

“The Preservation and Perseverance of God’s People”

John 10:21-42

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Dr. Jerry Nelson

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Most of us are in church this Sunday morning because we believe there are fundamentally important issues that undergird all of life.

We don’t come to church just because we need a little psychological encouragement to face a new week.

We don’t come to a church just because we need friends.

The primary reason we come is that we know there is a God.

The very existence of that God coupled with our sense that life matters coupled with the Bible’s witness that life is eternal make us realize how important it is to be in right relationship with that God.

Even among those who aren’t certain there is a God, it is interesting how often they pray.

Among them, there is an uneasy sense that God is and that he matters.

And certainly among us, who believe Jesus and call ourselves Christians, we know that a relationship with God is eternally important.

But what about that relationship?

Have I been called by Jesus to belong to him?

To use his metaphor, am I one of his sheep; do I have eternal life?

We've known others, who seemed to be such committed Christians, walk away from the faith.

And we wonder, can something happen that will cause us to walk away?

Can I be certain of my relationship with God; is it forever? Sometimes we become abruptly aware of the way we have been acting or not acting and we feel guilty.

Guilt often leads to doubts.

And then we feel guilty for doubting.

This is my last sermon as the primary preaching pastor of Gables.

And so I come today with a promise for you and a petition of you.

- The promise to you is God's promise to preserve you, as his, forever.
- And the petition of you is that you persevere in following Jesus. And so I have titled this message, "The preservation and perseverance of God's people."

Please stand in honor of God's Word as I read the text for today from our continuing study in the Gospel of John 10:22-42.

The setting for most of this text is in Jerusalem where the religious leaders have been harassing Jesus for some time.

On the Sabbath, Jesus had healed a man blind from birth and that really put the leaders into a tizzy.

They were so threatened and angered by Jesus actions and claims that they were looking for anything that would allow them to do away with him.

At this point in the discussion they are trying to incite him into saying outright that he is the "Messiah" so they can kill him.

Jesus knows that he is the Messiah but he can't use that word because the popular definition of that word was woefully inadequate in describing who Jesus truly was.

At that time most thought of the Messiah as another King David who would lead the people to political and economic freedom.

But Jesus is intent on demonstrating that he is far more than that, he is God who has come in human flesh.

In verse 25 Jesus said, “I did tell you (who I am), but you do not believe. The miracles I do in my Father’s name speak for me...”

Later in verses 37-38 he would say again, “Do not believe me unless I do what my Father does.<sup>38</sup> But if I do it, even though you do not believe me, believe the miracles that you may know and understand that the Father is in me, and I in the Father.”

But of course each time, the leaders react in anger.

They want **their** idea of a Messiah, not Jesus.

Now there is much more that could be said about this dialog between Jesus and the hostile religious leaders but instead I want to focus on four verses in the middle of this confrontation – verses 27-30.

Jesus says, “My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.<sup>28</sup> I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand.<sup>29</sup> My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand.<sup>30</sup> I and the Father are one.”

With these words Jesus shows the sharp contrast between those who belong to him and those who don’t.

Thinking of those who **don’t** belong to Jesus, he says pointedly in verse 26, “You do not believe because you are not my sheep.”

Then contrasting it with those who do belong to him, we see by implication those who don’t belong to him haven’t been called by Jesus, they don’t listen to his voice, they aren’t known by Jesus, they don’t follow Jesus, they don’t have eternal life and they will perish.

Those words should have been terrifying to those people, but instead they reacted in anger.

That is the way with many people – they don't think they have a problem and they certainly don't want Jesus' remedy.

But when some people hear Jesus' indictment, their consciences are pricked, their defenses drop and realizing their desperate condition they respond to Jesus.

That is the work of the Holy Spirit opening their minds to the truth and calling them to trust Jesus.

John 16:8 "He (the Holy Spirit) will convict...of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment..."

If you do not belong to Jesus and he has been, or is even now, convicting you, convincing you, I can do no better than remind you of God's promise in John 1:12 "To all who received (Jesus), to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God." Will you trust him?

But today, primarily, I want to address those of you who do belong to Jesus.

Hear Jesus again in 10:27-30 "My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. <sup>28</sup> I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. <sup>29</sup> My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. <sup>30</sup> I and the Father are one."

As I said earlier, if you are trusting Jesus, I want you to hear the promise of the **preserving power** of God for you.

Jesus' words in this text are marvelously reassuring because he makes us see that it is not about us, it is about him!

Think again today of what he has done for you and for me.

Remember what Jesus said to some of the religious leaders?

10:26 “You do not believe because you are not my sheep.

Why do they not believe? Because they are not Jesus’ sheep!

Earlier Jesus said so clearly, John 6:44 “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him...”

If you **have** come to Jesus, it is solely because God has drawn you.

As Jesus said, 10:27 “My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.

Maybe it was recently, maybe it was years ago:

- Did the Spirit of God prick your conscience about your sin and your need for a Savior?
- Did he give you a dread of what would happen if you continued to ignore Jesus?
- Did he convince you that Jesus is God – God who died to provide for the forgiveness of yours sins?
- Did he convince you to trust Jesus, to invite him to be saving-Lord of your life?
- Did he and does he continue to make you realize that obeying Jesus, following Jesus, is part of life now and for eternity?

If he has, then understand, that is the Shepherd of your soul commanding you, enabling you, drawing you, compelling you to come to him.

He has not called everyone, but he has called you!

In the next chapter of John (11) Jesus will illustrate this truth of his sovereign, unconditional, effective calling of you and me.

Lazarus was dead and had been dead for four days.

- How could Lazarus have come out of the grave if he was dead?
- How could Lazarus have even heard Jesus call him, if he was dead?

The point is that first **this dead man had to be made alive.**

Only then could he hear and respond.

You've responded to Jesus, you believe, you trust Jesus!

Why? Is it because you are smarter than others or better than others?

You know better than that.

God's word says it is because the Spirit of God **raised your spirit from the dead**; he caused you to be born again, and gave you faith to believe Jesus.

Here's the graphic way Ezekiel described it: 16:4-6 "On the day you were (physically) born your cord was not cut, nor were you washed with water to make you clean, nor were you rubbed with salt or wrapped in cloths. <sup>5</sup> No one looked on you with pity or had compassion enough to do any of these things for you. Rather, you were thrown out into the open field, for on the day you were born you were despised. <sup>6</sup> Then I passed by and saw you kicking about in your blood, and as you lay there in your blood I said to you, "Live!"

Paul said it this way in Ephesians 2:1,4-5 "As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins...<sup>4</sup> But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy,<sup>5</sup> **made us alive** with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved."

Everything about your relationship with Jesus is by his grace.

You didn't think of it, you didn't plan it, you didn't make it possible, you didn't initiate it, and you didn't make it happen. He did!

Listen to Ephesians 1:4-6 "For (God) chose us in (Jesus) before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love <sup>5</sup> he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will— <sup>6</sup> to the praise of his glorious grace..." All grace!!

But now to the point that Jesus emphasizes in our text:

Not only did Jesus choose you and give you new birth and call you to himself but he says here in verse 28 "I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand."

This is that **promise of the Preserving power of God** that I wish for you to depend on today and every day for the rest of your life.

There are **two aspects of this “eternal life”** that I want you to remember this morning.

First, Jesus is clearly speaking of a specific kind of life that he gives, it is spiritual life.

- It is life from God.
- It is his quality of life implanted in us.
- It is the ability to relate to God and to each other.
- It is to know God and to know we are loved.

Victor Hugo (author of Les Miserables) said, “The supreme happiness of life is the conviction of being loved for oneself or more correctly (much more correctly, being loved) in spite of oneself.”

That is what Jesus was talking about when he said in verse 10 “I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.”

- It is to be forgiven, to be loved, to be content in the love of God.
- It is to be alive with all the promises of God instead of trapped in sin and pointless living and waiting for worse at death.

He gives us, not just physical life, but his kind of spiritual life.

**The second aspect** of this “eternal life” is that it is “eternal.”

It is not temporary or intermittent; it is everlasting.

To suggest that eternal life could be temporary is to redefine the word eternal.

It is a contradiction to say that “eternal” can end.

If it **God’s** life in us, then of course it is eternal, it could not be otherwise because God is eternal.

1 Peter 1:23 “For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.

I want you to notice also that Jesus said, “I **give** them eternal life.”

This means that even now, he is actively giving, securing and preserving that life within us.

We are preserved by the same gracious intervention of God that brought us to him in the first place.

In Romans 8:34 we are told that Jesus is even now interceding for us from his exalted position in heaven.

That is how active his preserving power is; do you think Jesus receives what he prays for? I do.

And he is even now praying for you and me.

And Jesus goes on to make the point that, “No one can snatch them out of my hand. <sup>29</sup> My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand. <sup>30</sup> I and the Father are one.”

I have heard some say, “I know the text says that no one can snatch us out of Jesus’ hand but what if we want to get out – what if we jump out on our own?”

Is that not in part what the Bible speaks to in Romans 8?

Romans 6:36-39 “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?

Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or

danger or sword? ... <sup>38</sup> For I am convinced that neither death nor life,

neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any

powers, <sup>39</sup> neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation,

will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Think of the negatives Paul here names; aren’t these the very things that would tempt us to give up on God, to bail out on Jesus?

Aren’t these the crises of life that cause us to abandon the faith?

But what does God say? Nothing can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

I have walked across many busy streets with my children when they were young and now with my grandchildren.

I don't let them hold my hand, I hold theirs.

I won't let that child get away, even when he wants to.

So it is with God, even when I pull away, even when I quietly or loudly protest his will for my life, he might give me slack, he might even allow me to suffer some of the consequences of my choices in order to teach me, but he won't let me go.

In a hymn I've quoted before, the author captures this point so well.

I grasp thy strength, make it mine own,  
 My heart with peace is blest;  
 I lose my hold, and then comes down  
 Darkness, and cold unrest.  
 Let me no more my comfort draw  
 From my frail grasp of thee,  
 In this alone rejoice with awe -  
 Thy mighty grasp of me. John C. Shairp 1871

Now I understand from experience that we will not always feel assured of our relationship with God.

Assurance of our salvation is a feeling, a sense of well-being, which ebbs and flows depending on our current state of mind and our actions.

Assurance is in my mind and is subjective;

Preservation is in God and is objective.

When we focus our attention on ourselves as to whether we are measuring up to God's standards or even our own, we lose assurance.

But God is preserving even when we are not feeling assured.

The hymn I quoted from earlier captures this idea as well:

Twixt gleams of joy and clouds of doubt  
 Our feelings come and go;  
 Our best estate is tossed about  
 In ceaseless ebb and flow.  
 No mood of feeling, form of thought,  
 Is constant for a day;  
 But thou, O Lord, thou changest not:  
 The same thou art always.

There are those who suggest that the doctrine of the certainty of salvation will lead people to think they can get “saved” and then disregard Jesus assuming they will still go to heaven.

They say such a doctrine will lead to careless, unholy living.

But please understand this doctrine is not like some “get out of jail free” card.”

This doctrine is that those whom God saves, he really saves.

He grants them his kind of life – it is God’s life in them that has changed and is changing a person.

Remember what Jesus said in 10:27 “My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.”

He didn’t say they might listen, they might follow; he said they do listen and they do follow.

When Lazarus was given new life and called from the grave, what did he do? He came out.

He had to come out. It is the nature of life to live.

