

John Piper on Perseverance of the Saints

It follows from what was just said that the people of God WILL persevere to the end and not be lost. The foreknown are predestined, the predestined are called, the called are justified, and the justified are glorified. No one is lost from this group. To belong to this people is to be eternally secure.

But we mean more than this by the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints. We mean that the saints will and must persevere in the obedience which comes from faith. Election is unconditional, but glorification is not. There are many warnings in Scripture that those who do not hold fast to Christ can be lost in the end.

The following seven theses summarize our understanding of this crucial doctrine.

Our faith must endure to the end if we are to be saved.

This means that the ministry of the word is God's instrument in the preservation of faith as well as the begetting of faith. We do not breathe easy after a person has prayed to receive Christ, as though we can be assured from our perspective that they are now beyond the reach of the evil one. There is a fight of faith to be fought. We must endure to the end in faith if we are to be saved.

1 Corinthians 15:1,2, "Now I would remind you, brethren, in what terms I preached to you the gospel, which you received, in which you stand, by which you are saved, if you hold it fast-- unless you believed in vain."

Colossians 1:21-23 [Open in Logos Bible Software (if available)] , "And you, who once were estranged and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before him, provided that you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel..."

2 Timothy 2:11,12, "The saying is sure: If we have died with him, we shall also live with him; if we endure, we shall also reign with him..."

Mark 13:13 [Open in Logos Bible Software (if available)] , "But he who endures to the end will be saved."

See also Revelation 2:7 [Open in Logos Bible Software (if available)] , 10,11,17,25,26; 3:5,11,12,21.

Obedience, evidencing inner renewal from God, is necessary for final salvation.

This is not to say that God demands perfection. It is clear from Philippians 3:12,13 and 1 John 1:8-10 [Open in Logos Bible Software (if available)] and Matthew 6:12 that the New Testament does not hold out the demand that we be sinlessly perfect in order to be saved. But the New Testament does demand that we be morally changed and walk in newness of life.

Hebrews 12:14 [Open in Logos Bible Software (if available)] , "Strive for peace with all men, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord."

Romans 8:13, "If you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live."

Galatians 5:19-21, "Now the works of the flesh are plain: immorality, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things shall not enter the kingdom of God." (See also Ephesians 5:5 [Open in Logos Bible Software (if available)] and 1 Corinthians 6:10.)

1 John 2:3-6 [Open in Logos Bible Software (if available)] , "And by this we may be sure that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He who says, 'I know him' but disobeys his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him; but whoever keeps his word, in him truly love for God is perfected. By this we may be sure that we are in him: he who says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked." (See also 1 John 3:4-10 [Open in Logos Bible Software (if available)] , 14 [Open in Logos Bible Software (if available)] ; 4:20 [Open in Logos Bible Software (if available)] .)

John 8:31 [Open in Logos Bible Software (if available)] , "Jesus then said to the Jews who had believed in him, 'If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples.'" (See also Luke 10:28 [Open in Logos Bible Software (if available)] ; Matthew 6:14 [Open in Logos Bible Software (if available)] , 15 [Open in Logos Bible Software (if available)] ; 18:35 [Open in Logos Bible Software (if available)] ; Genesis 18:19 [Open in Logos Bible Software (if available)] ; 22:16-17 [Open in Logos Bible Software (if available)] ; 26:4-5 [Open in Logos Bible Software (if available)] ; 2 Timothy 2:19 [Open in Logos Bible Software (if available)] .)

God's elect cannot be lost.

This is why we believe in eternal security--namely, the eternal security of the elect. the implication is that God will so work that those whom he has chosen for eternal salvation will be enabled by him to persevere in faith to the end and fulfill, by the power of the Holy Spirit, the requirements for obedience.

Romans 8:28-30 [Open in Logos Bible Software (if available)] , "We know that in everything God

works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his propose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified." What is evident from this passage is that those who are effectually called into the hope of salvation will indeed persevere to the end and be glorified.

