints should say to Him in prayer, "Lead us not into temptation." Whoever, therefore, is heard when he asks this, is not led into the temptation of contumacy [stubborn refusal], whereby he could or would be worthy to lose perseverance in holiness.

*Augustine, On the Gift of Perseverance*

# LET US PRAY...



Cathedral of St. Augustine, Florida