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### **The Unconverted “Believer” (24); Continuing in Faith in Jesus Christ**

Our intention is to complete next Lord’s Day this Sunday morning series, “The Unconverted ‘Believer’”. Our concluding emphasis is on the nature of saving faith, as it is initially manifested at conversion, as it is continually exhibited throughout life, and as it must be sustained unto the end of life. Last week we focused on the first of these, our initial *coming to faith in Jesus Christ* as Lord and Savior. Today we will weigh what the Scriptures teach regarding the true Christian *continuing in faith in Jesus Christ* through life. And then next week, Lord willing, we will conclude our series with what it is to *complete this life of faith in Jesus Christ* unto our full and final salvation.

Last Lord’s Day we set forth what the Word of God teaches regarding the sinner initially coming to Jesus Christ in repentance and faith in order to become a Christian. We showed from the Word of God that saving faith is not as it is commonly assumed to be--simply “accepting Jesus Christ as your personal Savior” or “trusting Jesus Christ alone for the forgiveness of sins.” As we have repeatedly emphasized, biblical salvation is more than God’s forgiveness of sins, as essential and important as that is. To offer salvation limited to the obtaining God’s forgiveness of sins is to distort the biblical teaching regarding salvation. To receive salvation by God’s grace is to enter a new existence, a new way of life, even eternal life. In order for sinners to be saved, they must repent of their sin, turning from their former independent way of thinking and living, and believe and submit unto Jesus Christ as Lord of lords and King of kings. Only through the total surrender and yielding of one’s life to Jesus Christ the Lord may one receive God’s promise of salvation, including the forgiveness of sins and the gift of everlasting life.

But coming to Jesus Christ as one’s Lord and Savior is not just a one time “acceptance” of Him or decision to believe in Him. Coming to Jesus Christ is a commitment to continue in faith in Jesus Christ throughout life. It began with the initial resolve to order one’s life in submission and obedience to doing the will of God through Jesus Christ. This is what it is to repent of sin and to turn unto Him which leads to salvation. But that commitment is on-going. Our repentance is a continual condition and practice as Christians. The apostle Paul described biblical repentance unto salvation in his second letter to the church at Corinth. He had previously written them a letter confronting them with their sin, which resulted in their true repentance. Paul then wrote of their true repentance.

For even if I made you sorry with my letter, I do not regret it; though I did regret it. For I perceive that the same epistle made you sorry, though only for a while. <sup>9</sup>Now I rejoice, not that you were made sorry, but that your sorrow led to repentance. For you were made sorry in a godly manner, that you might suffer loss from us in nothing. <sup>10</sup>For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death. <sup>11</sup>For observe this very thing, that you sorrowed in a godly manner: What diligence it produced in you, what clearing of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what vehement desire, what zeal, what vindication! In all things you proved yourselves to be clear in this matter. (2 Cor. 7:8-11)

Paul had characterized their response to his instruction as true repentance unto God. It was not simply sorrow for having sinned, for unconverted people do that much. Their repentance involved personal, heart-felt resolve to turn from their sin unto the Lord. True repentance, which brings salvation, is the product of the grace of God working in the heart and mind of a person transforming him from his former way of thinking and living into one who loves and serves God in righteousness.

**Thomas Watson** (1620-1686) described true repentance this way: “Repentance is a grace of God’s Spirit whereby a sinner is inwardly humbled and visibly reformed... Before a man can come to Christ he must first come to himself.”<sup>1</sup> He wrote that repentance was a spiritual medicine made up of six ingredients:

1. Sight of sin
2. Sorrow for sin
3. Confession of sin
4. Shame for sin
5. Hatred for sin
6. Turning from sin

But again, initial repentance from sin, believing and submitting to Jesus Christ the Lord, is but the beginning of a life of repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. We thereafter live before and unto Jesus Christ, seeking to do the will of God from the heart. Saving faith shown in repentance is not a one-time decision, but a life-long discipline, which was born by God’s grace and is carried on by God’s grace through life unto our full and final salvation. Another author who addressed the biblical teaching of repentance was **John Colquhoun** (1748-1827). He wrote of the nature of true repentance as exhibited throughout the life of the true Christian.

