

# **Perseverance, Assurance, and Righteousness**

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In the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints, the question is “Will the believer who has been regenerated, justified, adopted by God, and united with Christ continue to permanently be saved, no matter what he does?” In other words, will a person who becomes a Christian always remain a Christian? Or is salvation of the believer somehow conditional? In other words, can a believer lose his salvation?

What a person believes regarding the doctrine of perseverance of the saints has practical consequences for Christian living.

- If there is no guarantee that salvation is permanent, believers may experience anxiety and insecurity that will detract from the task of Christian living, hope, and joy.
- If our salvation is absolutely secure, then there may be a tendency toward moral and spiritual indifference.

Therefore, a study of the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints is worth our time of study. We will examine both points of view and finally examine my point of view on this matter.

All sides on this matter agree on many points.

- They agree that God is faithful to keep all his promises.
- They agree that salvation is by faith and not by works.
- They agree that the Holy Spirit is at work in all believers.

Like so many beliefs, there are good and Godly people who hold to different positions on this doctrine.

## Perseverance of the Saints

The doctrine of the perseverance of the saints holds that once a person has been saved they will persevere as Christians until their death. In other words they believe that once a person is saved their salvation is absolutely secure. There are several Biblical texts that support the doctrine of once saved always saved or the perseverance of the saints.

*1 Peter 1:3-5 - <sup>3</sup>Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, <sup>4</sup>and **into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade**—kept in heaven for you, <sup>5</sup>who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.*

This text says that our inheritance or salvation...

- can never perish, spoil, or fade.
- is kept for us in heaven.
- is shielded by God's power until the last time.

*John 10:27-30 - <sup>27</sup>My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. <sup>28</sup>I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. <sup>29</sup>My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. <sup>30</sup>I and the Father are one.*

This text says that our eternal life or salvation...

- can never perish.
- no one can snatch the saved from the hands of Jesus.
- no one can snatch the saved from the hands of the Father.

Romans 8:38-39 - <sup>38</sup>*For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, <sup>39</sup>neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

This text teaches that there is nothing in heaven or earth that can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 1:6 - <sup>6</sup>*being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.*

This text teaches that God does not merely give us salvation and then abandon us to our own efforts. When we are saved God begins a good work in us that he will carry on until our death or the second coming of Jesus.

2 Timothy 1:11, 12 - <sup>11</sup>*And of this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher. <sup>12</sup>That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day.*

This text teaches that Jesus is able to guard our salvation until He comes again.

## **Conditional Salvation**

There are those Christians who do not believe in the perseverance of the saints. They believe that it is possible to lose their salvation because of sin and apostasy (a falling away from faith).

Their strongest argument for this position is that Jesus and the New Testament writers consistently warn believers of the dangers of being led astray. Their point is, why would Jesus and the New

Testament writers issue a warning about being led astray, if they could not be led astray and lose their salvation?

Hebrews 2:1 - <sup>1</sup>*We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away.*

This is a text that warns the believer to not “drift away” from the gospel we have heard and believed.

Colossians 1:21-23 - <sup>21</sup>*Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. <sup>22</sup>But now he has reconciled you by Christ’s physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation—<sup>23</sup>**if** you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant.*

This text teaches that salvation is conditional...

- if you continue in the faith.
- if you remain established and firm.
- if you are not moved from the hope in the gospel.

Those who believe in conditional salvation also base their belief on texts which apparently teach that people do lose their salvation.

Hebrews 6:11-12 - <sup>4</sup>*It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, <sup>5</sup>who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age, <sup>6</sup>if they fall away, to be brought back to repentance, because to their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace.*

This key text is saying that it is possible for believers to fall away from their faith. It also teaches that those who have completely fallen away from Christ have made it impossible to be brought back to repentance.

## **Righteousness for Salvation**

It is easy to see why there are Godly people who believe differently on the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints. There seem to be scriptures that prove both sides of the doctrine. All of the scriptures are inspired by God. How can we reconcile what the Bible says on both sides of this doctrine?

I believe that the solution lies in understanding the importance and role of righteousness in the salvation of the believer.

Understanding righteousness is central to our understanding of salvation because from Genesis to Revelation, only the righteous will be saved.

*Phillipians 3:7-9 - <sup>7</sup>But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. <sup>8</sup>What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ <sup>9</sup>and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.*

Paul **actually lost** all things for the sake of Christ Jesus his Lord. Paul gave up his freedom, his status, his achievements, and his money. In fact, Paul lost everything and considered it all “*rubbish*”, compared to the *surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus*. The things of this world that seemed so valuable to him **before Christ**, were like trash compared to gaining a relationship with Jesus Christ.

Next, Paul moves on to the centrality of righteousness as the basis of a saving relationship with Jesus. There can be no salvation without righteousness. **Righteousness is right conduct in the context of a right relationship with God.** We must **be** righteous **by receiving** the perfect righteousness of God as a gift by faith. God imputes righteousness to the believer by faith.

