

# The Perseverance of the Saints.

## Part 1

Loraine Boettner

1. Statement of the Doctrine. 2. Perseverance Does Not Depend Upon the Person's Good Works But Upon God's Grace. 3. Though Truly Saved the Christian May Temporarily Backslide and Commit Sin. 4. An Outward Profession of Righteousness Not a Guarantee That the Person Is a True Christian. 5. Arminian Sense of Insecurity. 6. Purpose of the Scripture Warnings Against Apostasy. 7. Scripture Proof.

### 5. ARMINIAN SENSE OF INSECURITY

A consistent Arminian, with his doctrines of free will and of falling from grace, can never in this life be certain of his eternal salvation. He may, indeed, have the assurance of his present salvation, but he can have only a hope of his final salvation. He may regard his final salvation as highly probable, but he cannot know it as a certainty. He has seen many of his fellow Christians backslide and perish after making a good start. Why may not he do the same thing? So long as men remain in this world they have the remnants of the old sinful nature clinging to them; they are surrounded by the most alluring and deceptive pleasures of the world and the most subtle temptations of the Devil. In many of the supposedly Christian churches they hear the false teaching of modernistic, and therefore unchristian, ministers. If Arminianism were true, Christians would still be in very dangerous positions, with their eternal destiny suspended upon the probability that their weak, creaturely wills would continue to choose right. Furthermore, Arminianism would logically hold that no confirmation in holiness is possible, not even in heaven; for even there the person would still retain his free will and might commit sin any time he chose.

By comparison the Arminian is like the person who has inherited a fortune of, say, \$100,000. He knows that many others who have inherited such fortunes have lost them through poor judgment, fraud, calamity, etc., but he has enough confidence in his own ability to handle money wisely that he does not doubt but that he will keep his. His assurance is based largely on self-confidence. Others have failed, but he is confident that he will not fail. But what a delusion is this when applied to the spiritual realm! What a pity that any one who is at all acquainted with his own tendency to sin should base his assurance of salvation upon such grounds! His system places the cause of his perseverance, not in the hands of an all-powerful, never-changing God, but in the hands of weak sinful man.

And does not the logic of the Arminian system tell us that the wise thing for the Christian to do is to die as soon as possible and thus confirm the inheritance which to him is of infinite value? In view of the fact that so many have fallen away, is it worth while for him to remain here and risk his eternal salvation for the sake of a little more life in this world? What would be thought of a business man who, in order to gain a few more dollars, would risk his entire fortune in some admittedly questionable venture? In fact, does it not at least suggest that the Lord has made many mistakes in not removing these people while they were true Christians? The writer, at least, is convinced that if he held the Arminian view and knew himself to be a saved Christian he would want to die as soon as possible and thus place his salvation beyond all possible doubt.

In regard to spiritual matters, a state of doubt is a state of misery. The assurance that Christians can never be separated from the love of God is one of the greatest comforts of the Christian life. To deny

this doctrine is to destroy the grounds for any rejoicing among the saints on earth; for what kind of rejoicing can those have who believe that they may at any time be deceived and led astray? If our sense of security is based only on our changeable and wavering natures, we can never know the inward calm and peace which should characterize the Christian. Says McFetridge, in his very illuminating little book, *Calvinism In History*, "I can well conceive of the terror to a sensitive soul of dark uncertainty as to salvation, and of that ever-abiding consciousness of the awful possibility of falling away from grace after a long and painful Christian life, which is taught by Arminianism. To me such a doctrine has terrors which would cause me to shrink away from it for ever, and which would fill me with constant and unspeakable perplexities. To feel that I were crossing the troubled and dangerous sea of life dependent for my final security upon the actings of my own treacherous nature were enough to fill me with a perpetual alarm. If it is possible, I want to know that the vessel to which I commit my life is seaworthy, and that, having once embarked, I shall arrive in safety at my destination." (p. 112.)

It is not until we duly appreciate this wonderful truth, that our salvation is not suspended on our weak and wavering love to God, but rather upon His eternal and unchangeable love to us, that we can have peace and certainty in the Christian life. And only the Calvinist, who knows himself to be absolutely safe in the hands of God, can have that inward sense of peace and security, knowing that in the eternal counsels of God he has been chosen to be cleansed and glorified and that nothing can thwart that purpose. He knows himself to be held to righteousness by a spiritual power which is as exhaustless and unvarying as the force of gravitation, and as necessary to the development of the spirit as sunshine and vitamins are to the body.