True repentance is not a transient act, as if a sigh or a pang of sorrow for sin amounted to it. No, these may indeed be acts of true repentance, while they issue from a heart sincerely penitent: but repentance itself, instead of being a passing (temporary) act, is an abiding principle, a lasting disposition of the soul, a gracious principle lying deep in the heart, disposing a man at all times to mourn for and turn from sin. The waters of godly sorrow for sin in the renewed heart will continue to spring up there while sin is there, though they may, through remaining hardness of heart, be much obstructed for a time. After the heart has, at the sinner’s first conversion, been smitten with evangelical repentance, the wound still bleeds, and will continue more or less to bleed until the band (band aid) of glory be put about it in the holy place on high. If, therefore, a man regards repentance only as the first stage in the way to heaven, and instead of renewing daily his exercise of it, satisfies himself with concluding that he has passed the first stage, the truth of his repentance is very questionable. The man who does not see his need of exercising repentance daily may have a counterfeit, but cannot have true repentance. He may have a superficial sorrow for his sins, and even such remorse gnawing at his conscience as may be the first moving of the worm that shall never die<sup>2</sup>, as that of Judas was, and yet be a total stranger to that evangelical repentance, which is both a saving grace and an abiding principle.<sup>3</sup>

Today we move on from initially coming to Jesus Christ unto salvation to consider what the Scriptures teach regarding the true Christian *continuing in faith in Jesus Christ* through life. Let us open the Holy Scriptures and read **Colossians 1:19-23**. Paul wrote to this church setting forth God’s work of salvation among them.

For it pleased the Father that in Him (Christ) all the fullness should dwell,<sup>20</sup> and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross.

<sup>21</sup>And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled <sup>22</sup>in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight— <sup>23</sup>if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Watson, **The Doctrine of Repentance** (The Banner of Truth Trust, 1987, orig. 1668), p. 18. I attached a PDF of this book by Watson to these sermon notes we sent out to our list of weekly receivers.

<sup>2</sup> This “first moving of the worm” is an allusion to the guilty conscience experienced by souls in hell. See Mark 9:43ff.

<sup>3</sup> John Colquhoun, **Repentance** (The Banner of Truth Trust, 1965, orig. 1826), pp. 27f.

away from the hope of the gospel which you heard, which was preached to every creature under heaven, of which I, Paul, became a minister.

We will address first the meaning of the words, phrases, and clauses of these verses, then we will give our attention to verse 23, which underscores the believer's need and responsibility to continue to believe onto the salvation of his soul.

We may consider these verses in three parts. First, we read of the Father's purpose in His Son, Jesus Christ (1:19, 20). Second, we read of the Father's purpose for His saints (1:21, 22). And third, we read of the Father's promise to His faithful saints (1:23).

### **I. The Father's purpose in His Son, Jesus Christ (1:19-20)**

Paul was writing to these Christians in the church at Colossae in order to encourage and exhort them to grow in their faith and knowledge of God the Father and their Savior, Jesus Christ. The apostle first set forth the primary goal or purpose which God was accomplishing through His Son, Jesus Christ. He wrote,

For it pleased the Father that in Him (Christ) all the fullness should dwell,<sup>20</sup> and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross.

In these few words the apostle Paul set forth both God's overarching will and purpose in history for His creation as well as His intention to accomplish His purpose through Jesus Christ. "All things" were in need of being reconciled unto God. He determined to accomplish this great work through Jesus Christ.

This requires some explanation. The Bible teaches that through man's initial sin all of God's creation suffered the total severance of its subordination and cooperation with God its creator. With the fall of Adam into sin, all humanity and even the entire created order, which had been placed under his stewardship, fell from its former state of harmony, submission, and blessedness before God. Before sin entered the world all existed in full compliance to the will of God; all things were in willing submission to God the creator. But upon Adam's fall, sin's effects permeated God's creation. Not only did man become cursed of God, but all the earth did as well. As Romans 8:20 states, "For the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will, but because of Him who subjected it." The effects of sin became all-encompassing and all-corrupting. But we read in Colossians 1:19 and 20 that God the Father purposed through Jesus Christ to reconcile to Himself all that exists, "whether things in the heavens or things on the earth." In other words, God purposed through Jesus Christ to recover and restore His creation to a willing and joyful submission to Him as its creator. Through the mediatorial kingdom of Jesus Christ, God purposed to redeem, recover, and renew His creation. Paul wrote of the future completion of God's purpose in history in 1 Corinthians 15. Upon the future resurrection of the dead, we read these words:

