

Perseverance of the Saints

Introduction

The view of Gresham Bible Church is that no true believer can ever lose his or her salvation. A popular term for this view is “eternal security,” but we prefer the term “perseverance of the saints.” “Eternal security” can convey a message that once you are saved you can live anyway you choose and it will not matter. The truth is that it does matter. To be saved, the Bible is clear that you must persevere to the end (Mark 13:13, Col 1:21–23, 2 Tim 2:11–12). To be saved a person must exhibit faith and repentance. True faith and repentance will result in a changed life (1 John 2:3–6). A transformed life is not what saves us, but is evidence that we have been saved by a gracious God.

Scriptural Support

There are many passages of scripture that affirm this doctrine and we will look briefly at 3 of them.

- John 10—Jesus is talking about being the Good Shepherd. In verses 28–29 Jesus makes it clear that no one is able to snatch His sheep from His or the Father’s hand. We belong to a Good Shepherd and we are in good hands. Nothing can be done that would remove us from God’s hands.
- Romans 8:28–29—This passage has been referred to as the golden chain. Here Paul details the steps of salvation. God foreknows us, predestines us, calls us, justifies us and glorifies us. From start to finish our salvation is in the hands of God. Notice that Paul speaks of our glorification in the past tense though it has not yet happened. Paul is so sure that all whom God calls to himself will be in heaven that he speaks as if it has already happened.
- Ephesians 1:13–14—This passage says that when we believe the gospel, we are sealed with the Spirit, which is the guarantee of our future inheritance. Once we believe the gospel and receive the Spirit, our eternal future with Christ is guaranteed.

Problem Passages

Hebrews 6:4–6 (ESV) *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.*

Though not all agree on the interpretation of this passage, there are three main views held by evangelicals. The first view is that a true believer can lose his or her salvation. This is not the view of GBC. Our position is based on the many passages of Scripture, including the three listed above, that deny the possibility of believers losing their salvation.

The second view on this passage in Hebrews is that it is not referring to true believers. Verse 9 speaking of the “better things—things that belong to salvation,” seems to contrast the things of salvation with the things listed in verses 4–6. This suggests that what was described in verses 4–6 did not lead to salvation. Rather, those things refer to benefits enjoyed by those involved in the community of believers.

And the third view is that this is a warning to actual believers, but that the warning brings about the desired outcome of perseverance. This view is supported by the fact that those being discussed have “shared in the Holy Spirit” as well as the fact that they cannot be restored *again* to repentance, which is evidence that they are actually saved.

At GBC we consider either view two or three possible, in light of the teaching throughout Scripture that those whom God has called will be kept by Him forever. Nevertheless, we still must take warnings like this seriously. In this case the warning is intended to boost our assurance by encouraging us to press on in faith and not fall away. It is possible to enjoy the benefits of the Christian life and community and never be born again (1 John 2:19). God intends that thought to sober us. We must exercise our faith. We must persevere.

Assurance

Our standing with God is not based on feelings. Feelings change, but as Christians, God’s love is constant and our salvation rests on what Jesus accomplished for us through the cross and His resurrection. We are saved from our sins by placing our faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ. Over time, a Christian will be marked by a growing Christ-likeness, as demonstrated by love for God’s Word, His church, and other believers in Jesus Christ.

The assertion of Christian perseverance is clearly demonstrated in God’s Word.

- John 17:2, 6, 9, 24—Jesus asks that those the Father has given Him would be preserved to glory.
- Romans 8:34; Hebrews 7:25—Jesus’ prayer will not go unanswered.
- John 6:37–40; 10:28–29—Jesus has promised to keep those who believe in Him so that their salvation is sure.
- Philippians 1:6—God completes the “good work” that He began in the life of a Christian.

Conclusion

God has graciously and lovingly sent his Son to die in the place of sinners so that all who repent and place their faith in him will be adopted into his family and have their relationship with their Creator restored. We are incapable of saving ourselves and we are just as incapable of losing the salvation that God has won for us in Christ Jesus.

This is not to say that there will not be periods of doubt or disobedience in the life of the believer. However, the grace of God is extensive enough to cover all doubt and disobedience. The reason the Bible calls us to examine ourselves to see if we are in the faith (2 Cor 13:5–6) is so we are able to look at our lives and see Christ being formed in us. And this will result in the

fruit of the Spirit being evident in our life. While doubt or disobedience may be present, a true believer will be able to see evidence of change that has occurred in his or her life. A believer receives the Holy Spirit, which not only guarantees salvation, but also transforms the believer's life from the inside out. This life transformation is not what saves us, but it is evidence of salvation. Those who do not press on in the faith show themselves to have never been born again (1 John 2:19). All born-again believers will continue in the faith and persevere until the end.