## 6. PURPOSE OF THE SCRIPTURE WARNINGS AGAINST APOSTASY

Arminians sometimes bring forth from the Scriptures the warnings against apostasy or falling away, which are addressed to believers, and which, it is argued, imply a possibility of their falling away. There is, of course, a sense in which it is possible for believers to fall away, when they are viewed simply in themselves, with reference to their own powers and capacities, and apart from God's purpose or design with respect to them. And it is admitted by all that believers can fall into sin temporarily. The primary purpose of these passages, however, is to induce men to cooperate willingly with God for the accomplishment of His purposes. They are inducements which produce constant humility, watchfulness, and diligence. In the same way a parent, in order to get the willing cooperation of a child, may tell it to stay out of the way of an approaching automobile, when all the time the parent has no intention of ever letting the child get into a position where it would be injured. When God plies a soul with fears of falling it is by no means a proof that God in His secret purpose intends to permit him to fall. These fears may be the very means which God has designed to keep him from falling. Secondly, God's exhortations to duty are perfectly consistent with His purpose to give sufficient grace for the performance of these duties. In one place we are commanded to love the Lord our God with all our heart; in another, God says, "I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes." Now either these must be consistent with each other, or the Holy Spirit must contradict Himself. Plainly it is not the latter. Thirdly, these warnings are, even for believers, incitements to greater faith and prayer. Fourthly, they are designed to show man his duty rather than his ability, and his weakness rather than his strength. Fifthly, they convince men of their want of holiness and of their dependence upon God. And, sixthly, they serve as restraints on unbelievers, and leave them without excuse.

Nor is any more proven by the passages, "Destroy not with thy meat him for whom Christ died," Rom. 14:15; and, "For through thy knowledge he that is weak perisheth, the brother for whose sake Christ died," I Cor. 8:11. In the same manner the influence of a particular person, when looked at merely in itself, might be said to be destroying our American civilization; yet America goes ahead and prospers,

because other influences more than offset that one. In these passages the principle asserted is simply this: Whatever their divine security, the responsibility of the one who casts a stumbling block in the path of his brother is not decreased; and that anyone who does cast a stumbling block in the way of his brother is doing all he can towards his brother's destruction.

## 7. SCRIPTURE PROOF

The Scripture proof for this doctrine is abundant and clear.

"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or anguish, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness or peril, or sword? Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, 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. 8:35-39.

"Sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under law, but under grace," Rom. 6:14. "He that believeth hath eternal life," John 6:47. "He that heareth my word, and believeth Him that sent me, hath eternal life, and cometh not into judgment, but hath passed out of death into life," John 5:24. The moment one believes, eternal life becomes a reality, a present possession, and not merely a conditional gift of the future. "I am the living bread which came down out of heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever," John 6:51. He does not say that we have to eat many times, but that if we eat at all, we shall live for ever. "Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall become in him a well of water springing up unto eternal life," John 4:14.

"Being confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Jesus Christ," Phil. 1:6. "Jehovah will perfect that which concerneth me," Ps. 138:8. "The gifts and calling of God are not repented of," Rom. 11:29. "The witness is this, that God gave unto us eternal life," I John 5:11. "These things have I written unto you that ye may know that ye have eternal life," I John 5:13. "For by one offering He hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified," Heb. 10:14. "The Lord will deliver me from every evil work, and will save me unto His heavenly kingdom," II Tim. 4:18. "For whom He foreknew, He also foreordained ... and whom He foreordained, them He also called; and whom He called, them He also justified; and whom He justified, them He also glorified," Rom. 8:29. "Having foreordained us unto adoption as sons through Jesus Christ unto Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will," Eph. 1:5.

Jesus declared, "I give unto them (the true followers, or 'sheep') eternal life; and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who hath given them unto me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand," John 10:28. Here we find that our security and God's omnipotence are equal; for the former is founded on the latter. God is mightier than the whole world, and neither men nor devils can rob Him of one of His precious jewels. It would be as easy to pluck a star out of the heavens as to pluck a saint out of the Father's hand. Their salvation stands in His invincible might and they are placed beyond the peril of destruction. We have Christ's promise that the gates of hell shall not prevail against His Church; yet if the Devil could snatch one here and another there and large numbers in some congregations, the gates of hell would to a great extent prevail against it. In principle, if one could be lost, all might be lost, and thus Christ's assurance would be reduced to idle words.

When we are told that "There shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, who shall show great signs and wonders; so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect," Matt. 24:24, the unprejudiced believing mind readily understands that it is impossible to lead astray the elect.

The mystic union which exists between Christ and believers is a guarantee that they shall continue steadfast. "Because I live, ye shall live also," John 14:19. The effect of this union is that believers participate in His life. Christ is in us, Romans 8: 10. It is not we that live, but Christ that liveth in us, Gal. 2:20. Christ and the believers have a common life such as that which exists in the vine and the branches. The Holy Spirit so dwells in the redeemed that every Christian is supplied with an inexhaustible reservoir of strength.

Paul warned the Ephesians, "Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, in whom ye were sealed unto the day of redemption," Eph. 4:30. He had no fear of apostasy for he could confidently say, "Thanks be to God who always leadeth us in triumph in Christ," II Cor. 2:14. The Lord, speaking through the prophet Jeremiah said, "I have loved thee with an everlasting love," 31:3, one of the best proofs that God's love shall have no end is that it has no beginning, but is eternal. In the parable of the two houses, the very point stressed was that the house which was founded on the rock (Christ) did not fall when the storms of life came. Arminianism sets up another system in which some of those who are founded on the rock do fall. In the twenty-third Psalm we read, "And I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever." The true Christian is no temporary visitor, but a permanent dweller in the house of the Lord. How those rob this psalm of its deeper and richer meaning who teach that the grace of God is a temporary thing!

