

DOCTRINE MATTERS: ESSENTIAL TRUTHS OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH

Message 21: Perseverance of the Saints

Conversion is a turning into the right road; the next thing is to walk in it. The daily going on in that road is as essential as the first starting if you would reach the desired end. To strike the first blow is not all the battle; to him that overcometh the crown is promised. To start in the race is nothing, many have done that who have failed; but to hold out till you reach the winning post is the great point of the matter. Perseverance is as necessary to a man's salvation as conversion.

- Charles Spurgeon

The doctrine of **perseverance of the saints**:

Those who are truly born again will be kept by God's power and will persevere as Christians until the end of their lives, and that only those who persevere until the end have been truly born again.

- Wayne Grudem, *Bible Doctrine: Essential Teachings of the Christian Faith*

The great **tension** ...

The **warning** passages:

Hebrews 2:1-4 (ESV)

¹ Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. ² For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable, and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, ³ how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard, ⁴ while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.

Hebrews 3:12-14 (ESV)

¹² Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God.

¹³ But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. ¹⁴ For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end.

Hebrews 6:4-12 (ESV)

⁴ For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, ⁵ and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, ⁶ and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt. ⁷ For land that has drunk the rain that often falls on it, and produces a crop useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God. ⁸ But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed, and its end is to be burned. ⁹ Though we speak in this way, yet in your case, beloved, we feel sure of better things—things that belong to salvation. ¹⁰ For God is not unjust so as to overlook your work and the love that you have shown for his name in serving the saints, as you still do. ¹¹ And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end, ¹² so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

Hebrews 10:26-27 (ESV)

²⁶ For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, ²⁷ but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries.

Hebrews 10:35-39 (ESV)

³⁵ Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. ³⁶ For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised. ³⁷ For, "Yet a little while, and the coming one will come and will not delay; ³⁸ but my righteous one shall live by faith, and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him." ³⁹ But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls.

The assurance passages:

Philippians 1:6 (ESV)

⁶ And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

Romans 8:28-39 (ESV)

²⁸ And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. ²⁹ 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 brothers. ³⁰ And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified. ³¹ What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³² He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? ³³ Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. ³⁴ Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. ³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? ³⁶ As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered." ³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

John 10:27-30 (ESV)

²⁷ My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. ²⁹ My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. ³⁰ I and the Father are one."

5 Views:

The Loss of Salvation View

John Wesley, Dale Moody

The warnings are addressed to believers and believers can and do abandon their salvation.

In this view, apostasy is a deliberate and willful rejection of the Christian faith.

The 'chain' of salvation in Romans 8 may be broken by the believer.

Other texts: 1 Cor 10:12, 2 Cor 13:5, Gal 4:8-11, 1 Tim 1:19, 2 Tim 4:10

The Loss of Reward View

Charles Stanley, R.T. Kendall, Zane Hodges

The warning passages address believers but speak either to the loss of rewards or the failure to enjoy a fruitful and happy Christian life.

Interprets the "kingdom of God" passages as meaning the extent that God rules in our hearts in the present world.

We receive rewards based on our works, but that is separate from salvation.

This view makes a distinction between conversion and discipleship.

Other texts: Eph 2:8-10, Gal 6:7-8

The Test of Genuineness View

S. Lewis Johnson, John Owen, Wayne Grudem

Perseverance and good works are present in true salvation.

Perseverance reflects the genuineness of faith exercised at the inception of a believer's new life.

The warnings in scripture are viewed as tests by which one can discern whether or not he is a genuine believer.

The warnings are totally *retrospective*.

Hebrews 6:4-5 is disconnected from salvation.

Those who have fallen away were never believers in the first place.

Other texts: 1 John 2:19, Matt 24:13, Col 1:21-23

The Hypothetical Loss of Salvation View

B.F. Westcott

Believers who fail to persevere will not be saved.

It is impossible for believers to commit apostasy, and therefore the punishment that is threatened will never become a reality.

Apostasy in Hebrews 6 is hypothetical. In fact, the opposite is assumed.

The Irresolvable Tension View

Gerald Borchert

All attempts to resolve the biblical tension ultimately negate either the warning or the assurance.

We cannot explain how they coexist.

God's intention is not to help us settle the relationship between God's sovereignty and human responsibility. Instead, both types of passages must be given their proper place.

A Hybrid View: The Means of Salvation

"... the warnings and admonitions in the Scriptures have a particular function. By them believers are warned against departing from Christ and the gospel. If they do apostatize, then they will face final damnation. In other words, the idea that the warnings relate only to the losing of rewards that are beyond eternal life is mistaken. The admonitions and threats in the Scriptures address the issue of eternal life. Nor are the warnings addressed to those who are nearly Christians. They are addressed to those who have received the Holy Spirit, to those who are genuine Christians."

- Tom Schreiner, *Run To Win the Prize*

In line with Romans 8, those who are elected, called, and justified will certainly be glorified.

No genuine believer will ever apostatize.

The warning passages are addressed to believers, and they are threatened with eternal destruction (not loss of rewards) if they commit apostasy.

The warning texts are real and serious. We must heed them in order to be saved on the day of the Lord.

The grace of God is so powerful that it not only grants us salvation apart from our merits, but also transforms us.

The Christian life is characterized by "the obedience of faith".

Heeding the warnings is the means by which the promise is obtained.

The warnings are *prospective*.

1 Corinthians 6:9-11 (ESV)

⁹ *Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, ¹⁰ nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. ¹¹ And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.*

Romans 1:5-6 (ESV)

⁵ *through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations, ⁶ including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ,*

Romans 16:26 (ESV)

²⁶ *... but has now been disclosed and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith ...*

Jude 1:21 (ESV)

²¹ *... keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life.*

Conclusion: Biblical Basis of Assurance (Via Perseverance):

1. Do I have a _____ in Christ for salvation?

Colossians 1:23 (ESV)

²³ ... if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister.

Hebrews 3:14 (ESV)

¹⁴ For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end.

2. Is there _____ of the regenerating work _____ in my heart?

Romans 8:16-17 (ESV)

¹⁶ The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷ and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

1 John 4:13 (ESV)

¹³ By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit.

Romans 8:14 (ESV)

¹⁴ For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.

Galatians 5:22-24 (ESV)

²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. ²⁴ And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

3. Do I see a progressive _____ in my Christian life?

2 Peter 1:3-11 (ESV)

³ His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, ⁴ by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire. ⁵ For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, ⁶ and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, ⁷ and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. ⁸ For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹ For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins. ¹⁰ Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall. ¹¹ For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Theology is for **doxology** and **devotion**—that is, the praise of God and the practice of godliness.

- J.I. Packer

NEXT WEEK: **Death and Glorification**