

THE WESTMINSTER CONFSSION OF FAITH
XVII. OF THE PERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS

Second Presbyterian Church, Greenville, SC

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I. CERTAINTY OF PERSEVERANCE

They, whom God hath accepted in his Beloved, effectually called, and sanctified by his Spirit, can neither totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace, but shall certainly persevere therein to the end, and be eternally saved.

I. CERTAINTY OF PERSEVERANCE

- **Perseverance is grounded in our acceptance in the “Beloved,” the effectual calling of God and sealing of the Holy Spirit.**
 - We approach perseverance by remembering who we are and what God has already done for us (Rom. 8:34).
 - We are thus confident that “he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion it in the day of Christ Jesus” (Phil. 1:6).
 - “And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified” (Rom. 8:30).
 - “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” (Jn. 10:27-28).

I. CERTAINTY OF PERSEVERANCE

- **Perseverance does not preclude “backsliding.”**

- We can never “totally or finally fall away from the state of grace,” but we can appear to be doing so.
- It is for this reason that the Reformed doctrine speaks of believers “persevering” – we need the light of God’s Word to keep us from losing our way.
- Carelessness in the Christian life remains perilous and is never tolerated in Scripture.

“We should offer no encouragement to the idea that those people are Christians who confess Christ as their Saviour at one moment and then live a life of disobedience at every other” (van Dixhoorn).

- What is the difference between Judas and Peter? That Peter repented!

“Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall. For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 1:10-11).

“You who by God’s power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time” (1 Pet. 1:5).

II. THE REASONS FOR OUR PERSEVERANCE

This perseverance of the saints depends not upon their own free will, but upon the immutability of the decree of election, flowing from the free and unchangeable love of God the Father; upon the efficacy of the merit and intercession of Jesus Christ, the abiding of the Spirit, and of the seed of God within them, and the nature of the covenant of grace: from all which ariseth also the certainty and infallibility thereof.

II. THE REASONS FOR OUR PERSEVERANCE

- We do not persevere by our free will. By relying on free will we would have no confidence of perseverance at all!
- Instead, **we persevere because of God's will:**
 - The immutability of the decree of election:

“God's firm foundation stands, bearing this seal: ‘The Lord knows those who are his’” (2 Tim. 2:19).

“For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable” (Rom. 11:29).
 - **Because of the free and unchanging love of God the Father:**

“I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued in my faithfulness to you” (Jer. 31:3).

“it is because the Lord loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers” (Dt. 7:8).

II. THE REASONS FOR OUR PERSEVERANCE

- **Because of “the efficacy of the merit of Jesus Christ”:**
 - Christ’s death does not merely place us in a redeemable situation, but he redeems his people from the sins.
 - The new covenant promises: “I will forgive their iniquities and remember their sins no more” (Jer. 31:34). If believers may fall away, then this promise is false and Christ died in vain.

“We have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all” (Heb. 10:10).
- **Because of “the efficacy of the intercession of Jesus Christ”:**
 - “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” (Jn. 6:39).
 - “And I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them in your name” (Jn. 17:11).
 - “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail” (Lk. 22:31-32).
 - “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” (Rom. 8:34).
 - “he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them” (Heb. 7:25)/

II. THE REASONS FOR OUR PERSEVERANCE

- **Because of “the abiding of the Spirit” and “the seed of God in them”:**

“In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory” (Eph. 1:13-14).

“I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, . . . You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you” (Jn. 14:16-17).

“No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God’s seed abides in him; and he cannot keep on sinning, because he has been born of God” (1 Jn. 3:9).

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come” (2 Cor. 5:17).

- **Because of the nature of the covenant of grace:**

- “when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the Lord shall prosper in his hand” (Isa. 53:10).

- “you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him” (Jn. 17:2).

“Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight” (Heb. 13:20-21).

II. THE REASONS FOR OUR PERSEVERANCE

- **Difference between the Reformed and Arminian view of Perseverance**
 - Both agree that believers in Christ must persevere in order finally to be saved.
 - Arminians teach that perseverance is uncertain whereas the Reformed teach it is certain for true believers.
 - Arminians ascribe perseverance ultimately to our free will; the Reformed ascribe perseverance to God's sovereign will.
 - Arminians teach that Christ's atonement makes salvation possible for everyone through faith, whereas the Reformed teach that Christ atoned for the elect only, effectually redeeming them from sin.
 - Arminians teach that "all men have the same gracious influence of the Holy Spirit operating on them" (Hodge), enabling them to believe if they are willing; the Reformed teach that believers have the special operations of the Holy Spirit, who seals us to salvation.

III. TRUE CHRISTIANS CAN (ALMOST) FALL AWAY

Nevertheless, they may, through the temptations of Satan and of the world, the prevalence of corruption remaining in them, and the neglect of the means of their perseverance, fall into grievous sins; and, for a time, continue therein: whereby they incur God's displeasure, and grieve his Holy Spirit, come to be deprived of some measure of their graces and comforts, have their hearts hardened, and their consciences wounded; hurt and scandalize others, and bring temporal judgments upon themselves.

- The examples of David and Peter: their sins hurt themselves and others, but God brought them back to repentance, sincere faith, and usefulness.
- Perseverance does not remove our need to walk carefully or to mitigate the damage if we do not.
- Perseverance does not remove divine discipline and chastisement, but demands them.
- God will persevere with us, pursuing and preserving us by grace, until we repent and come home.