Christ makes intercession for His people (Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:25), and we are told that the Father hears Him always (John 11:42). Hence the Arminian, holding that Christians may fall away, must deny either the passages which declare that Christ does make intercession for His people, or he must deny those which declare that His prayers are always heard. Let us consider here how well protected we are: Christ is at the right hand of God pleading for us, and in addition to that, the Holy Spirit makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered, Rom. 8:26.

In the wonderful promise of Jer. 32:40, God has promised to preserve believers from their own backslidings: "And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, and I will not turn away from following them, to do them good; and I will put my fear in their hearts, that they may not depart from me." And in Ezek. 11:19, 20, He promises to take from them the "stony heart," and to give them a "heart of flesh," so that they shall walk in his statutes and keep his ordinances, and so that they shall be His people and He their God. Peter tells us that Christians cannot fall away, for they "by the power of God are guarded through faith unto a salvation ready to be revealed at the last time," I Peter 1:5. Paul says, "God is able to make all grace to abound unto you; that ye, having always all sufficiency in everything, may abound unto every good work," II Cor. 9:8. He declares that the Lord's servant "shall be made to stand; for the Lord hath power to make him stand," Rom. 14:4.

And Christians have the further promise, "There hath no temptation taken you but such as man can bear: but God is faithful, and will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation make also the way of escape, that ye may be able to endure it," I Cor. 10:13. Their removal from certain temptations which would be too strong for them is an absolute and free gift from God, since it is entirely an arrangement of His providence as to what temptations they encounter in the course of their lives, and what ones they escape. "The Lord is faithful and will establish you and guard you from the evil one," II Thess. 3:3. And again, "The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear Him and delivereth them," Ps. 34:7. Amid all his trials and hardships Paul could say, "We are pressed on every side, yet not straightened; perplexed, yet not unto despair; pursued, yet not forsaken; smitten

down, yet not destroyed;... knowing that He that raised up the Lord Jesus Christ shall raise us also with Jesus," II Cor. 4:8, 9, 14.

The saints, even in this world, are compared to a tree that does not wither, Ps. 1:3; to the cedars which flourish on Mount Lebanon, Ps. 92:12; to Mount Zion which cannot be moved, but which abideth forever, Ps. 125: 1; and to a house built on a rock. Matt. 7:24. The Lord is with them in their old age, Is. 46:4, and is their guide even unto death, Ps. 48:14, so that they cannot be totally and finally lost.

Another strong argument is to be noticed concerning the Lamb's book of life. The disciples were told to rejoice, not so much over the fact that the demons were subject to them, but that their names were written in the Lamb's book of life. This book is a catalogue of the elect, determined by the unalterable counsel of God, and can neither be increased nor diminished. The names of the righteous are found there; but the names of those who perish have never been written there from the foundation of the world. God does not make the mistake of writing in the book of life a name which He will later have to blot out. Hence none of the Lord's own ever perish. Jesus told His disciples to find their chief joy in the fact that their names were written in heaven, Luke 10:20; yet there would have been small grounds for joy in this respect if their names written in heaven one day could have been blotted out the next. Paul wrote to the Philippians, "Our citizenship is in heaven," 3:20; and to Timothy he wrote, "The Lord knoweth them that are His," II Tim. 2:19. For the Scripture teaching concerning the book of life, see Luke 10:20; Phil. 4:3; Rev. 3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 20:12-15; 21:27.

Here, then, are very simple and plain statements that the Christian shall continue in grace, the reason being that the Lord takes it upon Himself to preserve him in that state. In these promises the elect are secured on both sides. Not only will God not depart from them, but He will so put His fear into their hearts that they shall not depart from him. Surely no Spirit-taught Christian can doubt that this doctrine is taught in the Bible. It seems that man, poor, wretched and impotent as he is, would welcome a doctrine which secures for him the possessions of eternal happiness despite all attacks from without and all evil tendencies from within. But it is not so. He refuses it, and argues against it. And the causes are not far to seek. In the first place he has more confidence in himself than he has any right to have. Secondly, the scheme is so contrary to what he is used to in the natural world that he persuades himself that it cannot be true. Thirdly, he perceives that if this doctrine be admitted, the other doctrines of free grace will logically follow. Hence he twists and explains away the Scripture passages which teach it, and clings to some which appear on the surface to favor his preconceived views. In fact, a system of salvation by grace is so utterly at variance with his every-day experience, in which he sees every thing and person treated according to works and merits, that he has great difficulty in bringing himself to believe that it can be true. He wishes to earn his own salvation, though certainly he expects very high wages for very sorry work.