

# THE PERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS

PHILIPPIANS 1:6

06/17/07

How often have you started a project around the house only to never complete it? You start with great enthusiasm, get about half way finished and then leave it alone, never to be picked back up again! We often have great plans and good intentions, but don't always follow through and finish what we start. We lack perseverance. Often it is simply a matter of time - we don't have time to do all that we set out to do, therefore, we leave piles of work left undone throughout life. Thankfully, God is not like us. He has all the time He wants to do the things He wants to do. The Lord always finishes what He starts.

God has never started anything He didn't finish. When all is said and done, God will have no unfinished projects, no uncompleted work. Because He is perfect all His works will be perfected. He is not lazy, like we are, nor is He ever discouraged. He is not subject to uncontrollable circumstances, nor is He limited by insufficient knowledge or power. **"Plan A"** is the only plan God has and **"Plan A"** will be completed. In Verse 6 Paul says that he is **"confident of this very thing."** He didn't say it was a possibility or even a probability. Rather, this is something Paul is absolutely certain about. He knows God! He understands His character and He knows that if God has begun a good work of grace in a believer's life, He will finish that work.

This verse was meant to encourage the Philippian believers. They were facing persecution and pressures from false teachers. There were conflicts within the church that threatened the unity of the body. Some of them were anxious and others were tempted to complain and argue. Some in the church were guilty of thinking they had already arrived at a state of perfection while others wondered if they were making sufficient progress in the faith. This verse answers all of these problems and is a great encouragement to all true believers. For those who think they've arrived spiritually, Paul says **"no – this work is not complete yet, and won't be until Christ returns."** For those believers who doubt they are making any progress and wonder if they ever will, this verse says, **"Yes, you will make progress and Christ will continue to work in you to make you what He wants you to be."**

Let's break down this verse. Paul spoke of, **"He"** who began this good work. Who is **"He"**? He is God – the almighty, the all-knowing, all present King of this universe. He is a loving, just, holy and merciful God. He is the infinite, eternal and unchangeable God who is the Creator and Sustainer of all things. He is the Redeemer of His people. He is all wise and perfectly good. It is **He** who began a good work in

you. He who is good does only that which is good. *We*, on the other hand, are not good. We have sinful hearts that produce sinful deeds. By nature we are all dead in trespasses and sins. But God, even when we were dead in sin, made us alive with Christ. The good work He begins is to change our hearts and give us a new heart – a new birth by His Spirit. We also call this work “**regeneration.**” Has God begun a good work in you and caused you to be born again? Those who have been born again will turn from their sins and put their faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. They will be justified by faith and have peace with God. They become new creatures in Christ. 2 Corinthians 5:17 say, “**Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.**” There is a change within that results in a change on the outside that all can see. Here God begins the work of sanctification, which is a gradual process by which the Holy Spirit works to enable us to grow in grace. We receive His help in order to die to sin and live to righteousness. Over time we become less sinful and more Christ-like.

Has God begun such a work in you? Then be sure of this – He will complete it, He will finish it, He will perfect it. *When?* He will begin in this life and one day He will make us perfect. When Jesus comes back, we will be changed and will be without sin. God’s saving purpose in us will be consummated on the “**day of Christ Jesus.**” But that day has not come yet. Right now some of us are in a mess. Will we make it until the end? Will we lose our salvation or fall away from Christ? If you are in Christ, you will persevere until the end. The passage today instructs us about the perseverance of the saints. The saints persevere because God perseveres them! This message is important for believers to grasp. It will encourage you to know that God is at work in you, even when you don’t see it, when you don’t feel it and when you aren’t aware of it. So be encouraged and don’t give up! Also, this doctrine of God’s preservation of believers is meant to teach us to distrust our own strength and depend entirely on God.