John 10:26-30 [Open in Logos Bible Software (if available)] , "You do not believe, because you do not belong to my sheep. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me; and I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of my Father's hand. I and the Father are one." (See also Ephesians 1:4-5 [Open in Logos Bible Software (if available)] .)

There is a falling away of some believers, but if it persists, it shows that their faith was not genuine and they were not born of God.

1 John 2:19 [Open in Logos Bible Software (if available)] , "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out, that it might be made plain that they all are not of us." Similarly, the parable of the four soils as interpreted in Luke 8:9 [Open in Logos Bible Software (if available)] -14 pictures people who "hear the word, receive it with joy; but these have no root, they believe for a while and in a time of temptation fall away."

The fact that such a thing is possible is precisely why the ministry of the Word in every local church must contain many admonitions to the church members to persevere in faith and not be entangled in those things which could possibly strangle them and result in their condemnation.

God justifies us on the first genuine act of saving faith, but in doing so he has a view to all subsequent acts of faith contained, as it were, like a seed in that first act.

What we are trying to do here is own up to the teaching of Romans 5:1, for example, that teaches that we are already justified before God. God does not wait to the end of our lives in order to declare us righteous. In fact, we would not be able to have the assurance and freedom in order to live out the radical demands of Christ unless we could be confident that because of our faith we already stand righteous before him.

Nevertheless, we must also own up to the fact that our final salvation is made contingent upon the subsequent obedience which comes from faith. The way these two truths fit together is that we are justified through our first act of faith because God sees in it (like he can see the tree in an acorn) the embryo of a life of faith. This is why those who do not lead a life of faith with its inevitable fruit of obedience simply bear witness to the fact that their first act of faith was not genuine.

The textual support for this is that Romans 4:3 [Open in Logos Bible Software (if available)] cites Genesis 15:6 [Open in Logos Bible Software (if available)] as the point where Abraham was justified by God. This is a reference to an act of faith early in Abraham's career. Romans 4:19-22, however, refers to an experience of Abraham many years later (when he was 100 years old, see Genesis 21:5 [Open in Logos Bible Software (if available)] , 12) and says that because of the faith of this experience Abraham was reckoned righteous. In other words, it seems that the faith which justified Abraham is not merely his first act of faith but the faith which gave rise to acts of obedience later in his life. (The same thing could be shown from James 2:21-24 [Open in Logos Bible Software (if available)] in its reference to a still later act in Abraham's life, namely, the offering of his son, Isaac, in Genesis 22.) The way we put together these crucial threads of biblical truth is by saying that we are indeed justified through our first act of faith but not without reference to all the subsequent acts of faith which give rise to the obedience that God demands. Faith alone is the instrument (not ground or basis) of our justification because God makes it his sole means of uniting us to Christ in whom we "become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:21 [Open in Logos Bible Software (if available)]).

God works to cause his elect to persevere.

We are not left to ourselves and our assurance is very largely rooted in the sovereign love of God to perform that which he has called us to do. 1 Peter 1:5, "By God's power we are guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time." Jude 24 [Open in Logos Bible Software (if available)] ,25 [Open in Logos Bible Software (if available)] , "Now to him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you without blemish before the presence of his glory with rejoicing, to the only God, our Savior through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen."

1 Thessalonians 5:23-24 [Open in Logos Bible Software (if available)] , "May the God of peace himself sanctify you wholly; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful, and he will do it."

Philippians 1:6 [Open in Logos Bible Software (if available)] , "And I am sure that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ."

1 Corinthians 1:8-9, "Jesus Christ will sustain you to the end; guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord."

Therefore we should be zealous to make our calling and election sure.

2 Peter 1:10 [Open in Logos Bible Software (if available)] , "Therefore, brethren, be the more

zealous to confirm your call and election, for if you do this you will never fall; so there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ."

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