

The Definition of Perseverance

Introduction

a. objectives

1. subject – an introduction to the biblical doctrine of the perseverance of the saints
2. aim – to cause us to understand what it means to be preserved by God and persevere to the end
3. passage – Philippians 1:6

b. outline

1. The Definition of Perseverance
2. The Duality of Perseverance
3. The Declarations of Perseverance

c. opening

1. the **personal value** of this topic to me
 - a. as a regular sinner, I am continuously plagued with the question, “has my (latest) sin made God change his mind about bringing me to heaven – have I *finally* pushed God to the point where he has now decided that I’m not worth it?”
 - b. it is from this *natural* temptation that I flee to the doctrine of the Perseverance of the Saints
 1. to the biblical reminders ensconced in Scripture that those who ask such questions are those who belong to the eternal plans of God, and can never escape his hand!
 2. or, is this the most **relevant** (or day-to-day) element of the concept of salvation??
2. the **inclusion** of this topic in the Confession
 - a. Chapter 17 of the 1689 London Baptist Confession – Of the Perseverance of the Saints
“Those whom God hath accepted in the beloved, effectually called and sanctified by His Spirit, and given the precious faith of His elect unto, can neither totally nor finally fall from the state of grace, but shall certainly persevere therein to the end, and be eternally saved, ...”
 - b. other speakers will be providing more “in-depth” analysis of the terms of the Confession
 - c. **my goal**: to approach the topic of perseverance in a more *generalized* and *goal-oriented* way
 1. definitionally: to define it properly, but also to “undefine” certain ways by which it is approached
 2. opposingly: to address certain aspects of apostasy, and its relation to eternal security
 3. applicably: to demonstrate how central and valuable this doctrine is to our everyday lives

I. The Definition of Perseverance

Content

a. the dictionary definition of perseverance

1. steadfastness in doing something despite difficulty or delay in achieving success; a single-mindedness of staying power to accomplish a goal; a stick-to-it-tiveness of purpose and action
 - a. synonyms: doggedness, tenacity; unyielding in following a course of action
2. but, perseverance (unlike resoluteness) *suggests* the presence of obstacles along the way
 - a. **i.e.** to persevere is to continue towards the goal *in spite of* the obstacles that try to prevent success

b. the theological definition of perseverance

1. Berkhof = “they whom God has regenerated and effectually called to a state of grace, can neither totally nor finally fall away from that state, but shall certainly persevere therein to the end and be eternally saved” – **i.e.** the regenerate and called cannot fall away from their state of salvation
2. Grudem = “all those who are truly born again will be kept by God’s power and will persevere as Christians until the end of their lives, *and* that only those who persevere until the end have been truly born again”
 - a. **part #1**: the truly born again will be kept by God in their salvation throughout their whole life
 - b. **part #2**: only those who continue in faith to the end of their lives are (were) truly saved
3. Gervais = “those who are elect, regenerated by the Spirit, and trust in Christ by faith will persist in their saved condition all the way through life *in spite of* the various moral failures they will fall under and will demonstrate their saved condition by the *increase* of both repentance and faith over time”
 - a. **part #3**: the truly saved will show evidence of their salvation in relation to sin throughout life

II. The Duality of Perseverance

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a. the dual nature of perseverance

1. **note:** the various definitions and discussions above *seem* to imply a “one-sidedness”
 - a. specifically, the word perseverance (itself) implies primarily *what we do* – we persevere
 1. **LOW:** it is the object *itself* that perseveres through obstacles
 - b. but, the theological definition above seems to imply that it is *God who holds us fast*
 2. **LOW:** in election → atonement → calling → (implies) keeping
 - b. but, the theological definition above seems to imply that it is *God who holds us fast*
 2. **LOW:** in election → atonement → calling → (implies) keeping
2. so, a robust discussion of the doctrine consists of understanding both a) God’s **preservation** of us and b) our **perseverance** in faith
 - a. **truth #1:** it is *God* that (in his decree) **preserves** his own from his initial intent *until* the end goal
 1. the decree of God to save includes **every aspect** of what it will take to get his people from their creation, their fall into sin, their redemption from sin, their inclusion in that redemption, their continuation in that redemption through life, **to** their ultimate glorification as the goal (**Phil. 1:6**)
“And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.”
 - b. **truth #2:** it is *we* who (in our faith) **persevere** from moment to moment *under* his preserving decree
 1. the decree of God is **practical** in that it actually works in time and space – like redemption (which was an actual work of the Son of God inside of creation), the preservation of the saints takes a form within time and space in the day-to-day lives of believers – they **persevere in life**
 2. believers “participate” in their preservation by actively **persevering** through the various realities of living – **i.e.** actually dealing with temptation, sin, doubt, pressures, etc.
3. **the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints is the assertion that God preserves a people within his purposes and plans by exerting his power over them through which they actively persevere in his purposes and plans**