Has God begun a “**good work**” of salvation in you? Then you can count on this very thing - that He will finish what He started! Is it possible for a person who receives Christ and is saved to later lose their salvation? **NO!** If you are in Christ, having been born of the Spirit, you need not fear that you will lose your salvation. Those who have truly been converted to Christ, will persevere in faith until the end and cannot be lost. If God has chosen a person, called them, regenerated them, justified them, adopted them, is sanctifying them - will He abandon them after all that? **Not a chance!** He will enable them to persevere and will finish what He started in them. For the rest of this message, I want to give an overview of the doctrine that this

verse teaches – the doctrine of the “**perseverance or preservation of the saints.**”  
 First of all, I want to attempt an:

## **I. EXPLANATION OF THE DOCTRINE OF THE PERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS**

Before I explain what it means, you need to know what it doesn't mean. The perseverance of the saints does not mean that everyone who *professes* to be a Christian will persevere to the end and be saved. We are all familiar with words of Jesus who said: **"NOT EVERYONE WHO SAYS TO ME, 'LORD, LORD,' WILL ENTER THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN, BUT ONLY HE WHO DOES THE WILL OF MY FATHER WHO IS IN HEAVEN."** (Matthew 7:21) It is not talk that shows forth a genuine faith, but doing the will of God. The perseverance of the saints does not mean that a person can be saved, live however they please, and still expect to get to heaven. God will enable the true believer in Christ to persevere in holiness until the end.

Another thing to consider is that this process is not automatic - the Christian must persevere. We are not passive in this at all. When God saves a person, He gives them a new heart so that they will live new lives. Their lives change and they begin to live for Christ instead of living for themselves. And yet it is possible for a true believer to fall back for a time - to "**backslide**", if you will. So, the doctrine of perseverance does not mean that a Christian will not backslide or have partial falls. We know from Scripture that men of God did backslide, without completely falling away. Moses, David, and Peter all come to mind as having fallen away from the Lord temporarily, yet they did not lose their salvation, and this was proven because they repented of their sins and came back to the Lord.

Have you perhaps backslidden in your own life? You may have fallen into some sin such as getting slack about church attendance, or you've stopped reading your Bible and praying. Maybe your sin is more serious - you may have fallen into sexual sin or you have been dishonest in some area of life. If you know Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, then I urge you to repent of your backsliding and return to the Lord. Jesus said, **"REMEMBER THE HEIGHT FROM WHICH YOU HAVE FALLEN! REPENT AND DO THE THINGS YOU DID AT FIRST."** (Revelation 2:5) The Lord will forgive you and restore you to Himself. If you are not willing to turn from your sins, then you might not be a true Christian. You are still in need of the new birth.

The perseverance of the saints means that those who are true believers will persevere and cannot lose their salvation. We must admit that we all know people

who appeared to be true Christians but who have fallen away from Christ, stopped coming to church, and rejected the Lord. What about those people? Dr. R.C. Sproul says, **"IN ESSENCE THIS DOCTRINE TEACHES THAT IF YOU HAVE SAVING FAITH YOU WILL NEVER LOSE IT, AND IF YOU LOSE IT, YOU NEVER HAD IT."** In 1 John 2:19 we read these words: **"THEY WENT OUT FROM US, BUT THEY DID NOT REALLY BELONG TO US. FOR IF THEY HAD BELONGED TO US, THEY WOULD HAVE REMAINED WITH US; BUT THEIR GOING SHOWED THAT NONE OF THEM BELONGED TO US."** When a person leaves Christ, leaves the church, and continues to be dominated by sin, he or she was probably never saved to begin with.

Perseverance is something that believers do, and yet they don't persevere because of their own strength, but by the grace and power of God. 1 Peter 1:5 says that Christians, **"THROUGH FAITH ARE SHIELDED BY GOD'S POWER UNTIL THE COMING OF THE SALVATION THAT IS READY TO BE REVEALED IN THE LAST TIME."** 1 Corinthians 1:8 says, **"HE WILL KEEP YOU STRONG TO THE END, SO THAT YOU WILL BE BLAMELESS ON THE DAY OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST."** Since salvation is of God, from beginning to end, then if you and I persevere, it will be because of the work of God. Jonah learned this lesson in the stomach of a big fish. While he was inside the fish he prayed to God. The last sentence of that prayer Jonah said, **"SALVATION IS OF THE LORD."** It was at that moment that the fish spit Jonah out onto the shore. C.H. Spurgeon said that, **"THIS IS THE THEOLOGY WHICH JONAH LEARNED IN THE GREAT FISH COLLEGE, IN THE UNIVERSITY OF THE DEEP. SALVATION IS GOD'S WORK, NOT MAN'S."**

Human pride makes us think that somehow we have something to do with our salvation - that at least we help God out in some way. But, as Spurgeon said, even if our feet were on the threshold of heaven and our hand upon the gate, we would not be able to take the last step unless it was by the grace that had already brought us that far. John Newton agreed in his hymn Amazing Grace: **"'TIS GRACE HAS BROUGHT ME SAFE THUS FAR, AND GRACE WILL LEAD ME HOME."**

