

1998 Summer Lecture Series (Carson City)
An Introduction to the Reformed Faith
Grace Triumphant: The Perseverance of the Saints (#11)
August 23, 1998

Introduction

The early church knew and insisted that if a person was to be finally saved, they had to endure to the end. The Scriptural testimony is clear:

Mark 13:13 (NASB) "And you will be hated by all on account of My name, but the one who endures to the end, he shall be saved.

Roma 11:22 (NASB) Behold then the kindness and severity of God; to those who fell, severity, but to you, God's kindness, if you continue in His kindness; otherwise you also will be cut off.

1Cor 15:1 (NASB) Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, 2 by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain.

Colo 1:21 (NASB) And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, [engaged] in evil deeds, 22 yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach-- 23 if indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard, which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, was made a minister.

Hebr 3:12 (NASB) Take care, brethren, lest there should be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart, in falling away from the living God. 13 But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is [still] called "Today," lest any one of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. 14 For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end;

Hebr 6:11 (NASB) And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end, 12 that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

Hebr 12:14 (NASB) Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord.

In the heat of a persecuted church, these admonitions to perseverance were cherished, and

seen as necessary. Both Tertullian and Hermas (3rd century) taught that post-baptismal repentance and forgiveness (in the case of falling from baptismal purity) was possible. While Cyprian and others denied any such repentance. By the fourth century there came into practice, with its corresponding fallacious sacramental view of baptism, the idea that one should wait until the death bed or at least the infirmity of old age, to be baptized.

Then enter Augustine! Augustine taught that if grace was indeed a Divine gift, manifesting itself in election and effectual calling, then most certainly perseverance also was a gift of Divine grace. Note what I said, "Perseverance itself was a gift of Divine grace." This is radically different than saying "Once saved, always saved."

By the fourth century, there would have been virtually no disagreement on the necessity to persevere. The disagreement was, "Is it possible to be in a state of grace, and then fall away, and be lost?" The semi-pelagians answered "Yes" appealing to the texts which demand perseverance. The Augustinians rebutted, "No!" While not ignoring the perseverance passages, they also appealed to such passages as Jn. 10:27-29; Phil. 1:6; 1 Pet. 1:5, showing that God's people are secure. This dual emphasis on perseverance and preservation can be seen in the 1689, ch. 17.

Now enter Pelagianism revisited, via Charles Finney. With Finney's decisional regeneration, which was being embraced by many Presbyterian pastors, there was a new (nothing new) element involved. Now Finney taught clearly the necessity of perseverance, but he also came up with a category for people who evidently did not persevere too well, and that was his teaching on perfectionism. Perhaps as the theological offspring of Wesley's teaching, Finney introduced into the non-Wesleyan community, the two-level Christian life.

Before we lay all the blame at Finney's feet, we need to understand developments in the late 19th century which paved the way for the perversion of the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints.

Out of Wesleyanism and Finneyism, came the holiness movement of the 1880s. Most of the holiness churches were Arminian in theology, but there were some semi-Arminians in the crowd, notably Albert Simpson (CMA). But the fruit of the holiness movement was the widespread acceptance of the two-tier Christianity, the haves and the have nots. Out of this soil came the Keswick Convention, and the deeper live movements.

Now we will see fatal marriage between a decisional regeneration and two-tier Christianity. If these two aberrant views of Christianity are accepted, then there no longer remains the necessity of perseverance. Those who do not persevere, the fruitless and barren, are merely "carnal Christians," they have yet to "know, reckon and yield," or have yet to discover the wonderful Spirit-filled life. Are they saved? Yes. Are they justified? Yes. They are just not yet sanctified. Or to put it another way, they have yet to yield to

Christ as Lord. Are they secure in Christ? Yes. Because of "Once saved, always saved."

This form of easy-believism, a total perversion of the true doctrine of perseverance, has been the hallmark of dispensational teaching for the last 100 years. It has been promoted in the two best selling dispensational study Bibles and has been imbibed by the church almost as a whole.

We are far, far from Augustine's *donum perseverantiae*, "the gift of perseverance."

- II. The Bible does teach the necessity of perseverance
 - A. Mark 13:13
 - B. Rom. 11:22
 - C. 1 Cor. 15:1-2
 - D. Heb. 12:14

- III. The Bible does teach that those who do not persevere will be lost
 - A. Jn. 15:1-6
 - B. Rom. 11:22
 - C. Heb. 6:4-6

- IV. The Bible does teach that God's people are secure (John Owen, 11)
 - A. Jn. 6:37
 - B. Jn. 10:27-29
 - C. 1 Pet. 1:5

- V. Synthesizing the truth
 - A. The elect will persevere because they are preserved by grace
 - B. Threats against apostasy are real threats
 - 1. They are warnings to those who do fall away
 - 2. They are means by which the elect are kept
 - C. There will be many false professors exposed in this life and the last day
 - 1 Tim. 1:18-20
 - Matt. 7:21-23
 - D. For these reasons, self-examination is the duty of all professing Christians
 - 2 Cor. 13:5; 2 Pet. 1:10
 - E. For these reasons, assurance is based on more than our decision