

# Reformation Theology: Perseverance of the Saints

## September 10, 2017 – Rev. Brian Hand

**Definition:** God's special redemptive grace will keep genuine converts faithful to Christ until the end.

1. Concerns God's special redemptive grace (given on to the elect for the purpose of salvation) not his common grace.
2. Distinguishes between genuine converts and false converts. **There are those who give the appearance of being converted, turning to him in faith and repentance but have not genuinely been regenerate**
3. States that these genuine converts will never lose all together their faith in Christ. **They will remain united to him even though they may go through periods of doubt or disillusionment they will remain unto glory**
4. The reason they persevere in faith is because of God's special redemptive grace. **1. Not because of intrinsic virtue or natural power God's special grace is sufficient and effective to preserve them to the end.**

**\*See Westminster Confession of Faith- Chapter 17.1-3**

### Implications

1. If a person is truly converted to Christ, they will surely gain eternal life. **Romans 8:30 predestined, called, justified, glorified. Golden chain of salvation.**
2. If a person utterly renounces their faith in Christ, they were never truly converted. **Logical reverse of the previous point. Those who gain eternal life are those who persevere, if someone doesn't persevere they were never truly converted in the first place. Does not include temporary turning away such as Peter or a weakness in the face of persecution. These temporary denials are essentially a lie rather than outright apostasy.**
3. If a person perseveres in faith to the end, it is ultimately due to divine grace alone. **Connects to Sola Gratia**
  - a. Our perseverance is no ground for boasting.

b. Our perseverance depends on God's election - not the reverse. Not that God elects us because he sees that we will persevere (Arminian) Most Arminians do not have a doctrine of perseverance. Some do say that if a person falls away, they may never return.

4. No matter how hard the trials believers face in life, God's grace will sustain them. God allows, even send trials, but will not allow them to destroy a genuine believer's faith. In other words, God's grace is stronger than the trials we face. This is an important point for us. This does not mean that true believers won't face terrible trials or that becoming a Christian makes life easy.

1. Human freedom is compatible with comprehensive divine sovereignty. If God can ensure that genuine believers remain in the faith without coercing them against their will then the compatibilist version must be true. It is not that God forces believers to remain against their will. He works with their wills as they are re-created in the image of Christ.

#### **Misunderstandings:**

1. If you just pray the sinner's prayer, you'll go to heaven no matter what.

This reduces the work of salvation to a magic phrase. This is not to say we can never use this. It is not some kind of program but an actual work of conversion. Confuses the external signs of conversion with the internal reality of rebirth of the Spirit accompanied by external signs.

2. A believer can be finally saved even if they never grow in sanctification.

Comes from the idea of "carnal Christians" dispensationalists. Supposed believers who continue to live carnal fleshly lives. A person could accept Jesus as Savior without submitting him as Lord. It got you into heaven but you just didn't get certain blessings. Romans 8:30 again those called and justified are also sanctified. The special redemptive grace of God is sufficient to justify and to ultimately glorify the believer.

3. If you ever deny Christ, that shows that you were never a genuine Christian.  
**Peter is an obvious example.**

4. A Genuine Christian can never suffer severe doubts or fall into grievous sin.

**David, these things do happen and this have practical implications for how we minister to such people, how we counsel and offer comfort. Look at church discipline practice.**

5. The Christian life will be easy, because we're always sustained by God's grace.

1. Because we depend on grace we should actually expect trials, this is how God's grace is demonstrated in our lives, otherwise there is nothing to persevere through. Paul- Three times I pleaded with the Lord, My strength is made perfect in weakness.

Analogy: Mark 4 - Jesus calms the storm. They were secure, but that doesn't mean there wasn't a storm, Christ displays their security in spite of the storm.

**Scriptural Support:**

John 6:22-65 (esp. vv. 37-40, 44, 54)

whoever comes to me I will never cast out, it is the will of the Father that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me. Everyone who believes should have eternal life **and will be raised up on the last day.** Jesus loses none of those whom the father gives him, we see irresistible grace and persevering

grace. 4 times Jesus declares he will raise them up on the last day. This is a central aspect of Christ's mission and his reputation is staked on completing it.

Romans 8:28-30

If all things work for their good nothing could work in a way that would make them lost.

Romans 8:35-39

Nothing can separate us from the love of Christ. Context is still speaking of those who are elect. Without a doctrine of perseverance Paul should have added nothing except an act of your own will choosing to fall away and separate yourself. But this would be included in the "Nothing else in all creation".

1 John 2:19

1. Some leave but it is because they were not of us, if they were of us they would not have left. Apostasy happens, people make profession but turn away, it shows that they were never truly in Christ. Not that they were of us but are no longer of us, they never were.

**Additional Scriptures:** Jeremiah 32:38-40; John 3:36; John 5:24; John 10:27-30; Romans 11:29; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Philippians 1:6; 1 Peter 5:10; Jude 24-25

**Summary Argument/ Theological Basis:**

1. If God is sovereign over the ends, he must also be sovereign over the means.

- a. God is sovereign over the ends (doctrine of providence)
  - b. Therefore, God must also be sovereign over the means.
  - c. Therefore, God must have the power to ensure that his purposes do not fail.
2. God's purpose is that his chosen people will be saved (Ephesians 1:3-14).
  3. Therefore, God has the power to ensure that his chosen people will be saved.
  4. Therefore, God has the power to ensure that his chosen people will never finally fall away, but will persevere to the end in faith and good works.