<sup>24</sup>Then comes the end, when He (Christ) delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. <sup>25</sup>For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. <sup>26</sup>The last enemy that will be destroyed is death. <sup>27</sup>For "He has put all things under His feet." But when He says "all things are put under Him," it is evident that He who put all things under Him is excepted. <sup>28</sup>Now when all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all. (1 Cor. 15:24-28)

Let us consider more specifically what it means for God to "reconcile" all things to Himself. First, what it does not mean. It does not mean that God is regaining *His* control over His created order. It is a great error to think that because man fell into sin and continues in rebellion to God that God had lost sovereign control over His creation. The common thinking is this: "Things have run amok, and God is desperately trying to recover the authority He lost when man rebelled." This is terrible error. For our God is sovereign! Because He is the Creator, He is the King of all that exists. He has always reigned over creation. His authority has never been diminished. God has always controlled all that transpires on the earth. God's

purposes have never been thwarted. He has never failed at anything He has sought to do. The fall of mankind into sin in no way removed or even diminished God's sovereign rule over His world. God is in the heavens and does whatsoever pleases Him. "Whatever the LORD pleases He does, in heaven and in earth, in the seas and in all deep places" (Psa. 135:6). Psalm 103:19 reads, "The Lord has established His throne in the heavens; and His sovereignty rules over all." God always has been and always will be the king of His creation. "The LORD is king forever and ever; the nations have perished out of His land" (Psa. 10:16). But due to the fall of man into sin and sin's adverse effects on all of creation, none of His creatures was willingly and lovingly submissive and serviceable to Him and His will.

What, then, does it mean for God to "reconcile" all things to Himself? God purposed that He would glorify Himself through history in restoring His creation, that all things would be reconciled unto Him, that all things would be once again subservient and compliant to Him. In saving His people from their sin, He secures for Himself their willing and loving subjection and devotion. God had purposed that He would accomplish this great work in history through His Son, Jesus Christ. Although He is the one, eternal, sovereign God, His creation has been at war with Him, refusing to submit, honor, and obey Him. He is at war with His creation, and all are at war with Him (apart from those in Christ). The world system, all that is, is against God and He is against it. That is why James wrote in his epistle, "Do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God" (James 4:4). The work of God in Christ is to fight against His enemies, to defeat and subdue them. In doing so He brings His elect to submit in unconditional surrender unto Him, even as He defeats and destroys all others, barring them from entering His everlasting kingdom. God even now is anticipating the time when all "His enemies will be made a footstool for His feet."

How does God accomplish this work of reconciling the creation to Himself? The answer is in Colossians 1:20. God has purposed "through Him (Christ) to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross." Now this is a matter that is too far beyond me to comprehend fully or express adequately. How, through the death of Jesus Christ on that cross, was all of creation reconciled to God? I can only at this time propose this primary reason: Because Christ bore the curse of God in Himself, God could deal mercifully and graciously, that is, redemptively and mercifully with His creation. **Matthew Henry** (1662-1714) wrote:

There was such a value in the blood of Christ that, on account of Christ's shedding it, God was willing to deal with men upon new terms to bring them under a covenant of grace, and *for His sake*, and in consideration of His death upon the cross, to pardon and accept to favour all who comply with them.

Until the justice of God was satisfied, the curse of God would remain upon His creation. And so, Colossians 1:19 and 20 declare that it is God the Father's purpose through His Son to bring all that exists to honor Him and submit willingly to Him as the one true God.