In our text, Paul tells us **two things** about the essential and fundamental matter of righteousness. **First**, *that I may gain Christ<sup>9</sup> and be found in him, **not** having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law.* It is impossible to be saved by keeping the law. The reason is that the righteousness that comes from keeping the law is imperfect righteousness that comes from human effort. Paul in Romans 3:10, 12, tells us that, *there is no one righteous, not even one... There is no one who does good, not even one.*

The good news is that God wants us to **abandon our own** righteousness so that we can **accept God's** righteousness. So the first thing we know about saving righteousness is that it is not produced by human effort.

**Second**, *that I may gain Christ<sup>9</sup> and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law,-- but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.* -- Only **God's** righteousness can save -- because only **perfect** righteousness can save.

Remember, righteousness is right conduct in the context of a right relationship with God. So, where will we find perfect conduct in the context of a perfect relationship with God? Perfect righteousness can only come from God.

Only Jesus lived a perfect life, in a perfect relationship with God, the Father. Only Jesus had 100% pure righteousness created by his perfect conduct and perfect relationship. Somehow we must obtain the righteousness of Jesus Christ so that we can stand in the intimate presence of the holy God. This righteousness is something we must have in order to have eternal life.

The righteousness of Jesus Christ is like a robe, a robe of righteousness. Isaiah 61:10 says, "*For he has clothed me with garments of salvation, and **arrayed** me in a robe of righteousness.*" Jesus' perfect life on earth was a process of weaving and sewing together a robe of righteousness.

- Every act of **compassion** was a stitch in the robe.
- Every act of **humility** was a stitch in the robe.
- Every act of **obedience** to his Father, was a stitch in the robe.

Finally, with his death on the cross the robe of righteousness was complete. He declared on the cross, "it is finished." And now that he has been resurrected, the robe of righteousness is available to us who will accept the robe by faith.

Jesus knit together the pure robe of righteousness with his perfect conduct in the context of a perfect relationship. And now the Heavenly Father is reaching down out of heaven and offering this robe to you. Do you want it?

You will want the robe of righteousness only to the extent that you understand the worthlessness of your own righteousness. Personal sin calls us to the righteousness of Jesus. If you believe that you are a sinner in need of salvation, then take the robe of Jesus.

Simply put on the robe of righteousness by faith. Trust that the person and death of Jesus will cover your sin so that you can be saved from sin and judgment.

You can't earn the robe and you can't deserve it. It is offered to us for free. However, it was not cheap. It cost Jesus his life. But it is still free to us. We simply put on the robe by faith. It is ours as a gift.

As we put on the robe of righteousness, the filthy rags of our own righteousness will be covered. All our sins will be covered. Our present and future standing before God will always be based on the righteousness of Jesus and not our own righteousness.

With the robe of righteousness we can stand in the intimate presence of God's holiness with boldness. Our standing before God is based on the righteousness of Jesus which we wear by faith.

However, God has a plan for our lives under the robe. God's robe of righteousness is what we wear over our imperfect lives. Under the robe is imperfect believers who are indwelt by the Holy Spirit. Under the robe God is purifying us to be more like Jesus. This is sanctification. Our standing before God is not based on this process of sanctification but on the robe of righteousness. The robe of righteousness is the righteousness of Jesus and not our own righteousness which is as "filthy rags."

Let's go back to our discussion of the perseverance of the saints. I believe that we can put together scripture on both sides of the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints based on our understanding of righteousness.

## Resolution through Understanding Righteousness

The best way that I can understand the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints is to see that God's plan is that all believers will persevere in their salvation until the end. God provides everything so that once the believer is saved, he will remain saved.

However, there are texts that warn against losing salvation and state the possibility of losing salvation. I believe that the only way to lose salvation is to consciously and knowingly reject the righteousness of Jesus. Sin alone will not cause a person to lose his salvation. But sin in the context of rejecting the righteousness of Jesus will cause a person to lose his salvation.

Hebrews 10:26-27 - <sup>26</sup>*If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left,* <sup>27</sup>*but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God.* <sup>28</sup>*Anyone who rejected the law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses.* <sup>29</sup>*How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God under foot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace?*

Here the text teaches us that there are several conditions that cause a saved person to lose his salvation. The former believer must...

- deliberately keep on sinning.
- trample the Son of God under foot.
- treat as an unholy thing the blood of Jesus.
- insult the Holy Spirit.

From this text it is clear that losing salvation and coming under the judgment and punishment of God is no easy matter for a believer.

We can see that it is not just sin that causes a person to lose salvation. All believers are sinners but they are forgiven sinners covered with the perfect righteousness of Jesus. Losing salvation is a conscious rejection of Jesus, his righteousness, his blood, and the Holy Spirit. This is not done by accident. This is not done unconsciously.

## **Assurance of Salvation**

All believers can rejoice that their salvation is assured. Nothing can separate them from the love of God in Christ Jesus. No one can snatch the believer from the hands of God. Assurance of salvation comes from a deep personal conviction from the Holy Spirit and from the authoritative Word of God.

Romans 8:16-17 - <sup>16</sup>*The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.* <sup>17</sup>*Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.*

Assurance of salvation comes from a **deep personal conviction** created by the Holy Spirit in the heart and spirit of a believer.

I John 5:13 - <sup>13</sup>*I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may **know** that you have eternal life.*

Assurance of salvation rests on the **authoritative testimony of the Word of God** and what it says about the person and work of Jesus Christ.