It is the nature of the new birth, the new life in Christ, to live, to listen, to follow Jesus.

This doesn’t mean that Christians won’t sin.

It doesn’t mean that Christians won’t doubt.

And it surely doesn't make obedience unnecessary but instead it recognizes that obedience and God's discipline along the way are the means God uses to keep us in the faith.

And we are assured that God will not fail in that.  
 Philippians 1:6 "Being confident of this, that (God) who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."

You might say, "Pastor, you make it sound like we have no responsibility at all, that it all just happens to us whether we like it or not."

No, that is not the result.

We have great responsibility.

Listen to the way the Apostle Paul combines both God's sovereign grace and our responsibility in Ephesians 2:8-10 "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—<sup>9</sup> not by works, so that no one can boast.<sup>10</sup> For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."

But remember, it is because it is all of grace from first to last that we have any ability to respond.

- Yes, I must choose to respond to Jesus but God enables my will, gives me the desire and draws me.
- Yes, I must trust Jesus, but God is the one who opens the eyes of my mind and heart to see that trusting Jesus is the right and only way.
- Yes, I must follow, but God gives me the desire and ability to follow. He predestines, elects, calls, gives me life, imparts faith, guides me and keeps me to the end.

Tony Snow was President Bush's Press Secretary until it was discovered he had cancer and died July 12 of this past year at 53 years of age.

During his illness he wrote about his experience.

He said, "The mere thought of dying can send adrenaline flooding through your system. A dizzy, unfocused panic seizes you. Your heart thumps; your head swims. You think of nothingness and swoon. You fear partings; you worry about the impact on family & friends. You fidget and get nowhere."

"The natural reaction is to turn to God and ask him to serve as a cosmic Santa. "Dear God, make it all go away. Make everything simpler." But another voice whispers: "You have been called." Your (circumstance) has drawn you closer to God, closer to those you love, closer to the issues that matter--and has dragged into insignificance the banal concerns that occupy our "normal time."

Then after writing more of what God, in his grace, had taught him in this experience, Snow concluded,

"We don't know (a lot), but we know this: No matter where we are, no matter what we do, no matter how bleak or frightening our prospects, each and every one of us who believe, each and every day, lies in the same safe and impregnable place, in the hollow of God's hand."

Listen again to Jesus' powerful promise to you and me: "My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. <sup>28</sup> I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand."

### **Now that promise of God's preserving power brings me to my petition to you to persevere.**

Jesus said, "My sheep follow me."

That is why at "Gables" we call Christians "Christ-followers."

I can think of no better charge to you in this regard than Paul's words to Timothy.

2 Timothy 3:14-4:3 "But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because...from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, <sup>17</sup> so that the man of

God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. <sup>1</sup> In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: <sup>2</sup> Preach (proclaim, tell) the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction. <sup>3</sup> For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear.”

Bind yourself to the Word of God; read it, study it, teach it, demand that your children’s teachers teach it, that your teachers teach it – it is life to your soul.

And never forget, we don’t persevere **so that** we will be preserved; we persevere because we **are being** preserved.

It is not our power but Jesus’ power that preserves us.

And it is because he preserves that we can persevere.

I wish to end with some brief personal remarks:

It has been the greatest **privilege** and greatest **challenge** of my life to serve as the preaching pastor of this church for over 30 years.

It has been the greatest **challenge** because of God and because of you.

I say “**because of God,**” because I was commissioned to represent God to you.

Do you realize how frightening it is to say, “Thus says the Lord”?

On a name plate inside the front cover of many of the books in my office are these words: 2 Timothy 2:15 “Do your best (“make every effort, study”) to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.”

There is a sacred seriousness in teaching the word of God that has always weighed very heavily on me.

And preaching has also been a great challenge **because of you.**

I realized that preaching is about your relationship with God.

God said, it is “the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.”

I knew it to be a tragically sad waste of your time and your lives to speak of things that in the end didn’t really matter.

But preaching to you has also been the greatest **privilege** of my life.

I inherited a congregation that desired to learn and you have continued in that desire.

Through the years there have been opportunities to pursue larger churches and seminary positions but they have never held an attraction for me.

Because I could not imagine a better group of people to serve.

- You have been responsive to the preaching of the word
- You have been generous with your encouragement.
- And best of all, you have used God’s grace to you to be his grace to others.

Jesus says, “My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.

<sup>28</sup> I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand.”

I close with a prayer for you:

Hebrews 13:20-21 “May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, <sup>21</sup> equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

Numbers 6:24-26 “The LORD bless you, and keep you; <sup>25</sup> The LORD make His face shine on you, and be gracious to you; <sup>26</sup> The LORD lift up His countenance on you, and give you peace.” AMEN

## **Additional Notes:**

An excellent and brief treatment of the “you are gods” phrase in John 10:34-36 can be found in Bruce Milne’s commentary on John, 155.

John 10:30 “I and the Father are one” See D.A. Carson’s commentary on John (pages 394-5) for the ontological implications of this claim.

### **It is all of Grace**

“Everyone who is eventually saved can only ascribe his salvation, from the first step to the last, to God’s favor and act. Human merit must be excluded: and this can only be by tracing back the work far beyond the obedience which evidences (salvation), or even the faith which appropriates salvation; (tracing it back) to the act of spontaneous favor on the part of that God who foresees and foreordains from eternity all his works.” (C.J. Vaughn In Stott, 250)

### **Shall Never Perish J.C. Ryle**

“When you realize his love is so enduring and so strong, that his love is based on him not on you, that he has chosen to love you with a love that will never fail because he has promised, you can rest in that love.

“Christ declares that his people ‘will never perish.’ Weak as they are they will all be saved. Not one of them shall be lost and cast away; not one of them will miss heaven. If they err, they shall be brought back; if they fall, they shall be raised. The enemies of their soul may be strong and mighty, but their Savior is mightier; and none shall pluck them out of their Savior’s hand.” (J.C. Ryle, *John*, 193 in Bruce Milne, *The Message of John*, 153)

### **More Scriptural Support for the Enduring Quality of “eternal life”**

John 6:39 “And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day.

2 Timothy 1:12 “I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day

Ephesians 1:13-14 “Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, <sup>14</sup> who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession—to the praise of his glory.

### **The Preservation of the Saints**

#### **A.W. Pink, *Exposition of the Gospel of John*, chapter 36**

“No stronger passage in all the Word of God can be found guaranteeing the absolute security of every child of God. Note the seven strands in the rope which binds them to God. First, they are Christ’s sheep, and it is the duty of the shepherd to care for each of his flock! To suggest that any of Christ’s sheep may be lost is to blaspheme the Shepherd Himself. Second, it is said “They follow” Christ, and no exceptions are made; the Lord does not say they ought to, but declares they do. If then the sheep “follow” Christ they must reach Heaven, for that is where the Shepherd is gone! Third, to the sheep is imparted “eternal life”: to speak of eternal life ending is a contradiction in terms. Fourth, this eternal life is “given” to them: they did nothing to merit it, consequently they can do nothing to demerit it. Fifth, the Lord Himself declares that His sheep “shall never perish,” consequently the man who declares that it is possible for a child of God to go to Hell makes God a liar. Sixth, from the *Shepherd’s* “hand” none is able to pluck them, hence the Devil is unable to encompass the destruction of a single one of them. Seventh, above them is the *Father’s* “hand,” hence it is impossible for them to jump out of the hand of Christ even if they tried to. It has been well said that if one soul who trusted in Christ should be missing in Heaven, there would be one vacant seat there, one crown unused, one harp unstrung; and this would grieve all Heaven and proclaim a disappointed God. But such a thing is utterly impossible.”

#### **A Present-day Result of God’s Preserving Power in our Lives:**

It is God's preservation of us that puts the "good" in "good news." If it is ultimately up to me whether I will one day be with Christ rather than in hell, then I will continue to be a most anxious and defeated man. I know myself; I know that I shall fail. Where is the "good" in that news? But the "good" news is that I am in God's hands – the God who has never failed and will never fail.

Rather than God's preserving promise being an inducement to carelessness, his promise is an inducement to obedience. We are all less likely to begin a process in which we fear we may, after all, fail. But we are energized by beginning something we know will succeed.

When my son, Paris, was two and three years of age, he would be willing to attempt what for him were great physical feats such as going hand over hand on the monkey bars high above the ground or walking a rail several feet off the ground because he knew I would catch him if he fell. Knowing that I would catch him didn't make him quit trying. To the contrary, knowing I would catch him was the very security he needed to try all the harder. Knowing we cannot ultimately fail with God but that God will see us through doesn't make us spiritually lazy but is the very security we need to pick and keep pressing forward.

**What follows is an excellent, albeit lengthy, tract on the subject of the preservation/perseverance of the people of God. I highly recommend you read it in its entirety.**

Never Perish

by

J. C. Ryle

(1816-1900)

"They shall never perish."--John 10:28

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First published by Drummond's Tract Depot, Stirling, Scotland

There are two points in religion on which the teaching of the Bible is very plain and distinct. One of these points is the fearful danger of the ungodly; the other is the perfect safety of the righteous. One is the happiness of those who are converted; the other is the misery of those who are unconverted. One is the blessedness of being in the way to heaven; the other is the wretchedness of being in the way to hell.

I hold it to be of the utmost importance that these two points should be constantly impressed on the minds of professing Christians. I believe that the exceeding privileges of the children of God, and the deadly peril of the children of the world, should be continually set forth in the clearest colors before the Church of Christ. I believe that the difference between the man in Christ, and the man not in Christ, can never be stated too strongly and too fully. Reserve on this subject is a positive injury to the souls of men. Wherever such reserve is practiced, the careless will not be aroused, believers will not be established, and the cause of God will receive damage.

Reader, perhaps you are not aware what a vast store of comfortable truths the Bible contains for the peculiar benefit of real Christians. There is a spiritual treasure house in the Word which many may never enter, and some eyes have not so much as seen. There you will find many a golden verity besides the old first principles of repentance, faith and conversion. There you will see in glorious array the everlasting election of the saints in Christ,—the special love wherewith God loved them before the foundation of the world,—their mystical union with their risen Head in heaven, and His consequent sympathy with them,—their interest in the perpetual intercession of Jesus, their High Priest,—their liberty of daily communion with Father and the Son,—their full assurance of hope,—their perseverance to the end. These are some of the precious things laid up in Scripture for those who love God: these are truths which some neglect from ignorance. Like the Spaniards in California, they know not the rich mines beneath their feet. These are truths which some neglect from false humility. They look at them afar off with fear and trembling, but dare not touch them. But these are truths which God has given for our learning, and which you and I are bound to study. It is impossible to neglect them without inflicting injury upon ourselves.

It is to one special truth in the list of a believer's privileges that I now desire to direct your attention this day. That truth is *the doctrine of perseverance*, —the doctrine that true Christians shall never perish or be cast away. It is a truth which the natural heart has bitterly opposed in every age. It is a truth which for many reasons deserves particular attention at the present time. Above all, it is a truth with which the happiness of all God's children is most closely connected.

There are four things which I propose to do in considering the subjects of perseverance.

- I. I will explain what the doctrine of perseverance means.
- II. I will show the Scriptural grounds on which the doctrine is built.
- III. I will point out some reasons why many reject the doctrine.
- IV. I will mention some reasons why the doctrine is of great practical importance.