**John Gill** (1697-1771) wrote of the reconciliation that Jesus Christ secured through His death on His cross.

It was the good will and pleasure of God from all eternity, as to lay up all fulness in Christ for His chosen people, so to reconcile them to Himself by Him; and which is another reason why Christ is, and ought to be considered as the head of the church, whose reconciliation He has procured, and why He ought to have the chief place in all things, and among all persons. Reconciliation supposes a former state of amity and friendship, and in such an one man was originally with God; and a breach of that friendship, which was made and issued in real enmity in the heart of man; and also a restoration to friendship again: and it is to be understood not of a reconciliation of God to men, which the Scriptures nowhere speak of, but of men to God; and is a reconciliation of them, not to the love of God, which His elect always shared in, but to the justice of God, offended by the transgression of a righteous law; and is indeed properly a reconciliation, atonement, and satisfaction for their sins, and so of their persons, and whereby all the perfections of God are reconciled to and agree with each other in the salvation of such sinners: now this takes its first rise from God the Father; it is owing to His sovereign good will and pleasure; He took the first step towards it; He knew what a state of enmity and rebellion His people would fall into; His

thoughts ran upon their peace and reconciliation from everlasting; He called a council of peace about it, and in it drew the model of it; He entered into a covenant of peace with His Son, and, in consequence of it, sent Him in the fulness of time to effect it, laying on Him the chastisement of their peace; it was His pleasure that this affair of reconciliation should be brought about.

The shedding of the blood of Jesus Christ on His cross is the apex of all redemptive history. God's purpose in history was assured and secured through that event. Paul declared that it pleased God to have reconciled all things unto Himself through His Son's death. Peace exists between God and His people secured through Christ's atoning death on their behalf.

But we should not limit the death of Christ on His cross to securing only the salvation of His people. Paul describes God's accomplishment through the death of Christ as having reconciled "all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross." Now some have in great error suggested that this hints at universalism, that God will remove fully the barrier between Himself and everything that He has created bringing peace between Himself and all of creation. This is clearly wrong. But through the death of Jesus Christ on His cross God not only secured the salvation of His elect, but He also secured the defeat and eternal banishment of His enemies from His presence. **F. F. Bruce** (1910-1990) wrote of this:

The peace effected by the death of Christ may be freely accepted, or it may be compulsorily imposed. When Paul speaks here of reconciliation on the widest scale, he includes in it what we should distinguish as pacification. The principalities and powers whose conquest by Christ is described in chapter 2:15 are certainly not depicted there as gladly surrendering to His grace, but as submitting against their wills to a power which they cannot resist. Everything in the universe has been subjected to Christ even as everything was created for Him. By His reconciling work, "the host of the high ones on high" and sinful men on earth have been decisively subdued to the will of God, and cannot but subserve His purpose, whether they please or not. So in Philippians 2:11 "things in heaven and things on earth and things under the earth" ultimately unite to bow in the name of Jesus and to acknowledge Him as Lord.<sup>4</sup>

Now after the apostle set forth the Father's purpose in His Son, Jesus Christ in verses 19 and 20, he next sets before his readers...

## **II. The Father's purpose for His saints (1:21-22)**

What does the Father purpose for His saints, for true Christians? We read in verses 21 and 22,

And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled <sup>22</sup>in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight

It is God's intention, He has purposed through the reconciling death of His Son, "to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach." This is quite a task, is it not? Look at what we had become and consider what He had to overcome to enable sinners like you and I to become "holy and blameless and beyond reproach." Paul had described Christians this way: "You were formerly alienated, and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds." It is quite clear that in salvation God's people are no longer "alienated, no longer "Blameless", and no longer "engaged in evil deeds." Again, salvation is much more than only the forgiveness of sins.

Consider our desperate, hopeless, and helpless former condition. First, Paul declared that Christians "once were *alienated*." We were born into this world alienated from God! (And alienated from one another!) We were strangers, foreigners, to all that makes for a peaceful existence. We were on the outside, separated

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<sup>4</sup> F. F. Bruce, **The Epistles of Paul to the Ephesians and to the Colossians** (William B. Eerdmans, 1957), p. 210.

from God in whom alone is true life, and our entrance to return unto Him was barred to us until Christ opened the way for us, breaking down the barriers which excluded us from the presence of God and fellowship with God. We were in need of reconciliation.

