

# THE LARGER AND SHORTER CATECHISMS.

## WHAT MAN OUGHT TO BELIEVE CONCERNING GOD

### QUESTION # 79.

*(Larger Catechism)*

Q #79. *May not true believers, by reason of their imperfections, and the many temptations and sins they are overtaken with, fall away from the state of grace?*

A. True believers, by reason of the unchangeable love of God,<sup>1</sup> and his decree and covenant to give them perseverance,<sup>2</sup> their inseparable union with Christ,<sup>3</sup> his continual intercession for them,<sup>4</sup> and the Spirit and seed of God abiding in them,<sup>5</sup> can neither totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace,<sup>6</sup> but are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation.<sup>7</sup>

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Question 1—*What do we understand by the doctrine of perseverance?*

*Answer—First*, when we speak of a person persevering in grace, we suppose that he has the truth of grace, Rom. 10:9. We do not mean that a person may not fall away from a profession of faith, Matt. 13:20-22; or that no one can lose those common operations of the Spirit, which, in many respects, bear a resemblance to that which is saving grace, Heb. 10:35-39. There is a temporary faith whereby persons appear religious while their doing so comports with their secular interests, but when they are called by reason of persecution or tribulation, which may arise for the sake of the Gospel, to forego their worldly interests, or quit their pretensions to religion, they fall away, or lose that grace which they seemed to have, Luke 8:18. We read of some whose hope of salvation is like the spider's web, or the giving up of the ghost, Job 8:14; 11:20; but these are described not as true believers, but as hypocrites, Job 8:13. It is beyond dispute that such may apostatize, and not only lay aside the external practice of some religious duties, but deny and oppose the doctrines of the Gospel, which they once assented to the truth of, 1 Cor. 10:12.

*Second*, it is certain that true believers may fall into very great sins, Ps. 51:4; but yet they shall be recovered and brought again to repentance, Luke 22:61, 62; John 21:17. We must distinguish, therefore, between their dishonoring of Christ, disobeying his commands, and thereby provoking him to be angry with them, Ps. 106:43; and their falling away totally from him, Ps. 89:33.

*Third*, it is beyond dispute that, as a believer may be destitute of the acts of grace, so he may lose the comforts of it, and sink into the depths of despair, Ps. 42:5; 116:3. It is certain, too, that when at any time he falls into very great sins, which seem inconsistent with a state of grace, he has no present evidence that he is a believer, and is never favored with a comfortable sense of his interest in Christ, Ps. 77:7-9. Nor is the joy of God's salvation restored to him, till he is brought unfeignedly to repent of his sin, Ps. 88:6; 51:12.

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<sup>1</sup> Jer. 31:3.

<sup>2</sup> 2 Tim. 2:19; Heb. 13:20, 21; 2 Sam. 23:5.

<sup>3</sup> 1 Cor. 1:8, 9.

<sup>4</sup> Heb. 7:25; Luke 22:32.

<sup>5</sup> 1 John 3:9; 2:27.

<sup>6</sup> Jer. 32:40; John 10:28.

<sup>7</sup> 1 Pet. 1:5.

Question 2—*What is the source of perseverance?*

*Answer*—It is certain that the best believers, if left to their own devices, would certainly fall from grace, both totally and finally, so that the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints is to be founded on the power and will of God alone, Job 7:20. Inasmuch as he upholds all things by the word of his power, Heb. 1:3; so that independency of him is inconsistent with the idea of our being creatures; and we have no less ground to conclude that his power maintains the new creature, or that grace which took its rise from him, Jude 1. This truth is confirmed by the prayer of the Saviour, wherein he sought the perseverance of those chosen unto the end, John 17:11. It is the power of God, wrought through faith unto salvation, that keeps believers from total or final apostasy, 1 Pet. 1:5.

Question 3—*What are the proofs of the doctrine of perseverance?*

*Answer*—*First*, the perseverance of the saints in grace may be proved from the unchangeable love of God, and his decree and purpose, relating to their salvation, in which it is discovered and executed, 1 John 4:19. The love of God to his people, therefore, must be considered as an immanent act, whence it follows, that it was from eternity, since all God's immanent acts are eternal, Jer. 31:3. This everlasting love is the same as his eternal purpose relating to the salvation of the elect, and this unchangeable purpose of grace is bound up in the immutability of his counsel, Heb. 6:17, 18.

*Second*, the perseverance of the saints may be inferred from the covenant of grace wherein Christ, being appointed the head of that covenant, was promised a seed to serve him, Ps. 22:30; and he was also promised to see all that fruit and effects of what he had done and suffered for them in order to their salvation, Isa. 53:10, 11. This covenant, being the decree of God for their perseverance in grace, 2 Tim. 2:19; Christ has undertaken to keep them, as the result of his becoming a surety for them, to the end so that they are perfected in that grace which he has wrought, Heb. 13:20, 21. Wherefore, we may observe that that life which Christ is said to give them is not only the beginning of life, in the first grace which they are made partakers of in conversion, but is that eternal life which denotes the completing of the work of grace in their everlasting salvation, John 17:3. On this account, it is called an everlasting covenant and its mercies the sure mercies of David, Isa. 55:3; 2 Sam. 23:5.

*Third*, the perseverance of the saints is further proved from their inseparable union with Christ, 1 Cor. 1:8, 9. This union is not only federal, as he is the head of the covenant of grace, but he is their vital head, from whom they receive their spiritual life and influence, John 15:4. This union is unchangeable, as founded on covenant engagements which cannot be violated, so that nothing may separate them from the love of Christ, Rom. 8:35, 38, 39; and, accordingly, Christ loves them to the end, John 13:1.

*Fourth*, the perseverance of the saints appears in the continual intercession of Christ for them, Heb. 7:25. It is evident that he prays for the perseverance of his people, Luke 22:32.

*Fifth*, believers' perseverance in grace may be proved from the Spirit and seed of God abiding in them, 1 John 3:9. When they were regenerated, it was by the power of the Holy Ghost, as condescending to come and take up his abode in them, 1 John 2:27. Thus we often read of their being acted by, and under the influence of the Holy Ghost, who is said to dwell where he is pleased to display his divine power and glory, John 14:16. This is a peculiar privilege of believers, Rom. 8:9.

It is by these things, that true believers are said to neither fall totally nor finally from grace, Jer. 32:40; for all is administered by Christ on their behalf, John 10:28.