I approach the subject with diffidence, because I know it is one on which holy men do not see alike. But God is my witness, that in writing this tract, I have no desire to promote any but of Scriptural truth. In pleading for perseverance, I can say with a good conscience that I firmly believe I am pleading for an important part of the Gospel of Christ. May God the Spirit guide both writer and reader into all truth! May that blessed day soon come when all shall know the Lord perfectly, and differences and divisions pass away for ever!

I. I will first explain *what I mean by the doctrine of perseverance.*

It is of the utmost importance to make this point clear. It is the very foundation of the subject. It lies at the threshold of the whole argument. In all discussions of disputed points in theology, it is impossible to be too accurate in defining terms. Half the abuse which has unhappily been poured on perseverance, has arisen from a thorough misunderstanding of the doctrine in question. Its adversaries have fought with phantoms of their own creation, and spent their strength in beating the air.

When I speak of the doctrine of perseverance, I mean this. I say that the Bible teaches that true Christians shall persevere in their religion to the end of their lives. They shall never perish. They shall never be lost. They shall never be cast away. Once in Christ, they shall always be in Christ. Once made children of God by adoption and grace, they shall never cease to be His children and become children of the devil. Once endued with the grace of the Spirit, that grace shall never be taken from them. Once pardoned and forgiven, they shall never be deprived of their pardon. Once joined to Christ by living faith, their union shall never be broken off. Once called by God into the narrow way that leads to life, they shall never be allowed to fall into hell. In a word, every man, woman and child on earth that receives saving grace, shall sooner or later receive eternal glory. Every soul that is once justified and washed in Christ's blood, shall be found safe at Christ's right hand in the day of judgment.

Reader, such statements as this sound tremendously strong. I know that well. But I am not going to leave the subject here: I must dwell upon it a little longer. I desire to clear the doctrine I am defending from the cloud of misrepresentation by which many darken it. I want you to see it in its own proper dress,—not as it is portrayed by the hand of ignorance and prejudice, but as it is set forth in the Scripture of truth.

Perseverance is *a doctrine with which the ungodly and worldly have nothing to do.* It does not belong to that vast multitude who have neither knowledge, nor thought, nor faith, nor fear, nor anything else of Christianity except the name. It is not true of them, that they will "never perish." On the contrary, except they repent, they will come to a miserable end.

Perseverance is *a doctrine with which hypocrites and false professors have nothing to do.* It does not belong to those unhappy people whose religion consists in talk, and words, and a form of godliness, while their hearts are destitute of the grace of the Spirit. It is not true of them, that they will "never perish." On the contrary, except they repent, they will be lost for ever.[1]

Perseverance is *the peculiar privilege of real, true, spiritual Christians.* It belongs to the sheep of Christ who hear His voice and follow Him. It belongs to those who are washed, and justified, and

sanctified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of God. It belongs to those who repent, and believe in Christ, and live holy lives. It belongs to those who have been born again, and converted, and made new creatures by the Holy Ghost. It belongs to those who are of a broken and contrite heart, and mind the things of the Spirit, and bring forth the fruits of the Spirit. It belongs to the elect of God, who cry to Him night and day. It belongs to those who know the Lord Jesus by experience, and have faith, and hope, and charity. It belongs to those who are fruit-bearing branches of the vine,—the wise virgins,—the light of the world,—the salt of the earth,—the heirs of the kingdom,—the followers of the Lamb. These are they whom the Bible calls the saints. And it is the saints and the saints alone of whom it is written, that they shall "never perish."<sup>[2]</sup>

Does any one suppose that what I am saying applies to none but eminent saints? Does any one think that people like apostles and prophets, and martyrs may perhaps persevere to the end, but that it cannot be said of the common sort of believers? Let him know that he is entirely mistaken. Let him know this privilege of perseverance belongs to the whole family of God,—to the youngest as well as the oldest,—to the weakest as well as the strongest,—to the babes in grace as well as to the old pillars of the Church. The least faith shall as certainly continue indestructible as the greatest. The least spark of grace shall prove as unquenchable as the most burning and shining light. Your faith may be very feeble, your grace may be very weak, our strength may be very small, you may feel that in spiritual things you are but a child. Yet fear not, neither be afraid. It is not on the quantity of a man's grace, but on the truth and genuineness of it that the promise turns. A farthing is as truly a current coin of the realm as a golden sovereign, though it is not so valuable. Wherever sin is truly repented of, and Christ is truly trusted, and holiness is truly followed, there is a work that shall never be overthrown. It shall stand when the earth and all the works thereof shall be burned up.

Reader, there are yet some things to be said about perseverance, to which I must request your special attention. Without them the account of the doctrine would be imperfect and incomplete. The mention of them may clear up some of the difficulties which surround the subject, and throw light on some points of Christian experience, which God's children find hard to understand.

Remember, then, that when I tell you believers shall persevere to the end, *I do not for a moment say that they shall never fall into sin*. They may fall sadly, foully, and shamefully, to the scandal of true religion, to the injury of their own deep and bitter sorrow. Noah once fell into drunkenness. Abraham twice said falsely that Sarah was only his sister. Jacob deceived his father Isaac. Moses spoke unadvisedly with his lips. David committed horrible adultery. Solomon lost his first love, and was led away by his many wives. Hezekiah forgot God, and boasted of his riches. Peter denied his Lord three times with an oath. The apostles all forsook Christ in the garden. All these are cases in point. They are all melancholy proofs that Christians may fall. But believers shall never fall *totally, finally, and completely*. They shall always rise again from their falls by repentance, and renew their walk with God. Though sorely humbled and cast down, they never entirely lose grace. The *comfort* of it they may lose, but not the *being*. Like the moon under an eclipse, their light is for a season turned into darkness; but they are not rejected and cast away. Like the trees in winter, they may show neither leaves nor fruit for a time; but the life is still in their roots. But they never perish.

Remember for another thing, that when I say believers shall persevere to the end, *I do not mean that they shall have no doubts and fears about their own safety*. So far from this being the case, the holiest men of God are sometimes sorely troubled by anxieties about their own spiritual condition. They see so much weakness in their own hearts, and find their practice come so short of their desires, that they are strongly tempted to doubt the reality of their own grace, and to fancy they are but hypocrites, and shall never reach Heaven at all. To *be safe* is one thing: to *feel sure* that we are safe is quite another. There are many true believers who never enjoy the full assurance of hope all their days. Their faith is so weak and their sense of sin so strong, that they never feel confident of their own interest in Christ. Many a time they could say with David, "I shall one day perish" (1 Sam. xxvii. 1); and with Job, "Where is my hope?" (Job xvii. 15.) The joy and peace in believing, which some feel, and the witness of the Spirit, which some experience, are things which some believers, whose faith is impossible to deny, never appear to attain. Called as they evidently are by the grace of God, they never seem to taste the full comfort of the calling. But they are perfectly safe, though they themselves refuse to know it.

" More happy, but not more secure,

The glorified spirits in heaven."

The full assurance of hope is not necessary to salvation. The absence of it is no argument against a man's perseverance to the end. That mighty master of theology, John Bunyan, knew well what he wrote when he told us that Despondency and Much-afraid got safe to the celestial city at last, as well as Mr. Valiant-for-the-truth. It is as true of the most doubting child of God, as it is of the strongest, that he shall "never perish." He may never feel it. But it is true?[3]

Remember, in the last place, that the certain perseverance of believers *does not free them from the necessity of watching, praying, and using means, or make it needless to ply them with practical exhortations*. So far from this being the case, it is just by the use of means that God enables them to continue in the faith. He draws them with the cords of a man. He uses warnings and conditional promises as part of the machinery by which He insures their final safety. The very fact that they despised the helps and ordinances which God has appointed, would be a plain proof that they had no grace at all and were on the road to destruction. St. Paul before his shipwreck had a special revelation from God, that he and all the ship's company should get safe to land. But it is a striking fact that he said to the soldiers, "Except the seamen abide in the ship ye cannot be saved." (Acts xxvii.31.) He knew that *the end* was insured, but believed also that it was an end to be reached by the use of certain *means*. The cautions, and conditional promises, and admonitions to believers, with which Scripture abounds, are all part of the Divine agency by which their perseverance is effected. An old writer says, "they do not imply that the saints can fall away: but they are preservatives to keep them from falling away." The man that thinks he can do without such cautions and despises them as legal, may well be suspected as an impostor, whose heart has never yet been renewed. The man who has been really taught by the Spirit will generally have a humble sense of his own weakness, and be thankful for anything which can quicken his conscience and keep him on his guard. They that persevere to the end are not dependent on any means, but still they are not independent of them. Their final salvation does not hang on their obedience to practical exhortations, but it is just in taking heed to such

exhortations that they will always continue to the end. It is the diligent, the watchful, the prayerful and the humble to whom belongs the promise: "They shall never perish."

Reader, I have now given you an account of what I mean when I speak of the doctrine of perseverance. This, and this only, is the doctrine that I am prepared to defend in this tract. I ask you to weigh well what I have said, and to examine the statement I have made on every side. I believe it will stand inspection.

It will not do to tell us that this doctrine of perseverance has any *tendency to encourage careless and ungodly living*. Such a charge is utterly destitute of truth. It cannot justly be brought forward. I have not a word to say on behalf of any one who lives in wilful sin, however high his profession may be. He is deceiving himself. He has a lie in his hand. He has none of the marks of God's elect. The perseverance I plead for is not that of sinners, but of saints. It is not a perseverance in carnal and ungodly ways, but a perseverance in the way of faith and grace. Show me a man that deliberately lives an unholy life, and yet boasts that he is converted and shall never perish, and I say plainly, that I see nothing hopeful about him. He may know all mysteries, and speak with the tongue of angels, but so long as his life is unaltered he appears to me in the high road to hell.[4]

It will not do to tell us that this doctrine of perseverance, *is merely a piece of Calvinism*. Nothing is easier than to get up a prejudice against a truth, by giving it a bad name. Men deal with doctrines they do not like, much as Nero did when he persecuted the early Christians. They dress them up in a hideous garment and then hold them up to scorn and run them down. The perseverance of the saints is often treated in this manner. People stave it off by some sneering remark about Calvinism, or by some apocryphal old wives' fable about Oliver Cromwell's death-bed, and think they have settled the question.[5] Surely it would be more becoming to inquire whether perseverance was not taught in the Bible 1400 years before Calvin was born. The question to be decided is not whether the doctrine is Calvinistic, but whether it is scriptural. The words of Bishop Horsely deserve to be widely known. "Take especial care," he says, "before you aim your shafts at Calvinism, that you know what is Calvinism and what is not,—that in the mass of doctrine which it is of late become the fashion to abuse under the name of Calvinism, you can distinguish with certainty between that part of which is nothing better than Calvinism, and that which belongs to our common Christianity and the general faith of the reformed Churches,—lest, when you mean only to fall foul of Calvinism you should unwarily attack something more sacred and of a higher origin."