But secondly, Paul declared that Christians “once were... *enemies in your minds*.” The problem with sin that God had to overcome was not just Him securing His forgiveness of our sins. The effects of sin are far-reaching. Sin had permeated us thoroughly, corrupting us completely. Our minds were “hostile” toward God. Consider the immediate effects of sin on Adam as recorded in Genesis 3. Listen to this description of Adam in his relationship to God immediately after he had sinned:

“His understanding, originally enlightened with heavenly wisdom, became darkened and overcast with crass ignorance. His **heart**, formerly fired with holy veneration toward His Creator and warm with love to Him, now became alienated and filled with enmity against Him. His **will**, which had been in subjection to His rightful Governor, had cast off the yoke of obedience. His whole moral constitution was wrecked and had become unhinged, perverse. In a word, the life of God had departed from his soul. His **aversion** for the supremely excellent One appeared in his flight from Him as soon as he heard his approach. His crass **ignorance** and stupidity were evinced by his vain attempt to conceal himself from the eyes of Omniscience. His **pride** was displayed in refusing to acknowledge his guilt; his **ingratitude** when he indirectly upbraided God for giving him a wife.”<sup>5</sup>

And that was just at the beginning of sin’s entrance! It has had much time to develop and manifest itself in many forms. The fact is that from birth we did not naturally desire to submit to God. We were, before being reconciled to God, “hostile in our minds.” We were in need of a new nature; that which only comes through the new birth, being born again, and that has only come to us because of the death of Christ Jesus, His ascension to His throne, and the imparting of life to us, His people. This is what resulted in our complete change of attitude toward God and His Son.

Third, Paul declared that Christians “once were alienated... *by wicked works*.” Our “evil deeds” were the product of our “hostile minds.” Each of us was in need of a new heart to unseat the reign of our “hostile minds.” We needed the blood of Jesus to secure the forgiveness of our sins. It was through His death that Christ was exalted to be the Lord and King of creation so that the grace and mercy of God could be brought to bear upon His people. It took Christ’s death to pay our penalty, but it takes Christ’s life to provide us purity and power to live before God as His holy people. And so, “although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds, yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy, blameless, beyond reproach.”

But we then read a conditional clause in verse 23. Our complete salvation will only finally and fully take place, “if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard, which was preached to every creature under heaven, of which I, Paul, became a minister” (Col. 1:23). And so, here we read of...

### III. The Father’s promise to His faithful saints (1:23)

Let us read the verse again in context

<sup>21</sup>And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled <sup>22</sup>in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight— <sup>23</sup>*if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard*, which was preached to every creature under heaven, of which I, Paul, became a minister.

This verse is troublesome to some. They assume that this verse makes allowance for a truly saved person to lose his salvation if he fails to “continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not

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<sup>5</sup> Arthur Pink, **Gleanings from the Scriptures** (Moody Press, 1969), p. 59)

moved away from the hope of the Gospel.” But we know that the Holy Scriptures are quite clear in teaching that no one who has been truly converted to Christ can become unconverted, losing his soul. But it may seem to some that this verse is troublesome in that it suggests this possibility. Some might wrongly conclude that this verse suggests that our salvation is based on works, on our effort to persevere. And again, we know that salvation is secured to us solely through faith. One is not saved because of works “lest any man boast” (Eph. 2:8f). To be saved by works is not to be saved by grace. And so, this verse may appear to be troublesome, but it should not be so.

How do we deal with it? It has been dealt with several ways. Some have said the following:

“It is only talking about rewards that God will bestow upon Christians. It really does not speak to salvation. Those who are faithful will be presented in heaven ‘holy and blameless and beyond reproach’, but all the others will still be saved, they just won’t have as good a presentation before God.”

But to explain this verse in this manner is to do terrible violence to the passage. Rather, we are to take the passage as it stands:

“You He reconciled, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach--if indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel.”

Actually this verse is perfectly consistent with the eternal security of the believer and salvation by grace through faith alone. What it sets forth is that true saving faith is a continuing, persevering faith throughout life. It is true that God will keep everyone of His own unto their final salvation. But it is also true that the true believer is to give all diligence to remain in faith unto his final salvation. Of course we know that it is the grace of God that will assure that the true believer does so. To quote **F. F. Bruce** once again, who addressed this matter clearly and forcefully, he wrote of the final salvation of those in Christ to whom Paul was writing:

This then, is the prospect which lies before them, provided that they remain firmly founded and established in their faith. If the Bible teaches the final perseverance of the saints, it also teaches that the saints are those who finally persevere—in Christ. Continuance is the test of reality. The apostle’s language may suggest that the readers’ first enthusiasm was being dimmed, that they were in danger of shifting from the fixed ground of the Christian hope. And indeed, to hold fast to hope is throughout the New Testament an indispensable condition of attaining the goal of full salvation to be revealed at the *parousia* (coming) of Christ. Hope forms an essential part of the gospel—that gospel which (as Paul has already emphasized) is spreading and bearing fruit in all the world, having been proclaimed “in the whole creation under heaven.”<sup>6</sup>

