

Notes on Preservation/Perseverance

I would like to make a few comments on this subject. Someone has said that perseverance and preservation are two sides of the same coin. I agree with that statement.

Preservation means that none of the elect will finally be plucked from the hand of God. This is sometimes referred to as the doctrine of ETERNAL SECURITY. It is sometimes defined as ONCE SAVED, ALWAYS SAVED. This is definitely a beautiful and comforting Biblical truth.

Perseverance is the other side of the coin. What I understand this to mean is that the elect will persevere in some degree of faith and holiness. When people hear this they sometimes run backwards, because they think that those who hold to this doctrine are teaching perfectionism. But this is not true. When I say that the elect will continue in some degree of faith and holiness, I am simply saying that their faith will not totally and finally fail. Someone has already given the example of Christ praying for Peter that his faith would not fail. Peter certainly had a grievous lapse of faith, but the Lord interceded for him and his faith was not totally and finally overthrown. In fact the Scripture teaches this in 1 John 5:4, where it is said "For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith."

When I say that the child of God will persevere in some degree of holiness, I simply mean that there is a difference in one who is spiritually alive and one who is spiritually dead. A child of God cannot live permanently in gross sin and be happy in it.

We get no credit for our perseverance. It is the work of God in us. As Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15:10, "But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me." Paul did not take one iota of credit for his zealous works on behalf of Christ. I appreciate the statement by 96 year old Brother Morris Oakley of Little Rock, AR. He told me, "Brother Guess, I give God 100% of the credit for anything I have ever done that is good. I take 100% of the blame for all the bad that I do." In my humble opinion, that is sound theology!

I like to picture the relationship between preservation and perseverance in this way. Often I have climbed steep places with one of my very small children. As we climb, I grasp the tiny hand in my big hand. I grip them with my strength and bring them to safety. They have no real strength, but instinctively they grip my hand with all their might. In reality their grip really does not get the job done, mine does. Nevertheless, they hold on to me. God's big hand is the one that holds me, gets me to safety, and never lets me go. However, conscious of my weakness, and aware of the danger about me, I hold on to Him. Sometimes my grip gets very weak. Sometimes I get so distracted by the things of this world, I may for a time forget to hold on. Praise God, He continues to hold on.

People usually sing what they believe. Old Baptists love the song titled PRESERVATION. If you closely examine that and similar songs you will see elements of what our forefathers called perseverance.

"Now in Thy praise, eternal King, Be all my tho'ts employed;
While of this precious truth I sing, 'Cast down, but not destroyed;'

Oft the united powers of hell My soul have sore annoyed;
And yet I live this truth to tell, 'Cast down, but not destroyed;'

In all the paths thru which I've pass'd What mercies I've enjoyed;
And this shall be my song at last, 'Cast down, but not destroyed;'

When I with God in heav'n appear, There shall I Him adore;
Destroyed shall be my sin and fear, And I cast down no more."

Perseverance is not works salvation. It is simply the outworking in our lives of what God has worked in us. This doctrine has been of great practical value to me. When I have been back slidden and away from God, Satan has tried to make me give up, to tell me that it is of no use, and that I might as well lie there and die in my self-pity. Then I can take the sword of the Spirit and drive Satan away. I can quote him Philippians 1:6 which says, "Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ:"

The fire of eternal life will never go out in the heart of a child of God. Sometimes it may seem to be out, but when we stir the ashes of our heart and put the kindling of God's word and the kerosene of the Holy Spirit on it, we feel like traveling on!

God bless each of you precious saints to lift up the hands that hang down and strengthen the feeble knees. Remember that He that is in you is greater than he that is in the world.

Hallelujah!

Brother Zack Guess