Last, but not least, it will not do to tell us *that perseverance is not the doctrine of the Church of England*. Whatever men please to say against it, this is an assertion at any rate, which they will find it hard to prove. Perseverance is taught in the seventeenth Article of the Church of England, clearly, plainly, unmistakably. It was the doctrine of the first Archbishops of Canterbury, Parker, Grindal, Whitgift, Bancroft, and Abbott. It was the doctrine preached by the judicious Hooker, as any one may see by reading his sermons.[6] It was the doctrine which all the leading divines of the Church of England maintained till the reign of Charles the First. The denial of the doctrine up to this time was hardly tolerated. More than one minister who called it in question was compelled to read a public recantation before the University of Cambridge. In short, till the time when Archbishop Laud came into power, perseverance was regarded in the Church of England

as an acknowledged truth of the Gospel. Together with the popish leaven which Laud brought with him, there came the unhappy doctrine that true believers may fall away and perish. This is a simple matter of history. The perseverance of the saints is the old doctrine of the Church of England. The denial of it is the new.[7]

Reader, I feel that it is time to leave this branch of the subject and pass on. I want no clearer and no more distinct statement of perseverance than that contained in the seventeenth Article of my own Church, to which I have already referred. The article says of God's elect —"They which be endued with so excellent a benefit of God, be called according to God's purpose by His Spirit working in due season: they through grace obey His calling: they be justified freely: they be made sons of God by adoption: they be made like the image of His only begotten Son Jesus Christ: they walk religiously in good works, and, at length, by God's mercy, *they attain to everlasting felicity.*" These are precisely the views which I maintain. This is the doctrine which I long ago subscribed. This is the truth which I believe it is my duty as a clergyman, to defend. This is the truth, which I now want you to receive and believe.[8]

II. I now proceed to *show the Scriptural grounds on which the doctrine of perseverance is built.*

I need hardly say that the Bible is the only test by which the truth of every religious doctrine can be tried. The words of the sixth Article of the Church of England deserve to be written in letters of gold: "Whatsoever is not read in the Holy Scripture, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man that it should be believed as an article of the faith." By that rule I am content to abide. I ask no man to believe the final perseverance of the saints, unless the doctrine can be proved of the Word of God. One plain verse of Scripture, to my mind, outweighs the most logical conclusions to which human reason can attain.

Reader, in bringing forward those texts of Scripture on which this tract is founded, I purposely abstain from quoting from the Old Testament. I do so, lest any should say that the Old Testament promises belong exclusively to the Jewish people as a nation, and are not available in a disputed question affecting individual believers. I do not admit the soundness of this argument, but I will not give any one the chance of using it. I find proofs in abundance in the New Testament, and to them I shall confine myself.

I shall write down the texts which appear to me to prove final perseverance, without note or comment. I will only ask you to observe as you read them, how deep and broad is the foundation on which the doctrine rests. Observe that it is not for any strength or goodness of their own that the saints shall continue to the end and never fall away. They are in themselves weak, and frail, and liable to fall like others. Their safety is based on the promise of God, which was never yet broken,—on the election of God, which cannot be in vain,—on the power of the great Mediator Christ Jesus, which is Almighty,—on the inward work of the Holy Ghost, which cannot be overthrown. I ask you to read the following texts carefully, and see whether it is not so.

"I give unto them eternal life; and they shall *never perish*, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.

"My Father, which gave them Me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand." (John x. 28, 29.)

"Who shall *separate us* from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?

"As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.

"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 powers, nor things present, nor things to come,

"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. viii. 35-39.)

"They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have *continued* with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us." (1 John ii. 19.)

"Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on Him that sent Me, hath everlasting life, and *shall not come into condemnation*; but is passed from death unto life." (John v. 24.)

"I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if any man eat of this bread, he shall *live for ever*." (John vi. 51.)

"Because I live, ye *shall live* also." (John xiv. 19.)

"Whosoever liveth and believeth in Me, shall never die." (John xi. 26.)

"By one offering He hath *perfected for ever* them that are sanctified." (Heb. x. 14.)

"He that doeth the will of God *abideth for ever*." (1 John ii. 17.)

"Sin shall *not have dominion* over you." (Rom. vi. 14.)

"The very hairs of your head are all numbered." (Rom. vi. 14.)

"A bruised reed shall He not break, and smoking flax shall He not quench." (Matt. xii.20.)

"Who shall also *confirm you to the end*, that ye may be blameless in the day of Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Cor. i. 8.)

"Kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time." (1 Peter i. 5.)

"Preserved in Jesus Christ, and called." (Jude 1.)

"The Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and *will preserve* me unto His heavenly kingdom ." (2 Tim. iv. 18.)

"I pray God your whole spirit, and soul, and body, be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

"Faithful is He that calleth you, who also *will do* it." (1 Thess. v. 23,24.)

"The Lord is faithful, who *shall stablish* you, and keep you from evil." (2 Thess. iii.3.)

"God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it." (1 Cor.x. 13.)

"God willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath;

"That by two immutable things, in which it was *impossible for God to lie*, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us." (Heb.vi.17,18.)

"Fear not little flock; for it is your *father's good pleasure* to give you the kingdom." (Luke xii. 32.)

"This is the Father's will which hath sent Me, that of all which He hath given Me I should *lose nothing*, but should raise it up at the last day." (John vi. 39.)

"The foundation of God *standeth sure*, having this seal, the Lord Knoweth them that are His." (2 Tim. ii. 19)

"Whom He did predestinate, them that He also called; and whom He called, them He also justified; and whom He justified, *them He also glorified*." (Rom. viii. 30.)

"God hath not appointed us unto wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Thess.v. 9.)

"God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit, and belief of the truth." (2 Thess. ii. 13.)

"The vessels of mercy, which He had afore prepared unto glory." (Rom. ix. 23.)

"The gifts and calling of God are without repentance." (Rom. 11. 29.)

"If it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect." (Matt. xxiv. 24.)

"He is able to *save to the uttermost* all them that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them." (Heb. vii. 25.)

"Able to *keep you from falling*, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy." (Jude 24.)

"I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day." (2 Tim. i.12.)

"I have prayed for thee, That thy *faith fail not*." (Luke xxii. 32.)

"Holy Father, keep through Thine own name those whom Thou hast given Me." (John xvii. 11.)

"I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil." (John xvii. 15.)

"I will that day they also whom thou hast given Me, *be with Me* where I am." (John xvii. 24.)

"If, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son; much more, being reconciled, we *shall be saved* by His life." (Rom. v.10.)

"The Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth Him not, neither knoweth Him; but ye know Him, for He dwelleth with you, and *shall be in you*." (John xiv. 17.)

"Being confident of this very thing, that He which begun a good work in you, *will perform it* until the day of Jesus Christ." (Phil. i. 6.)

"The anointing which ye have received of Him abideth in you; and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye *shall abide* in Him." (John ii. 27.)

"The Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are *sealed* unto the day of redemption." (Ephes. iv. 30.)

"Ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance, until the redemption of the purchased possession." (Ephes. i. 13, 14.)

"Born again, not of corruptible seed, but of *incorruptible*." (1 Peter i. 23.)

"He hath said, I will never leave thee nor forsake thee." (Heb. xiii. 5.)

Reader, I lay before you these forty-four texts of Scripture, and ask your serious attention to them. I repeat that I will make no comment on them. I had rather leave them to the honest common sense of all who read the Bible. Some of these texts, no doubt, bring out the doctrine of final perseverance more clearly than others. About the interpretation of some of them, men's

judgments may differ widely. But there are not a few of the forty-four which appear to my mind so plain, that were I to invent words to conform my views, I should despair of inventing any that would convey my meaning so unmistakably.

I am far from saying that these texts are all the Scriptural evidence that might be brought forward. I am satisfied that the doctrine maintained in this tract might be confirmed by other arguments of great might and power.

I might point to the *attributes of God's character revealed in the Bible*, and show how His wisdom, unchangeableness, and power, and love, and glory are all involved in the perseverance of the saints. If the elect may finally perish, what becomes of God's counsel about them in eternity, and His doings for them in time?[9]

I might point to all *the offices which the Lord Jesus fills*, and show what discredit is thrown on His discharge of them, if any of His believing people can finally be lost.

What kind of Head would He be, if any of the members of His mystical body could be torn from Him? What kind of Shepherd would He be, if a single sheep of His flock was left behind in the wilderness? what kind of Physician would He be, if any patient under His hand were at length incurable? What kind of High Priest would He be, if any name once written on His heart were found wanting when He makes up His jewels? What kind of Husband would He be, if He and any soul once united to Him by faith were ever put asunder? [10]

Finally, I might point to the great fact that there is *not a single example in all Scripture of any one of God's elect ever finally making shipwreck and going to hell*. We read false prophets and hypocrites. We read of fruitless branches, stony ground, and thorny ground hearers, virgins without oil in their vessels, servants who bury their talents. We read of Balaam, and Lot's wife, and Saul, and Judas Iscariot, and Ananias and Sapphira, and Demas. We see their hollow characters. We are told of their end. They have no root. They are rotten at the heart. They endure for a while. They go at last to their own place. But there is not a single instance in the whole Bible of any one falling away who ever showed unquestionable evidences of grace. Men like Abraham, and Moses, and David, and Peter, and Paul always hold on their way. They may slip. They may fall for a season. But they never entirely depart from God. They never perish. Surely if the saints of God can be cast away, it is a curious and striking fact that the Bible should not have given us one single plain example of it.

But time and space would fail me if I were to enter into the field which I have just pointed out. I think it better to rest my case on the text which I have already given. The mind to which these texts carry no conviction, is not likely to be influenced by other arguments. To myself they appear, when taken altogether, to contain such an immense mass of evidence, that I dare not, as a Christian man, deny to be true. I dare not, because I feel at this rate I might dispute the truth of any doctrine in the Gospel. I feel that if I could explain away such plain texts as some of those I have quoted, I could explain away almost all the leading truths of Christianity.

Reader, I am quite aware that there are some texts and passages of Scripture which appear at first sight to teach a contrary doctrine to that which I maintain in this tract. I know that many attach

great weight to these texts, and consider them to prove that the saints of God may perish and fall away. I can also say that I have examined these texts with attention, but have found in them no reason to alter my opinion on the subject of perseverance.[11] Their number is small. Their meaning is unquestionably more open to dispute than that of many of the forty-four I have quoted. They all of them admit of being interpreted so as not to contradict the doctrine of perseverance. I hold it to be an infallible rule in the exposition of Scripture, that when two texts seem to contradict one another, the less plain must give way to the more plain, and the weak must give way to the strong. That doctrine which reconciles most texts of Scripture is most likely to be right. That doctrine which makes most texts quarrel with one another is most likely to be wrong.

I ask you, if not convinced by all I have said hitherto, to put down the texts I have quoted on behalf of perseverance, and the texts commonly quoted against it, in two separate lists. Weigh them one against another. Judge them with fair and honest judgment. Which list contains the greatest number of positive, unmistakable assertions? Which list contains the greatest number of sentences which cannot be explained away? Which list is the strongest? Which list is the weakest? Which list is the most flexible? Which list is the most unbending? If it were possible in a world like this to have this question fairly tried by an unprejudiced, intelligent jury, I have not the least doubt which way the verdict would go. It is my own firm belief and conviction that the final perseverance of the saints is so deeply founded on Scriptural grounds, that so long as the Bible is the Judge, it cannot be overthrown.

III. The third thing I propose to do, is to *point out the reasons why many reject the doctrine of perseverance.*

It is impossible to deny that multitudes of professing Christians entirely disagree with the views expressed in this. I am quite aware that many regard them with abhorrence, as dangerous, enthusiastic, and fanatical, and lose no opportunity of warning people against them I am also aware that among those who hold that the saints of God may fall away and perish, are to be found many holy, self-denying, spiritually-minded persons, —persons at whose feet I would sit in Heaven, though I cannot approve of all their teaching upon earth.