Let's look now at some:

## **II. SCRIPTURAL ARGUMENTS IN SUPPORT OF THIS DOCTRINE**

There are many churches and individuals that believe salvation can be lost. There are many Christians who fear that they will not be able to continue following Christ and that they will not make it to heaven. There is a fear of falling away in some. But the Bible says, **"FOR YOU DID NOT RECEIVE A SPIRIT THAT MAKES YOU A SLAVE AGAIN TO FEAR, BUT YOU RECEIVED THE SPIRIT OF**

**SONSHIP.**" (Romans 8:15) If you are a child of God, then all the promises of God are yours in Christ. It is a matter of believing what God says. God's Word says, **"being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ."** Jesus said, **"MY SHEEP LISTEN TO MY VOICE; I KNOW THEM, AND THEY FOLLOW ME. I GIVE THEM ETERNAL LIFE, AND THEY SHALL NEVER PERISH; NO ONE CAN SNATCH THEM OUT OF MY HAND."** (John 10:27,28) Romans 11:29 says, **"FOR GOD'S GIFTS AND HIS CALL ARE IRREVOCABLE."** These verses are straightforward. They teach that it is impossible for one of God's elect to be lost.

So many Christians just **"hope"** they will make it to heaven, when God has promised us that believers will certainly make it to heaven! Once I was driving to my Dad's house once which is up in the mountains of North Carolina. On the way up I noticed that the gas gauge was on empty. We had 15 miles to go on the Greenville Reservoir road before we would get to a gas station. With my whole family in the car, I was afraid we would run out of gas and be stuck in the middle of nowhere! I kept going, only hoping, not knowing if we would make it. We made it, but that last 15 miles was not an enjoyable ride for me because of my anxiety. If you know the Lord Jesus as your Savior, you don't have to worry about whether you'll run out of gas! He will carry you to your eternal home! He has promised, and He does not lie.

Another scriptural reason why Christians will certainly persevere is the Scriptural doctrine of election. If God has chosen you for salvation, is it conceivable that He would allow you to fall away and not be saved in the end? No! There is no power on earth that can nullify God's eternal decree of election. Romans 8:30 pictures the golden chain of salvation which cannot be broken: **"AND THOSE HE PREDESTINED, HE ALSO CALLED; THOSE HE CALLED, HE ALSO JUSTIFIED; THOSE HE JUSTIFIED, HE ALSO GLORIFIED."** If He has predestined an individual, then that person will be glorified. There is no possibility of any of His elect not making it to heaven! The *Westminster Confession of Faith* says, **"THIS PERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS DEPENDS NOT UPON THEIR OWN FREE WILL, BUT UPON THE IMMUTABILITY OF THE DECREE OF ELECTION."** Election is absolutely unchangeable. Therefore, perseverance is guaranteed.

The perseverance of believers is also guaranteed by the atonement of Christ. If Jesus Christ died particularly for your sins, then is it conceivable that you could be lost? If He purchased you by His blood, can the devil buy you back again? Unthinkable! Not only did Jesus die for the sins of His people, He also intercedes in heaven for them now, at the right hand of the Father. Hebrews 7:25 says,

**"THEREFORE HE IS ABLE TO SAVE COMPLETELY THOSE WHO COME TO GOD THROUGH HIM, BECAUSE HE ALWAYS LIVES TO INTERCEDE FOR THEM."** If Christ is interceding for you in heaven, can His prayers fail? Impossible! Remember the apostle Peter. Peter denied Christ, but Jesus told him that He had prayed for him, that his faith would not fail. Though Peter denied Christ three times, Christ's prayer was answered and Peter repented of his denial and continued on in the faith. As a believer, Christ prays for you and your faith will not fail.