**Objections:**

1. God doesn't take away our free will after we're born again.

A. Implies that God has to take away free will if it will be that we can't turn away. Assumes an incompatibilist view and that this would mean becoming a Christian means we have less freedom. The freedom that we have gained is freedom from sin and death. But we become slaves to Christ. We are free to do good.

2. Hebrews 6:4-6 makes clear that some people can permanently fall away.

A. Everything said here could be describing false converts, nothing implies regeneration. Tasting, experienced the blessings in some respects, participated in the life of the church but doesn't imply a decisive and permanent change. John Owen- they tasted but didn't swallow. Most difficult is shared in the Holy Spirit. Saul, would be an example, as would Judas. These would have

experienced the common operation of the Spirit, a work of the Spirit that is gracious but limited and temporary. We may see them “clean up their lives a bit, be involved, but not rebirth.

Some take a position in which these warnings function as a sort of means that God uses to keep the elect. They are addressed to professing Christians (Elect and unelect) they are a means that produces preservation in the elect in the same way that warning signs near the edge of a cliff. Even if no one has fallen and died, it doesn't mean that the signs were pointless.

One of the issues we may experience is that the doctrine of assurance doesn't function in the same way for other people as it does for us, in other words, while we may have assurance of the Spirit working in us and be encouraged, we don't have the same level of certainty of the work of God in others. For example, if you come to me and say I am concerned when I read this verse that I may have committed such a deep sin, I have doubts and am worried that I may have fallen away, then I would say that the very concern and desire to repent and be restored is evidence that you have not ultimately fallen away in some irrevocable way.

If however you came to me and told me of a friend or a child that you were concerned about these things, I couldn't have the same confidence in pointing you to assurance and the perseverance of the Saints. In other words, if this is your child and they have tasted the grace of God by growing up in your home, by being a part of the church community, etc. and they are currently not living for the Lord then I wouldn't immediately point you to the doctrine of perseverance and say don't worry about it, I would have more questions.

3.The doctrine of perseverance encourages complacency and antinomianism.

This is where there can be a misunderstanding when people simplify this doctrine to once saved always saved. When we talk about perseverance of the Saints we are saying that the same special redemptive grace which saves or converts is the same special redemptive grace of God which sanctifies, causes growth in the Christian life and the same grace that keeps them to the end. Not that anyone who comes forward in an alter call can never fall away.

4.The doctrine of perseverance minimizes the many warning passages.

The warnings are one of the ways in which God preserves his people. Because they have a genuine fear of the Lord the warnings help to keep them

**Importance to the Christian Life**

- PS exalts the sovereignty of God in all things.

Sovereign over the ends and the means. God has the power to bring his sheep safely home.

- PS reassures us that God's redemptive purposes never fail.

When a sinner comes to the Son for salvation they receive salvation and it is impossible for the Son to ever lose those the Father has given him.

- PS reinforces the gospel truth that we are saved by grace from start to finish.

Again, no boasting. Why is this practical? It says a lot about how we practice our going, how we look at other sinners and how we interact with the non-Christian world. If you are saved by grace, sanctified by grace, and persevere by grace, then you have much cause to be thankful, to worship and praise the Lord for that grace. But you have no reason, no cause to boast before God or to look down on another sinner who may not be where you are.

- PS implies that genuine saving faith in Christ will be evidenced by a transformed life.

A. God's special redemptive grace is effective, secures conversion, sanctification, perseverance, and glorification. If there is no transformation, the two options are that God's purpose failed or that person was never truly converted.



- PS means that it makes good sense to pray for Christians who are struggling with their faith.

An encouragement to pray for one another, to do so specifically. If we said it makes sense to pray for conversion of unbelievers by name then it makes equally good sense to pray for each other to persevere in times of trial, difficulty, and doubt. In such prayers we are praying for the special redemptive grace of God to be active in another's life. And we pray for such things because God is sovereign over all things. If God's sovereignty were limited by some kind of absolute libertarian freedom of the human will, then it would not make sense to pray for these things. But because God is sovereign, because his grace is efficacious, accomplishing all he intends, then praying this way is one of the most sensible things to do. Also an encouragement to ask for prayer

- PS offers a sure foundation for our assurance of salvation.

Without a doctrine of perseverance there can be no basis for a doctrine of assurance. We need a connection between your faith today and your faith tomorrow. We need Romans 8:30. Just thinking through this, if the power that libertarian free will gives you is the power to overthrow God's work in salvation then that is a power I don't want.

- PS implies that we should strive to make our calling and election sure (2 Peter 1:3-11).
  - A. This means that the Christian life is active, not passive. This is not, let go and let God. This persevering grace works through us not in spite of us or instead of us. Our trials and struggles are part of the means by which we

are shaped into the image of Christ and brought to glory. The striving is part of the means. It is also the assurance that these strivings are part of the grace of God working through us and will ultimately be successful even when they don't appear to be so in the immediate sense.