This being the case, it becomes a matter of deep interest to find out, if we can, the reasons why the doctrine of perseverance is so often refused. How is it that the doctrine for which so much Scripture can be alleged, should be stoutly opposed? How is it that a doctrine which for the first hundred years of the Reformed Church of England it was hardly allowable to call in question, should now be so frequently rejected? What new views can have risen up in the last two centuries which make it necessary to discharge this good old servant of Christ? I am confident that such inquiries are of deep importance in the present day. There is far more in this question than appears at first sight. I am satisfied that I am not wasting time in endeavouring to throw a little light on the whole subject.

I desire to clear the way by conceding that many good persons refuse the doctrine of perseverance for no reason whatever excepting that *it is too strong for them.* There are vast numbers of true-hearted Christians just now who never seem able to bear anything strong. Their religious constitution appears so feeble, and their spiritual digestion so weak, that they must

always be "fed with milk and not with meat." Talk to them strongly about grace, and they put you down as an Antinomian! Talk strongly about holiness, and you are thought legal! Speak strongly of election, and you are considered a narrow-minded Calvinist! Speak strongly about responsibility and free agency, and you are regarded as a low Arminian! In short, they can bear nothing strong of any kind or in any direction. Of course they cannot receive the doctrine of perseverance.

I leave these people alone. I am sorry for them. There are sadly too many of them in the Churches of Christ just now. I can only wish them better spiritual health, and less narrowness of views, and a quicker growth in spiritual knowledge. The persons I have in my mind's eye in this part of my tract are of a different class, and to them I now address myself.

(1) I believe one reason why many do not hold perseverance is *their general ignorance of the whole system of Christianity*. They have no clear idea of the nature, place, and proportion of the various doctrines which compose the Gospel. Its several truths have no definite position in their minds. Its general outline is not mapped out in their understandings. They have a vague notion that it is a right thing to belong to the Church of Christ, and to believe all the Articles of the Christian faith. They have a floating, misty idea that Christ has done certain things for them, and that they ought to do certain things for Him, and that if they do them it will be all right at last. But beyond this they really know nothing. Of the great systematic statements in the Epistles to the Romans, Galatians, and Hebrews, they are profoundly ignorant. As to a clear account of Justification, you might as well ask them to square the circle or write a letter in Sanskrit. It is a subject they have not even touched with the tips of their fingers. This is a sore disease, and only too common in England. Unhappily it is the disease of thousands who pass muster as excellent Churchmen. It is absurd to expect such people to hold perseverance. When a man does not know what it is to be *justified* he cannot of course understand what it is to persevere to the end.

(2) I believe another reason why many do not hold perseverance, is *their dislike to any system of religion which draws distinctions between man and man*. There are not a few who entirely disapprove of any Christian teaching which divides the congregation into different classes, and speaks of one class of people as being in a better and more favourable state before God than another. Such people cry out, "that all teaching of this kind is *uncharitable*; that we ought to hope well of every body, and suppose everybody will go to heaven." They think it downright wrong to say that one man has faith and another not, one a child of God, and another a child of the world, one a saint and another a sinner. "What right have we to think anything about it?" they say. "We cannot possibly know. Those whom we call good, are very likely no better than others, —hypocrites, impostors, and the like. Those of whom we think badly are very probably quite as much in the way to heaven as the rest of mankind, and have got good hearts at bottom." As to any one feeling sure of heaven, or confident of his own salvation, they consider it quite abominable. "No man can be sure. We ought to hope well of all." There are only too many people of this sort in the present day. Of course the doctrine of perseverance is perfectly intolerable to them. When a man refuses to allow that any one is elect, or has grace, or enjoys any special mark of God's favour more than his neighbours, it stands to reason that he will deny that any one can have the grace of perseverance.

(3) I believe another common reason why many do not hold perseverance is *an incorrect view of the nature of saving faith*. They regard faith as nothing better than a feeling or impression. As soon as they see a man somewhat impressed with the preaching of the Gospel and manifesting some pleasure in hearing about Christ, they set him down at once as a believer. By and by the man's impressions wear away, and his interest about Christ and salvation ceases altogether. Where is the faith he seemed to have? It is gone. How can his friends, who have pronounced him a believer, account for it? They can only account for it by saying, that "a man may fall away from faith," and that "there is no such thing as perseverance." And in short, this becomes an established principle in their religion. Now this is a mischievous error, and I am afraid sadly common in many quarters. It manifestly may be traced to ignorance of the true nature of religious affections. People forget that there may be many religious emotions in the human mind with which grace has nothing to do. The stony ground hearers received the word with joy, but had no root in them. The history of all revivals proves that there may often be a great quantity of seemingly religious impression without any true work of the Spirit. Saving faith is something far deeper and mightier than a little sudden feeling. It is an act not of the feelings only but of the whole conscience, will, understanding, and inward man. It is the result of clear knowledge. It springs from a conscience not grazed merely, but thoroughly stirred. It shows itself in a deliberate, willing, humble dependence on Christ. Such faith is the gift of God, and is never overthrown. Make faith a mere matter of feeling, and it is of course impossible to maintain perseverance.

(4) I believe another reason why many do not hold perseverance is near akin to the one last mentioned. It is *an incorrect view of the nature of conversion*. Not a few are ready to pronounce any change for the better in a man's character a conversion. They forget that there may be many blossoms on a tree in spring, and yet no fruit in autumn, and that a new coat of paint does not make an old door new. Some, if they see any one weeping under the influence of a sermon, will set it down at once as a case of conversion. Others, if a neighbour suddenly gives up drinking or swearing, and becomes a communicant and a great professor, at once rush to the conclusion that he is converted. The natural consequence in numerous instances is disappointment. Their supposed case of conversion often turns out nothing more than a case of outward reform, in which the heart was never changed. Their converted neighbour sometimes returns to old habits, as the sow that was washed, to her wallowing in the mire. But then unhappily the pride of the natural heart, which never likes to allow itself mistaken, induces people to form a wrong conclusion about the case. Instead of telling us that the man never was converted at all, they say that "he was converted, but afterwards lost his grace and fell away." The true remedy for this is a right understanding of conversion. It is no such cheap and easy and common thing as many seem to fancy. It is a mighty work on heart, which none but He who made the world can effect, and a work which will abide and stand the fire. But once take a low and superficial view of conversion, and you will find it impossible to maintain final perseverance.

(5) I believe another most common reason why many do not hold perseverance is *an incorrect view of the effect of baptism*. They lay it down, as a cardinal point in their divinity, that all who are baptized are born again in baptism, and all receive the grace of the Holy Ghost. Without a single plain text in the Bible to support their opinions, and in the face of the 17th Article, which many of them as Churchmen have subscribed, they still tell us that all baptized persons are necessarily regenerate. Of course such a view of baptism is utterly destructive of the doctrine that

true grace can never be overthrown. It is plain as daylight that multitudes of baptized persons never show a spark of grace all their lives, and never give the slightest evidence of having been born of God. They live careless and worldly, and careless and worldly they die, and to all appearance miserably perish. According to the view to which I am now referring, "they have all fallen away from grace! They have all had it! They were all made God's children! But they all lost their grace! They have all become children of the devil!" I will not trust myself to make a single remark on such doctrine. I leave those who can to reconcile it with the Bible. All I say is, that if baptismal regeneration be true, there is an end of the final perseverance.

(6) I believe another reason why many do not hold perseverance, is *an incorrect view of the nature of the Church*. They make no distinction between the visible Church which contains "evil as well as good," and the invisible Church which is composed of none but God's elect and true believers. They apply to the one the privileges, and blessings, and promises which belong to the other. They call the visible Church, with its crowds of ungodly members, and baptized infidels, "the mystical body of Christ, the Bride, the Lamb's wife, the Holy Catholic Church," and the like. They will not see what Hooker long ago pointed out, and his admirers would do well to remember,—that all these glorious titles do not properly belong to any visible Church, but to the mystical company of God's elect. The consequence of all this confusion is certain and plain. Upon this man-made system they are obliged to allow that thousands of members of Christ's body have no life, no grace, and no sympathy with their Head, and end at last by being ruined forever, and becoming lost members of Christ in hell! Of course at this rate they cannot maintain the doctrine of perseverance. Once embrace the unscriptural notion that all members of the visible Church are, by virtue of their churchmanship, members of Christ, and the doctrine of this tract must be thrown aside. Oh, what a wise remark it is of Hooker's! "For want of diligently observing the difference between the Church of God mystical and visible, the oversights are neither few nor light that have been committed."

Reader, I commend the things I have just been saying to your sincere and prayerful attention. I have gone through them at the risk of seeming wearisome, from a deep conviction of their great importance. I am sure if any of this tract deserves consideration, it is this.

I entreat you to observe how important it is for Christians to be *sound in the faith*, and to be armed with clear Scriptural knowledge of the whole system of the Gospel. I fear the increasing tendency to regard all doctrinal questions as matters of opinion, and to look on all earnest-minded men as right, whatever doctrines they maintain. I warn you that the sure result of giving way to this tendency will be a vague, low, misty theology,—a theology containing no positive hope, no positive motive, and no positive consolation,—a theology which will fail most, just when it is most wanted, in the day of affliction, the hour of sickness, and on the bed of death.

I know well that it is a thankless office to offer such warnings as these. I know well that those who give them must expect to be called bigoted, narrow-minded, and exclusive. But I cannot review the many errors which prevail on the subject of perseverance, without seeing more than ever the immense need there is for urging on all to be careful about doctrine. Oh, learn to know what you mean when you talk of believing the doctrines of Christianity! Be able to give a reason of your hope. Be able to say what you think is true, and what you think false in religion. And

never, never forget that the only foundation of soundness in the faith, is a thorough textual knowledge of the Bible.

I entreat you, in the last place, to observe how *one error in religion leads on to another*. There is a close connection between false doctrines. It is almost impossible to take up one alone. Once let a man get wrong about the Church and the sacraments, and there is no saying how far he may go and where he may land at last. It is a mistake at the fountain-head and influences the whole course of his religion. The mistake about baptism is a striking illustration of what I mean. It throws a colour over the whole of a man's divinity; it insensibly affects his views of justification, sanctification, election, and perseverance; it fills his mind with a tangled maze of confusion as to all the leading articles of the faith. He starts with a theory for which no single plain text of Scripture can be alleged, and before this theory tramples plain passages of the Bible by the score! They interfere forsooth, with his favourite theory, and therefore cannot mean what common sense tells us they do! Oh, reader, be as jealous about a little false doctrine, as you would be about a little sin! Remember the words of St. Paul: "a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump."

IV. I now proceed, in the last place, to mention *some reasons why the doctrine of final perseverance is of great importance*.

When I speak of the importance of perseverance, I do not for a moment mean that it is necessary to salvation to receive it. I freely grant that thousands and tens of thousands have gone to heaven, who believe all their lives that saints might fall away. But all this does not prove the doctrine maintained in this tract to be a matter of indifference. He that does not believe it and yet is saved, no doubt does well; but I am persuaded that he that believes it and is saved does far better. I hold it to be one of the chief privileges of the children of God, and I consider that no privilege contained in the Gospel can be lost sight of without injury to the soul.

(1) Perseverance is a doctrine of great importance, because of *the strong colour which it throws on the whole statement of the Gospel*.

