

SOTERIOLOGY: The Glorious Doctrine of God's Great Salvation

Lesson 10: Preservation and Perseverance

¹² Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, ¹³ for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. (Philippians 2:12-13)

I. What do we mean by “Preservation” and “Perseverance”?

Preservation is God's keeping His people saved, and **perseverance** is their continuing to believe the Gospel and live for God, *finishing* in the faith.

Charles Spurgeon:

*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.***

The New Hampshire Confession, Xi: Of The Perseverance Of Saints

We believe that such only are real believers as endure unto the end; that their persevering attachment to Christ is the grand mark which distinguishes them from superficial professors; that a special Providence watches over their welfare; and they are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation.

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

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.

II. The Tension Between Warnings and Assurance

One of the most difficult issues in reading the scriptures is explaining the tension between warning passages and texts that promise assurance.

Warning passages:

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. (Heb 2:1-4)

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. (Heb 3:12-14)

¹⁵ Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, ² and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. (1 Cor 15:1-2)

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. (Heb 6:4-12)

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. (Heb 10:26-27)

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. (Heb 10:35-39)

Assurance passages:

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. (Phil 1:6)

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. (Rom 8:28-39)

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.” (Jn 10:27-30)

³⁷ All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. ³⁸ For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. ³⁹ And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. (Jn 6:37-39)

¹³ In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, ¹⁴ who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory. (Eph 1:13-14)

²⁴ Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, ²⁵ to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord ... (Jude 24-25a)

III. 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.

IV. A Hybrid View: The MEANS of Salvation

Those who are elected, called, and justified will certainly be glorified. No genuine believer will ever apostatize. Nonetheless, the warning passages in the scriptures are addressed to believers, and they are threatened with eternal destruction (not loss of rewards) if they commit apostasy.

"... 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*

How should believers receive the warning passages?

V. Reasons Genuine Believers Will Persevere

First, God promises in his Word that those who are his will never completely fall or perish. At the beginning of this session, we listed several passages that promise God will keep his own and that they will never perish.

Second, when God chose us, he did so before the world was created: "just as He chose us in Him [Christ] before the foundation of the world" (Eph. 1:4). This means that God is not limited by time. He has full knowledge of the future before it happens. When God chose you before the world was created, he set in motion a process that he is committed to finishing.

This process, or unbreakable chain of events, is listed in Romans 8:29–30: "*For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.*"

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

Conclusion

God is the beginning, middle, and end of our salvation. God's GRACE begins it (Eph 1:3-14; 2:1-10; Titus 3:4-7) and will complete it (Phil 1:6; Rom 8:18-39; 1 Pet 1:3-5). We will persevere in holiness because God perseveres in grace.

So ...

No GENUINE believer will ever apostatize. And yet ...

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 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 are the MEANS by which the promise is obtained.

The warnings are PROSPECTIVE.

Next week: Glorification