We should say a word respecting the biblical teaching of *the perseverance of the saints*. We know that God Himself enables His people to persevere in their faith through life unto their full and final salvation. This is a blessed biblical doctrine (teaching). Perseverance speaks of the certain continuance of a true believer in his faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ, that he will most certainly show forth throughout life his faith through his repentance from sin and obedience to his Lord and Savior. This is a teaching of Scripture that is often affirmed in the face of Arminians, who believe that true Christians can lose their salvation through their own unbelief and failure. The Scriptures teach that God’s purpose to save His people can never be frustrated or defeated, but that God keeps all of His people secure by His grace. God does not lose one of His elect, but rather saves them to the uttermost. Jesus said, “All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out” (John 6:37).

Here is a statement and explanation of the doctrine of perseverance as taught in the Holy Scriptures.

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<sup>6</sup> F. F. Bruce, **The Epistles of Paul to the Ephesians and to the Colossians** (William B. Eerdmans, 1957), p. 213.

Those who are the elect of God, who are recipients of God's effectual call, having been regenerated by the Holy Spirit, led to repent of sin and believe on Christ for salvation, shall never fall away so as to perish, but will be kept by the power of God unto the salvation which is reserved for them in heaven.

In order to clarify what this statement affirms and what it does not affirm, consider the following points. First, the doctrine of perseverance does not mean that everyone who professes to believe or believes for a while is saved eternally. This has reference to the elect of God, true believers who are truly born again, whose lives bear evidence of the presence of saving faith. Second, consequently, the common expression, "the eternal security of the believer", is somewhat a misnomer. Perhaps "the eternal security of the *true* believer" would be better. But the expression "eternal security" should probably be distinguished from the expression, "the perseverance of the saints." The former expression is often stressed with only respect to what Christ has done on behalf of the Christian; that is, due to Christ's perfect sacrifice upon His cross the Christian who is once forgiven, is forever forgiven. But the perseverance of the saints speaks to what Christ does 'in' a person, in that the Savior enables His people to persevere in their faith unto the end. Third, perseverance in faith and obedience is the grand distinguishing mark of a true child of God. True saving faith cannot be totally extinguished, for it is undergirded by the power of God assuring that saving faith will overcome all obstacles and endure every trial.<sup>7</sup> Here is a wonderful expression of this biblical doctrine of the perseverance of the saints from the **First London Baptist Confession of 1646**:

All those that have this precious faith wrought in them by the Spirit, can never finally nor totally fall away; seeing the gifts of God are without repentance; so that He still begets and nourishes in them faith, repentance, love, joy, hope, and all the graces of the Spirit unto immortality; and though many storms and floods arise, and beat against them, yet they shall never be able to take them off that foundation and rock, which by faith they are fastened upon; notwithstanding, through unbelief, and the temptations of Satan, the sensible sight of this light and love, be clouded and overwhelmed for a time; yet God is still the same, and they shall be sure to be kept by the power of God unto salvation, where they shall enjoy their purchased possession, they being engraven upon the palms of His hands, and their names having been written in the book of life from all eternity.

But one of the means that the Lord uses to enable His people to persevere are the exhortations and warnings in Scripture of the believer's responsibility to persevere in their faith. They are not exhortations to do so in our own strength, but we are to employ the means of grace that the Lord has set forth in Scripture to the end that we will persevere. And so, when addressing this doctrine, it is also important to stress the responsibility of the believer to use every means of grace that God has made available to him in order to persevere. And so, here in Colossians 1:23 we have a conditional sentence in which we read of the necessity that we persevere. It does not suggest that we doubt that we will persevere, but it does provide motivation for us not to become lazy, careless, or presumptive. Again, it reads,

And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled <sup>22</sup>in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight— <sup>23</sup>*if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard*, which was preached to every creature under heaven, of which I, Paul, became a minister. (Col. 1:21-23)

And so, you must do all that you are commanded to do in order to assure that you continue in the faith. But we know that God will do all that He needs to do to assure that you will continue in the faith that saves your soul.