The grand characteristic of the Gospel is, that it is glad tidings. It is a message of peace to a rebellious world. It is good news from a far country, alike unexpected and undeserved. It is glad tidings that there is a hope for us, lost, ruined, and bankrupt as we are by nature,—a hope of pardon, a hope of reconciliation with God, a hope of glory. It is the glad tidings that the foundation of this hope is mighty, deep, and broad,—that it is built on the atoning death and gracious mediation of a Saviour. It is the glad tidings that this Saviour is an actual living person, Jesus the Son of God; able to save to the uttermost all who come to God by Him, and no less merciful, compassionate, and ready to save than able. It is the glad tidings that the way to pardon and peace by this Saviour is the simplest possible. It is not a thing high in Heaven that we cannot reach, or deep in the depths that we cannot fathom. It is simply to believe, to trust, and to cast ourselves wholly on Jesus for salvation, and salvation is all our own. It is the glad tidings that all who believe are at once justified and forgiven all things; their sins, however many, are washed away; their souls however unworthy are counted righteous before God. They believe on Jesus, and therefore they are saved. This is the good news. This is the glad tidings. This is the truth which is the grand peculiarity of the Gospel. Happy indeed is he that knows and believes it!

But think, reader, for a moment, what a mighty difference it would make in the sound of the Gospel, if I went on to tell you, that after receiving all those mercies you might by-and-by lose them entirely. What would your feelings be if I told you that you were in daily peril of forfeiting all these privileges, and having your pardon sealed in Christ's blood taken back again? What would you think if I told you that your safety was yet an uncertain thing, and that you might yet perish and never reach Heaven at all? Oh, what a falling off this would seem! Oh, how much of the grace and beauty of the glorious Gospel would disappear and fade away! Yet this is literally and exactly the conclusion to which a denial of perseverance *must* bring us.

Once admit that the saints of God may perish, and you seem to me to tear from the Gospel crown its brightest jewel. We are hanging on the edge of precipice. We are kept in awful suspense until we are dead. To tell us that there are plenty of gracious promises to encourage us, if we will only persevere, is but mockery. It is like telling the sick man that if he will only get well he will be strong. The poor patient feels no confidence that he will get well, and the poor weak believer feels nothing in him like power to persevere. Today he may be in Canaan, and tomorrow he may be in Egypt again, and in bondage. This week he may be in the narrow way; but for anything he knows, next week he may be back in the broad road. This month he may be a justified, pardoned, and forgiven man; but next month his pardon may be all revoked, and he himself in a state of condemnation. This year he may have faith, and be a child of God; next year he may be a child of the devil, and have no part or lot in Christ. Where is the good news in all this? What becomes of the glad tidings? Verily such doctrine seems to me to cut up the joy of the Gospel by the roots. Yet this is the doctrine we *must* hold, if we reject the final perseverance of the saints.[12]

I bless God that I am able to see another kind of Gospel than this in the word of God. To my eyes the Bible seems to teach that he who once begins the life of faith in Christ, shall without doubt be preserved from apostasy, and come to a glorious end. Once made alive by the grace of God, he shall live for ever. Once raised from the grave of sin and made a new man, he shall never go back to the grave and become once more the old man dead in trespasses and sins. He shall be kept by the power of God. He shall be more than conqueror through Him that loved Him. The eternal God is his refuge; underneath Him are Everlasting Arms. The love in which he is interested is eternal. The righteousness in which he is clothed is eternal. The redemption which he enjoys is eternal. The *sense and comfort* of it he may lose by his own carelessness. But *the thing* itself, after once believing, is his for evermore.

Reader look at the two ways in which the weary and heavy\_laden sinner may be addressed, and judge for yourself which is most like the gospel of the grace of God. On the one side stands the doctrine, which says, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved. Once believing thou shalt never perish. Thy faith shall never be allowed entirely to fail. Thou shalt be sealed by the Holy Spirit unto the day of redemption." On the other side stands the doctrine, which says, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved. But after thou hast believed take care. Thy faith may fail. Thou mayest fall away. Thou mayest drive the Spirit from thee. Thou mayest at length perish everlastingly." Which doctrine of these two contain most good news? Which is most like glad tidings? Is it all the same which way the sinner is addressed? Is it matter of indifference whether we tell him that believing he is saved, *unless he falls away*, or whether we tell him that believing he is saved *for ever*? I cannot think it. I regard the difference between the

two doctrines as very great indeed. It is the difference between January and June. It is the difference between twilight and noonday.

I speak for myself. I cannot answer for the experience of others. To give me solid peace, I must know something about my *future prospects* as well as about my *present position*. It is pleasant to see my pardon today: but I cannot help thinking of tomorrow. Tell me that He who leads me to Christ, and gives me repentance and faith in Him, will never leave me nor forsake me, and I feel solid comfort. My feet are on a rock. My soul is in safe hands. I shall get safe home. Tell me, on the other hand, that after being led to Christ I am left to my own vigilance, and that it depends on my watching, and praying, and care, whether the Spirit leaves me or no, and my heart melts within me. I stand on quicksand. I lean on a broken reed. I shall never get to heaven. It is vain to tell me of the promises; they are only mine if I walk worthy of them. It is vain to talk to me of Christ's mercy; I may lose all my interest in it by indolence and self-will. Reader, the absence of the doctrine of perseverance appears to me to give a different colour to the whole Gospel. You cannot wonder if I regard it as of great importance.

(2) But the doctrine of perseverance is also of importance, because of *the special influence it is calculated to have on all who halt between two opinions in religion*.

There are many persons of this description in the Church of Christ. There are hundreds to be found in every congregation to which the Gospel of Christ is preached, who know well what is right, and yet have not courage to act up to their knowledge. Their consciences are awakened. Their minds are comparatively enlightened. Their feelings are partially aroused to a sense of the value of their souls. They see the path they ought to take. They hope one day to be able to take it. But at present they sit still and *wait*. They will not take up the cross and confess Christ.

And what keeps them back? In a vast proportion of cases they are afraid to begin, lest they should by-and-by fail and fall away. They see innumerable difficulties before them if they serve Christ. They are quite right. It is vain to deny that there are difficulties, both many and great. They stand shivering on the brink of the vast sea on which we would have them embark, and as they mark the rolling, tumbling waves, their hearts faint. They mark many a little boat on the waters of that sea, tossed to and fro, and struggling hard to make its way across, and looking as if it would be engulfed in the angry billows, and never get safe to harbour. "It is of no use," they feel: "it is of no use. We shall certainly fall away. We cannot serve Christ yet. The thing cannot be done."

Now, what is most likely to give courage to these halting souls? What is most likely to hearten them for the voyage? What is most likely to cheer their spirits, nerve their minds, and bring them to the point of boldly launching away? — I answer, without hesitation, The *doctrine of final perseverance*.

I would fain tell them that however great the difficulties of Christ's service, there is grace and strength in store to carry them triumphantly through all. I would tell them that these poor, praying, broken-spirited voyagers whom they watch and expect to see cast away, are all safe as if they were already in harbour. They have each a pilot on board, who will carry them safe through every storm. They are each joined to the everlasting God by a tie that can never be broken, and

shall all appear at length safe at the right hand of their Lord. Yes: and I would fain tell them that they too shall all make a glorious end if they will only begin. I would have them know that, if they will only commit themselves to Christ, they shall never be cast away. They shall not be plucked away by Satan. They shall never be left to sink and come to shame. Trials they may have, but none that the Spirit will not give them power to endure. Temptations they may have, but none that the Spirit shall not enable them to resist. Only let them begin, and they shall be conquerors. But the great matter is to begin.

Reader, I believe firmly that one reason why so many wavering Christians hang back from making a decided profession, is the want of encouragement which the doctrine of perseverance is intended to afford.

(3) The doctrine of perseverance is of importance because of *the special influence it is calculated to have on the minds of true believers.*

The number of true believers is at all times very small. They are a little flock. But even out of that flock there are a few who can be called strong in faith, few who know much of uninterrupted joy and peace in believing, few who are not often cast down by their doubts, anxieties, and fears.

It is useless to deny that the way to Heaven is narrow. There are many things to try the faith of believers. They have trials the world cannot understand. They have within a heart weak, deceitful, and not to be trusted,—cold when they would fain be warm,—backward when they would fain to be forward,—more ready to sleep than watch. They have without a world that does not love Christ's truth, and Christ's people, —a world full of slander, ridicule, and persecution,—a world with which their own dearest relations often join. They have ever near them a busy devil, an enemy who has been reading men's hearts for 6,000 years, and knows exactly how to suit and time his temptations,—an enemy who never ceases to lay snares in their way,—who never slumbers and never sleeps. They have the cares of life to attend to, like other people,—the cares of children,—the cares of business,—the cares of servants,—the cares of money,—the cares of earthly plans and arrangements,—the cares of a poor, weak body, each daily thrusting itself upon their souls. Who can wonder that believers are sometimes cast down? Who ought not rather to marvel that any believers are saved? Truly I often think that the salvation of each saved person is a greater miracle than the passage of Israel through the Red Sea.[13]

But what is the best antidote against the believer's fears and anxieties? What is most likely to cheer him as he looks forward to the untried future and remembers the weary past? I answer without hesitation, the *doctrine of the final perseverance of God's elect.* Let him know that God having begun a good work in him will never allow it to be overthrown. Let him know that the footsteps of Christ's little flock are all in one direction. They have erred. They have been vexed. They have been tempted. But not one of them has been lost. Let him know that those whom Jesus loves, He loves unto the end. Let him know that He will not suffer the weakest lamb in His flock to perish in the wilderness, or the tenderest flower in His garden to wither and die. Let him know that Daniel in the den of lions, the three children in a fiery furnace, Paul in the shipwreck, Noah in the ark, were none of them more cared for and more secure than the believer in Christ. Let him know that he is fenced, walled, protected, guarded by the Almighty power of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, and cannot perish. Let him know that it is not in the power of the things in

the present or things to come,—of men or of devils,—of cares within or troubles without, to separate one single child of God from the love that is in Christ Jesus.

This is strong consolation. These are the things which God has laid up in the Gospel for the establishment and confirmation of His people. Well would it be for His people if these things were more brought forward than they are in the Church of Christ. Verily I believe that one reason of the saints' weakness is their ignorance of the truths which God has revealed in order to make them strong.

Reader, I leave the subject of the importance of perseverance here. I trust I have said enough to show you that I have not called your attention to it in this tract without good cause. I feel strongly that the hardness of man's heart is such that nothing should be omitted in religious teaching which is likely to do it good. I dare not omit a single grain of truth, however strong and liable to abuse it may seem to be. Nothing appears to me of small importance which adds to the beauty of the Gospel, or gives encouragement to the halting, or confirms and builds up God's people. I desire to teach that the Gospel not only offers present pardon and peace, but eternal safety and certain continuance to the end. This I believe be the mind of the Spirit. And what the Spirit reveals I desire to proclaim.

And now, reader, I have brought before you, to the best of my ability, the whole subject of perseverance. I have told you as plainly as I can, what I believe to be the truth as it is in Jesus. If I have offended you by anything I have said, I am sorry. I have no desire to pain anyone, and least of all the children of God. If I have failed to convince you I am sorry, but I am satisfied the defect is not in the doctrine I defend, but in my manner of stating it. It only remains to conclude this tract by a few words of practical application.

(1) For one thing, let me entreat you to consider well, *whether you have any part at all in the salvation of Christ Jesus.*

It matters nothing what you believe about perseverance, if after all you have no faith in Christ. It matters little whether you hold the doctrine or not, so long as you have no saving faith, and your sins are not forgiven, and your heart not renewed by the Holy Ghost. The clearest head-knowledge will save no man. The most correct and orthodox views will not prevent a man perishing by the side of the most ignorant heathen if he is not born again. Oh, search and see what is the state of your own soul!