III. The Declarations of Perseverance

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a. biblical texts that speak *directly* to perseverance

1. **Philippians 1:6** – a direct axiom of the concept (**in a didactic work**)
“And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.”
2. **2 Timothy 1:12 (KJV)** – a confidence of the Apostle which becomes normative for all like him
“... for 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.”
 - a. Paul was confident that the trust he had committed, God would keep until the day of judgment
3. **2 Timothy 4:18** – a confidence of Paul in the plan of God to glorify himself
“The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen.”
 - a. Paul was confident that God would keep him safe from every *fatal* evil deed (his or others)
4. **1 Peter 1:3-5** – (**again**) a direct axiom of the concept (**in a didactic work**)
“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God’s power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.”
 - a. being born again is to a living hope, to an inheritance that is imperishable, and is guarded by faith
5. **John 6:38-40** – Jesus expressing his purpose to hold fast those given to him by God
“For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.”
 - a. saints persevere because it is the will of Christ to hold them fast to the day of resurrection
6. **John 10:27-30** – Jesus describing the perseverance of his own sheep
“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand. I and the Father are one.”
 - a. saints know Jesus Christ, and they follow him (**i.e.** they are obedient; they **persevere**)
 - b. saints have eternal life, and they will never perish (**i.e.** their future is one of life, not judgment)
 - c. saints cannot be lost from Christ’s power (**i.e.** he holds them in his hand)
 - d. saints persevere because it is the power of the Triune God that keeps them safe in his plans

b. biblical concepts that *infer* perseverance

1. the concept of salvation referred to as “*eternal life*” (x43 in ESV N.T.)
 - a. with the assumption being that this life *begins* at conversion, and continues *unabated* into eternity
 - b. the perseverance of the saints seems to be a *synonym* of this concept – conversion to a new “form” of life (i.e. a life of obedience and love of God) that continues forever *without loss*
2. the reality of divine election as a choice without withdrawal
 - a. if election is God’s *choice* to save people who are *unable* to save themselves (i.e. as his grace),
 - b. then that choice cannot be *conditional* either upon 1) what God sees in them (inherently) or 2) some change in “status” that occurs after the fact of the choice
 - c. therefore, election itself leads naturally to the doctrine of perseverance: those God chooses, he chooses *eternally*, and their “status” as saved cannot be “unchosen”
 - d. additionally (see **Romans 8:28-30**), election is not only to salvation (in the “heaven” sense), but to a predestined conformity to the full nature of the image of Christ in us
 - e. thus, perseverance is more than just an “eternal security,” but a full sense of God choosing for us to become like his Son, starting in this life and being completed in our glorification
3. the nature, merits, and intercession of Christ himself (**Romans 8:33-34**)

“Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.”

 - a. if Christ has completed an atonement for us, and intercedes for us before the Father,
 - b. then it is reasonable to assume that he not only made atonement for our sin, but continues to advocate for us when we fall in sin after our conversion
 - c. therefore, the intercessory work of Christ empowers our perseverance in spite of the sinful failure
4. the mystical union of the believer in Christ (i.e. as those “*in Christ*”; x86 in ESV N.T.)
 - a. **note:** this is a subject too deep to cover here, by way of complete understanding, however ...
 - b. it is clear from the Pauline corpus in the N.T. that believers are included in the mystical body of Christ himself, added to the “*temple*” being built up with him as the “*cornerstone*” (**Eph. 2:19-22**)
 - c. the imagery is of believers included in the “structure” in a permanent sense
 - d. thus, the perseverance of the saints is their everlasting inclusion in the very body of Christ himself
5. the presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer (**Romans. 8:14-17**)

“For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’ The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.”

 - a. the Holy Spirit permeates every aspect of the life of a regenerate person
 - b. this presence testifies that we are children of God, and co-heirs with Christ of God’s promises
 - c. and, this presence is unretractable, a seal that prevents us from falling back into slavery
 - d. thus, the presence of the Spirit is the very essence (and engine!) of perseverance
6. the access of believers into the very presence of God (**Heb. 10:19-23**)

“Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.”

 - a. because Christ has torn away the curtain separating us from the presence of a holy God
 - b. we are able to enter with *confidently* into his presence (i.e. without fear of being destroyed)
 - c. thus, the saints persevere because they know (already!) what it’s like to be in God’s presence