There are other passages of Scripture that give a similar impetus to us to persevere in our faith in the Lord Jesus. Consider the following verses:

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<sup>7</sup> 1 Peter 1:5



Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, <sup>2</sup>by which also you are saved, ***if you hold fast that word which I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.*** (1 Cor. 15:1, 2)

To believe in vain is to believe only for a while, but then to forsake Christ. This is the case of the apostate, who has no salvation promised to him.

Peter declared in his first epistle this same reality:

Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, <sup>9</sup>receiving ***the end of your faith-- the salvation of your souls.*** (1 Pet. 1:8f)

Paul instructed Timothy of his future salvation and of those to whom Timothy would be ministering the Word of God:

Till I come, give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine. <sup>14</sup>Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you by prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the eldership. <sup>15</sup>Meditate on these things; give yourself entirely to them, that your progress may be evident to all. <sup>16</sup>Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. ***Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you.***” (1 Tim. 4:13-16)

We read similarly Hebrews 3:5 and 6:

“And Moses indeed was faithful in all His house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which would be spoken afterward, <sup>6</sup>but Christ as a Son over His own house, whose house we are ***if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end.*** (Heb. 3:5f)

This is also stated in Hebrews 3:12-14:

Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; <sup>13</sup>but exhort one another daily, while it is called “Today,” lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. <sup>14</sup>***For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end,*** <sup>15</sup>while it is said:

“Today, if you will hear His voice,  
Do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.”

The Hebrew Christians could be assured of their future salvation through their persevering faith.

But, beloved, we are confident of better things concerning you, yes, things that accompany salvation, though we speak in this manner. <sup>10</sup>For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister. <sup>11</sup>***And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end,*** <sup>12</sup>***that you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.*** (Heb. 6:9-12)

Again, the writer to the Hebrews exhorted his readers to persevere in their faith in Jesus Christ, which would result in their full salvation, as we read in Hebrews 10:33-39:

But recall the former days in which, after you were illuminated, you endured a great struggle with sufferings: <sup>33</sup>partly while you were made a spectacle both by reproaches and tribulations, and partly while you became companions of those who were so treated; <sup>34</sup>for you had compassion on me in my chains, and joyfully accepted the plundering of your goods, knowing that you have a better and an

enduring possession for yourselves in heaven. <sup>35</sup>Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward. <sup>36</sup>For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise:

<sup>37</sup>“For yet a little while,  
And He who is coming will come and will not tarry.  
<sup>38</sup>Now the just shall live by faith;  
But if anyone draws back,  
My soul has no pleasure in him.”

<sup>39</sup>***But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul.***

We have often said that a temporary believer is no true Christian. The faith that justifies the sinner, also leads him in the path of sanctification and in his perseverance in faith unto the full salvation of his soul. It was God in His grace that set Him on this course and it is through God’s grace he will most certainly finish his life of faith. And again, the passage in Colossians confirms this truth:

<sup>21</sup>And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled <sup>22</sup>in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight— <sup>23</sup>***if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard***, which was preached to every creature under heaven, of which I, Paul, became a minister.

Notice that Paul set forth the “hope of the gospel.” This phrase itself speaks of the future promise of the gospel of full and final salvation. Biblical “hope” is the assurance of God’s promise that He will be merciful and gracious to the believing sinner. The gospel is a basis of hope for the believer. It is the promise of God, the good news of God in Christ that we will most certainly be finally and fully saved when we come forth from the grave and we stand righteous before God, vindicated before Him on the Day of Judgment. This should motivate us to watchfulness and diligence. As Paul wrote to the church at Rome, “And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed” (Rom. 13:11).

May our Lord both encourage us and enable us to put forth all of our desire, resolve, and energy to continue in this faith in Jesus Christ, using all the means that He has granted us, with the assurance that we will stand on that day. Let us be as Job who could in faith declare,

For I know that my Redeemer lives,  
And He shall stand at last on the earth;  
<sup>26</sup>And after my skin is destroyed, this I know,  
That in my flesh I shall see God,  
<sup>27</sup>Whom I shall see for myself,  
And my eyes shall behold, and not another. (Job 19:25-27)

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