You cannot live forever. You must one day die. You cannot avoid the judgment after death. You must stand before the bar of Christ. The summons of the Archangel cannot be disobeyed. The last great assembly must be attended. The state of your own soul must one day undergo a thorough investigation. It will be found out one day what you are in God's sight. Your spiritual condition will at length be brought to light before the whole world. Oh, find out what it is now! While you have time, while you have health, find out the state of your soul.

Your danger, if you are not converted, is far greater than I can describe. Just in proportion to the thorough safety of the believer is the deadly peril of the unbeliever. There is but a step between the unbeliever and the worm that never dies, and the fire that is not quenched. He is literally

hanging over the brink of the bottomless pit. Sudden death to the saint is sudden glory; but sudden death to the unconverted sinner, is sudden hell. Oh, search and see what is the state of your soul!

Remember that you may find out whether you have an interest in the invitations of the Gospel. It is a thing that may be known. It is nonsense to pretend that no man can tell. I never will believe that an honest man, with a Bible in his hand, will fail to discern his spiritual condition by diligent self-examination. Oh be a honest man! Search the Scriptures. Look within. Rest not till you find out the state of your soul. To live on and leave the soul's state uncertain, is not to play the part of a wise man but a fool.

(2) *In the next place, if you know nothing of the privileges of the Gospel, I entreat you this day to repent and be converted, to hear Christ's voice, and follow Him.*

I know no reason, human or divine, why you should not accept this invitation today and be saved, if you are really willing. It is not the quantity of your sins that need prevent you. All manner of sin may be forgiven. The blood of Jesus cleanseth away all sin.—It is not the hardness of your heart that need prevent you. A new heart God will give you, and a new spirit will He put in you.—It is not the decrees of God that need prevent you. He willeth not the death of sinners. He is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.—It is not any want of willingness in Christ:—He has long cried to the sons of men, "Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." "Him that cometh unto Me I will in no wise cast out." Oh, reader, why should not you be saved?

A day must come, if you are ever to be God's child, when will you cease to trifle with your soul's interests. An hour must come when at last you will bend your knee in real earnestness, and pour out of your heart before God in real prayer. A time must come when the burden of your sins will at last feel intolerable, and when you will feel you must have rest in Christ or perish. All this must be if you are ever to become a child of God and be saved. And why not today? Why not this very night? Why not without delay seek Christ and live? Oh, reader, answer me, if you can!

(3) *In the next place, let me entreat every reader who holds final perseverance, so to use this precious doctrine as not to abuse it.*

There is an awful readiness in all men to abuse God's mercies. Even the children of God are not as free from the sad infection. There is a busy devil near the best of saints, who would fain persuade them to make their privileges a plea for the careless living, and to turn their soul's meat into poison. I cannot look around the church and the end to which many high professors come without feeling that there is need for caution. "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall."

Would we know what it is to abuse the doctrine of perseverance? It is abused when believers make their safety an excuse for inconsistencies in practice. It is abused when they make their security from final ruin an apology for a low standard of sanctification, and a distant walk with God. Against both those abuses I entreat believers to be on their guard.

Would we know what it is to use the doctrine of perseverance aright? Let us watch jealously over the daily workings of our own hearts. Let us mortify and nip in the bud the least inclination to spiritual indolence. Let us settle down in our minds as a ruling principle of our lives, that the mercies of God are only turned to a good account when they have *a sanctifying effect on our hearts*. Let us root it finally in our inward man, that the love of Christ is never so really valued as when it constrains us to increased spiritual-mindedness. Let us set before our minds, that the more safe we feel the more holy we ought to be. The more we realise that God has done much for us, the more we ought to do for God. The greater our debt, the greater should be our gratitude. The more we see the riches of grace, the more rich should we be in good works.

Oh, for a heart like that of the Apostle Paul! To realize like he did, our perfect safety in Christ,—to labour as he did for God's glory, as if we could never do too much,—this is the mark,—this is the standard at which we ought to aim.

Reader, let us so use the doctrine of perseverance that our good may never be evil spoken of. Let us so adorn the doctrine by our lives that we may make it beautiful to others, and constrain men to say, "It is a good and holy thing to be persuaded that the saints will never perish."

(4) In the last place, *I entreat all believers who have hitherto been afraid of falling away, to lay firm hold on the doctrine of perseverance, and to realize their own safety in Christ.*

I want you to know the length and breadth of your portion in Christ. I want you to understand the full amount of treasure to which faith in Jesus entitles you. You have found out that you are a great sinner. Thank God for that. You have fled to Christ for pardon and peace with God. Thank God for that. You have committed yourself to Jesus for time and eternity: you have no hope but in Christ's blood, Christ's righteousness, Christ's mediation, Christ's daily all-persevering intercession. Thank God for that. Your heart's desire and prayer is to be holy in all manner of conversation. Thank God for that. But oh, lay hold upon the glorious truth,—that believing on Jesus you shall never perish, you shall never be cast away, you shall never fall away! It is written for you as well as the apostles, "My sheep shall never perish." Yes! reader, Jesus has spoken it, and Jesus meant it to be believed. Jesus has spoken it, who never broke His promises. Jesus has spoken it, who cannot lie. Jesus has spoken it, who has power in heaven and earth to keep His word. Jesus has spoken it for the least and lowest believers: "My sheep shall never perish."

Wouldest thou have *perfect peace in life*? Then lay hold on this doctrine of perseverance. Thy trials may be many and great. Thy cross may be very heavy. But the business of thy soul is all conducted according to an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure. All things are working together for thy good. Thy sorrows are only purifying thy soul for glory; thy bereavements are only fashioning thee as a polished stone for the temple above, made without hands. From whatever quarter the storms blow, they only drive thee nearer to heaven: whatever weather thou mayest go through it is only ripening thee for the garner of God. Thy best things are quite safe. Come what will, thou shalt "never perish."

Wouldest thou have *strong consolation in sickness*? Then lay hold on this doctrine of perseverance. Think, as thou feelest the pins of this earthly tabernacle loosening one by one, "nothing can break my union with Christ." Thy body may become useless; thy members may

refuse to perform their office; thou mayest feel like an old useless log,—a weariness to others, and a burden to thyself. But thy soul is safe. Jesus is never tired of caring for thy soul. Thou shalt "never perish."

Wouldest thou have *full assurance of hope in death*? Then lay hold on this doctrine of perseverance. Doctors may have given over their labours; friends may be unable to minister to thy wants; sight may depart; hearing may depart; memory may be almost gone: but the loving kindness of God shall not depart. Once in Christ thou shalt never be forsaken. Jesus shall stand by thee. Death shall not separate thee from the everlasting love of God in Christ. Thou shalt "never perish."**[14]**

Reader, may this be your portion in life and death! And may it be mine!

**Added to Bible Bulletin Board's "J. C. Ryle Collection" by:**

**Tony Capoccia**

***Bible Bulletin Board***

**Box 119**

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## FOOTNOTES

[1] "We do not hold that all whom the most discerning minister or Christian considers true Christians, will be 'kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation.' God alone can search the heart, and He may see that to be a dead and temporary faith which we in the judgement of charity think living and permanent."—*Scott's reply to Tomline, page 675.*

[2] "It is grossly contrary to the truth of the Scriptures to imagine that they who are thus renewed, can be unborn again."—*Archbishop Leighton, 1680.*

[3] "Every believer doth not know that he is a believer, and therefore, he cannot know all the privileges that elong to believers."—*Traill, 1690.*

"Let none encourage themselves to a freedom in sin, and presume upon God's preservation of them without the use of means. No! The electing counsel upon which this victory is founded, chose us to the end. He that makes such a consequence, I doubt whether he ever was a Christian.

I may safely say that any person that hath settled, resolved, and wilful remissness, never yet was in the covenant of Grace."—Charnock *on Weak Grace*. 1684.

[5] I allude you to the common story that Cromwell on his deathbed asked Dr. Thomas Goodwin whether a believer could fall from grace. Goodwin replied he could not. Cromwell is reported to have said, that "if so he was safe, for he was sure that he had been in a state of grace."

The truth of this story is exceedingly questionable. It is a remarkable fact that Cromwell's faithful servant, who published a collection of all the remarkable sayings and doings of his master in his last sickness, does not mention this conversation. It is more probable that it is one of those false and malicious inventions with which the great Protector's enemies laboured so hard to blacken his memory after his death.

[6] "As Christ being raised from the dead, dieth no more, death hath no more power over him; so the justified man being allied to God in Christ Jesus our Lord, doth as necessarily from that time forward always live, as Christ by whom he hath life liveth always." (Rom. vi. 10; John xiv. 19.) "As long as that abideth in us which animateth, quickeneth, and giveth life, so long as we live; and we know that the cause of our faith abideth in us for ever. If Christ the fountain of life may flit, and leave the habitations where once He dwelleth, what shall become of His promise, 'I am with you to the world's end'? If the seed of God which containeth Christ may be first conceived and then cast out, how doth St. Peter term it immortal? (1 Pet. i.23.) How doth St. John affirm that it abideth (1 John. iii.9)."—*Hooker's Discourse of Justification*. 1590

[7] There are few subjects about which English people are so ignorant as they are about the real doctrines of the Church of England. Many persons know nothing of the theological opinions of the English Reformers, and of all leading English divines for nearly a century after the Protestant Reformation. They call opinions old which in reality are new, and they call opinions new which in reality are old.

It would be a waste of time to inquire into the causes of this ignorance. Certain it is that it exists. Few people seem to be aware that those doctrines which now are commonly called *evangelical*, were the universally received divinity of English Churchmen throughout the reigns of Queen Elizabeth and James 1st. They are not, as many ignorantly suppose, new-fangled views of modern invention. They are simply the old paths in which the Reformers and their immediate successors walked. Tractarianism, High Churchism, and Broad Churchism are new systems. Evangelical teaching is neither more nor less than the old school.

The proof of this assertion is to be found in the Church history of the reigns of Elizabeth and James 1st, and in the writings of the divines of that period. Far be it from me to defend all the sayings and doings of theologians of that date. The student will find in their writings abundant traces of intolerance, illiberality, and bigotry, which I would be the last to defend. But that the vast majority of all Churchmen in that day held doctrines which are now called Calvinistic and Evangelical, is to my mind as clear as noon-day: and upon no point does the evidence appear to me so clear as upon the doctrine of perseverance.

(1) Is it not a historical fact, that in Queen Elizabeth's reign, in the year 1595, the University of Cambridge compelled Mr. Barret, of Caius college, to read a public recantation and apology in St. Mary's Church, for having denied the doctrines of final perseverance and election? —*The Church of England's old Antithesis to new Arminianism by William Prynne, page 56.*

(2) Is it not a historical fact, that the Articles drawn up by the Vice-Chancellor and heads of the University of Cambridge, against the above-mentioned Barret, conclude with the following words? "This doctrine, being not about inferior points of matters indifferent, but of the substantial ground, and chief comfort and anchor ground of our salvation, hath been to our knowledge continually and generally received, taught, and defended in this University, in lectures, disputations, and sermons, and in other places in sermons, since the beginning of her Majesty's reign, and is so still holden: and we take it agreeable to the doctrine of the Church of England—*Edwards Veritas Redux, page 534*

(3) Is it not a historical fact, that in the same Queen Elizabeth's reign, in the same year, 1595, the Lambeth Articles were drawn up and approved by Archbishop Whitgift and Bishop Bancroft (afterwards Archbishop of Canterbury); and that they contain the following proposition: "A true living and justifying faith, and the Spirit of God who justifies, is not extinguished, falleth not away, vanisheth not in the elect, either finally or totally." These articles were not added to our confession of faith; but Fuller's words nevertheless are perfectly true: "The testimony of these learned divines is an infallible evidence what were the general and received doctrines of England in that age."—*Fuller's Church History. Tegg's edition. Third volume, page 150.*

(4) Is it not a historical fact, that in the year 1604, in James the First's reign, this doctrine of perseverance was considered at the Hampton Court Conference. The Puritan party wished the Lambeth Articles to be added to the thirty-nine Articles. Their request was not granted: but on what grounds? *Not because the doctrine of perseverance was objected to, but because King James thought it better "not to stuff the book of Articles with all conclusions theological."* While even Overall, Dean of St. Paul's, whose soundness on this point was most suspected, used these remarkable words: "Those who are justified according to the purpose of God's election, though they might fall into grievous sin, and thereby into the present estate of damnation, yet never totally nor finally fall from justification, but are in time renewed by God's Spirit unto lively faith and repentance —*Fuller's Church History, third volume, page 181.*

(5) Is it not a historical fact, that the first exposition of the thirty-nine Articles, published after the Reformation, contains a full and distinct assertion of the doctrine of perseverance, in the part which treats of the seventeenth Article? I allude to the work of Thomas Rogers, Chaplain to Archbishop Bancroft, to whom the book was dedicated, 1607.—*Rogers on the thirty-nine Articles. Parker Society Edition.*

(6) Is it not a historical fact, that in the year 1612, King James the 1st published a declaration written by himself, against one Vorstius, an Arminian divine, in which he calls the doctrine, that the saints may fall away, "A wicked doctrine, a blasphemous heresy, directly contrary to the doctrine of the Church of England." *Prynne. Church of England Antithesis, etc., page 206.*

(7) Is it not a historical fact, that the same King James the 1st, in the same year 1612, wrote a letter to the States of Holland, in consequence of a Dutch divine, named Bertius, having written a book on the Apostasy of the Saints, and sent it to the Archbishop of Canterbury. In this letter, the King speaks of Bertius as "a pestilent heretic," and called his doctrine "an abominable heresy," and in one place says, "he is not ashamed to lie so grossly as to avow that the heresies contained in the said book are agreeable with the religion and profession of the Church of England."—*Prynne. Church of England's Antithesis to Arminianism, page 206.*

(8) Is it not a historical fact, that the same King James the First, in the year 1616, visited with severe displeasure a clergyman named Sympson, a fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge, for preaching before him, at Royston, that true believers may totally fall away?—*Fuller's History of Cambridge, page 160.*

(9) Is it not a historical fact, that in the Synod of Dort, in the year 1619, the doctrine of final perseverance was strongly asserted? Now several English Divines were formally deputed to attend this Synod and take part in its proceedings, and amongst others, Bishop Davenant, and Bishop Carleton. And is it not notorious that however much they differed from the conclusions of the Synod in the matters of discipline, they "approved all the points of the doctrine?"—*Fuller's Church History, vol. 3, page 279.*

(10) Last, but not least, is it not a historical fact, that all the leading Archbishops and Bishops in the reigns of Elizabeth and James the First, were thorough Calvinists in matters of doctrine? And is not a notorious fact that the final perseverance of the saints is one of the leading principles of the system that is called Calvinistic? Heylin himself is obliged to confess this. He says, "It was safer for any man in those times to have been looked upon as a heathen or publican than an anti-Calvinist."—*Heylin's Life of Laud, page 52.*

I lay these ten facts before the reader, and ask his serious attention to them. I am unable to understand how any one can avoid the conclusion which may be drawn from them. To me it appears an established point in history, that the doctrine of the final perseverance of the saints is the old doctrine of the Church of England, and the denial of this doctrine is new.

I could easily add long quotations to strengthen the evidence which I have brought forward. I could turn to marginal notes of the "Bishop's Bible", published under the special superintendence and approval of Archbishop Parker. I could quote passage upon passage from the writings of Archbishops Cranmer, Grindal, Sandys, Abbot, Usher,—of Bishops Ridley, Latimer, Jewell, Pilkington, Babington, Hall, Davenant, Carleton, Prideaux, and Reynolds. In short, the difficulty is to find theological writers in the reigns of Elizabeth and James the First, who ever thought of disputing final perseverance. William Prynne gives the names of no less than 130 writers who held that the saints could never perish, and gives the references to their works. But at that time he wrote (1629) he could only find four writers who had denied the perseverance of the saints and taught the possibility of their apostasy. I could supply many quotations from the writers he names. But I spare the reader. He has probably heard enough.

I have made this note longer than I intended, but the importance of the facts which it contains must be my apology. The whole subject in the present day is one of the deepest moment.

The evangelical members of the Church of England are constantly taunted by their adversaries with holding new views. They are told that their opinions are not "Church opinions," and that they ought to leave the Church of England and become dissenters without delay. I entreat all readers of these pages never to be moved by such taunts and insinuations. I tell them that those who make them are only exposing their own thorough ignorance of the first principles of their own communion. I tell them not to be ashamed of their own views, for they have no cause. I tell them that the evangelical members of the Church of England are the true representatives of the views of the Reformers and their immediate successors, and that those who oppose them know not what they are saying.

If I were in a position to offer counsel to my evangelical brethren at this crisis, I would earnestly advise them *to hold fast the doctrine of final perseverance, and never let it go*. There is no doctrine which so entirely overturns the modern view of baptismal regeneration. There is no doctrine in consequence which Tractarians dislike so much and labour so hard to overthrow. It is a barrier in their path. It is a thorn in their side. It is an argument which they cannot answer. The seventeenth Article of the Church of England is one of the keys of our position. He that gives up the doctrine of perseverance may rest assured that he has sold the past to his enemy. Once allow that saving grace may be totally lost, and in the day of controversy you will never hold your ground.

Last, but not least, I would counsel all clergymen who are persecuted for holding evangelical opinions to arm themselves with a thorough knowledge of old Church of England divinity, and to take comfort in the thought that they have the truth on their side. They, at all events, are explaining the thirty-nine Articles according to the intention of those who composed them. Their opponents are either neglecting the Articles, or attaching to them a new meaning.

How far is it reasonable and fair to persecute godly men for preferring the views of the Reformers to those of Laud, I leave it to the others to decide. But those who are persecuted may take comfort in the reflection that if they err, they err in good company. And if they ever suffer loss of character and position for holding final perseverance and denying the inseparable connection of baptism and regeneration, they may boldly tell the world that they suffer because they agree with Latimer, and Hooper, and Jewell, and Whitgift, and Carleton, and Davenant, and Usher, and Leighton, and Hooker, and Hall. He that suffers in company with these good men has no cause to be ashamed.

[8] I would entreat any man that hath his eyes set right in his head to read and consider the words of the seventeenth Article, the order and soundness of them; and then let him judge whether perseverance unto the end be not soundly and roundly set down and averred in this Article."—*George Carleton, Bishop of Chichester, 1692. An Examination, p.63.*

[9]"Now if Thou shalt kill this people as one man, then the nations, which have heard the fame of Thee, will speak, saying, "Because the Lord was not able to bring this people into the land which He sware unto them, therefore He hath slain them in the wilderness."—Numbers xiv. 15, 16. "What wilt Thou do to Thy great name?"—Joshua vii. 9. "If any of the elect perish, God is overcome by man's perverseness; but none of them perish, because God, who is omnipotent, can by no means be overcome."—*Augustine. De Corruptione et Gratia, cap. VII*

[10] "How well do they consult for Christ's honour that say His sheep may die in a ditch of final apostasy?"

"Christ and His members make one Christ. Now, is it possible a piece of Christ can be found at last burning in hell? Can Christ be a crippled Christ? Can this member drop off and that? How can Christ part with His mystical members and not with His glory?"—*Gurnall*. 1665.

[11] The following texts, on which the opponents of perseverance principally rely, appear to call for a brief notice.

Ezek. iii. 20 and Ezek. xviii. 24. I can see no proof in either of these cases that "the righteous" here spoken of, is anything more than one, whose outward conduct is righteous. There is nothing to show that he is one justified by faith and accounted righteous before God.

1 Cor. ix. 27. I see nothing in this but the godly fear of falling into sin, which is one of the marks of a believer, and distinguishes him from the unconverted, and a simple declaration of the means which Paul used to preserve himself from being a castaway. It is like 1 John v. 18: "He that is begotten of God *keepeth himself*."

John xv. 2. This does not prove that the true believers shall be taken away from Christ. A branch that "*does not bear fruit*" is not a believer. "A lively faith," says the 12th Article, "may be as evidently known by good works, as a tree is known by the fruit."

1 Thess. v. 19. If "the Spirit" here means the Spirit in ourselves, it means no more than grieving the Spirit," in Eph. iv. 30. But many think it is the Spirit's gifts in others, and ought to be taken in connection with verse 20.

Gal. v. 4. The tenor of the whole Epistle seems to show that this "falling" is not from inward grace of the Spirit, but from the doctrine of grace. The same remark applies to 2 Cor. vi. 1.

Heb. vi. 4-6. The person here described as "falling away" has no characteristics which may not be discovered in unconverted men, while it is not said that he possesses saving faith, and charity, and is elect.

John viii. 31; Coloss. i. 23. The conditional "if" in both these verses, and several others like them that might be quoted, does not imply uncertainty as to the salvation of those described. It simply means that the evidence of real grace is "continuance." False grace perishes. True grace lasts. "It is frequent in Scripture," says Charnock, "to put into promises these conditions which in other places are promised to be wrought in us."—*Charnock on Real Grace*. 1684.

I readily grant that these are not all the texts that the adversaries of final perseverance generally bring forward; but I believe they are the principal ones. The weak point in their case is this: they have no text to prove that saints may fall away, which will at all compare with such an expression as, "*My sheep shall never perish*;" and they have no account to give of such a mighty saying as this promised of our Lord, which is at all satisfactory or even rational. John Goodwin, the famous Arminian, offers the following explanation of this text: "The promise of eternal

safety made by Christ to His sheep, doth not relate to their estate in the present world, but to that of the world to come!" A man must be sorely put to straits when he can argue in such a way.

[12] "They weaken Christians' comfort that make believers walk with Christ like dancers upon a rope, every moment in fear of breaking their necks."—*Manton on Jude*. 1658

[13] "There are as many miracles wrought as a saint is preserved minutes."—*Jenkyn on Jude*. 1680.

[14] The deathbed of Bruce, the famous Scotch divine, is a striking illustration of this part of my subject. Old Fleming describes it in the following words. "His sight failed him, whereupon he called for his Bible; but finding his sight gone he said, 'Cast up to me the eighth chapter of the Romans and set my finger to these words,—I am persuaded that neither death nor life, etc., shall be able to separate me from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Now,' said he, 'is my finger is upon them?' when they told him it was, he said, 'Now God be with you my children: I have breakfasted with you, and shall sup with my Lord Jesus Christ this night,' and so gave up the Ghost."—*Fleming's Fulfilment of Prophecy*, 1680.