Another reason why true saints will persevere is because of the presence of the Holy Spirit within them. When you trust in Christ alone to save you, He gives you the gift of the Spirit who indwells you. Jesus promised that He will never leave us or forsake us. The Spirit of God unites us to Jesus Christ so that we are one with Him and this union is permanent. Romans chapter 8 tells us that nothing can separate us from His love! **"FOR I AM CONVINCED THAT NEITHER DEATH NOR LIFE, NEITHER ANGELS NOR DEMONS, NEITHER THE PRESENT NOR THE FUTURE, NOR ANY POWERS, 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."** (Romans 8:38,39) Human love is not perfect and does fail, but God's love never fails. Psalm 27:1 says, **"Though my father and mother forsake me, the Lord will receive me."** God's love is perfect and unchanging. If He loves you and you are His child now, you will be loved and remain His child forever! As we continue on in studying the doctrine of perseverance, we need to examine:

### **III. SOME COMMON OBJECTIONS TO THIS DOCTRINE**

One objection to the doctrine of perseverance is that it will encourage people to go out and live however they please. If we teach that believers cannot lose their salvation then what is there to stop a Christian from enjoying himself in sin? Contrary to what some think, this belief in eternal security does not foster the license to sin. If I know I am secure in the Father's love forever, then that fact will make me thankful and desirous to please God. To have an uncertainty and fear about your eternal destiny will not help you to obey, but will only serve to be a hindrance. But to be certain about your eternal destiny and God's unchanging love, will make you love God all the more and do all that you can to serve Him. Confidence in God and His eternal plan will only spur you on to greater obedience.

Another objection that is given to the doctrine of perseverance is the example of some professing Christians who have fallen away. Dr. G.I. Williamson says, **"IT MUST BE ADMITTED THAT EXPERIENCE OFTEN SEEMS TO CONTRADICT THIS TEACHING. WHO CANNOT THINK OF SOMEONE WHO BECAME A**

**MEMBER OF THE CHURCH, GIVING EVIDENCE OF GREAT INTEREST IN DIVINE THINGS AND SUSTAINING ZEALOUS ATTENDANCE UPON THE MEANS OF GRACE FOR CONSIDERABLE TIME, WHO YET, LATER ON, FELL AWAY FROM THE FELLOWSHIP OF CHRIST INTO COMPLETE NEGLECT AND EVEN ANTAGONISM."** How do we answer this objection? In response I would say that it is all too easy for us to be fooled by false appearances, and that external righteousness can be faked. In the parable of the sower, Jesus said that some people would hear the Word and receive it with joy, but having no root, they eventually fall away. **"No root"** is the key phrase in that verse. The root is like the heart. If a person has no new heart, there will be no lasting fruit of righteousness. The new birth always results in lasting change. 1 John 3:9 says, **"NO ONE WHO IS BORN OF GOD WILL CONTINUE TO SIN, BECAUSE GOD'S SEED REMAINS IN HIM."** Such a person who falls away has never been born again.

Another objection that is raised comes from several Scripture passages which seem to contradict the doctrine of perseverance and teach that man can fall away. Hebrews 6:4-6 says, **"IT IS IMPOSSIBLE FOR THOSE WHO HAVE ONCE BEEN ENLIGHTENED, WHO HAVE TASTED THE HEAVENLY GIFT, WHO HAVE SHARED IN THE HOLY SPIRIT, WHO HAVE TASTED THE GOODNESS OF THE WORD OF GOD AND THE POWERS OF THE COMING AGE, IF THEY FALL AWAY, TO BE BROUGHT BACK TO REPENTANCE."** (Hebrews 6:6) This is a difficult passage to be sure. Thomas Watson, says that **"THE APOSTLE HERE SPEAKS OF HYPOCRITES."** He is not referring here to true Christians. It is possible to be enlightened without being born again. You can taste the goodness of God without eating. You can experience some of the common operations of the Holy Spirit, without Him indwelling you and uniting you to Christ.

Verse 9 of Hebrews chapter 6 seems to indicate that it was not true believers that were referred to as being able to fall away: **"EVEN THOUGH WE SPEAK LIKE THIS, DEAR FRIENDS, WE ARE CONFIDENT OF BETTER THINGS IN YOUR CASE - THINGS THAT ACCOMPANY SALVATION."** The author of Hebrews was not trying to frighten those who really knew Christ, but to warn those who were hypocrites, that they might turn to Christ for salvation before it was too late. The Bible also says in 1 Corinthians 10:12, **"SO, IF YOU THINK YOU ARE STANDING FIRM, BE CAREFUL THAT YOU DON'T FALL!"** Does this mean that a Christian can fall away and lose their salvation? Not really. I think that this verse is meant to guard against a false hope and false confidence that hypocrites have. But it is also meant to guard believers against spiritual pride. If we rely on ourselves, we will fall into sin. Don't ever think that you are beyond being able to commit certain sins. If God left us to ourselves, we would be capable of anything. The point is that if you

know Jesus Christ and have been born of His Spirit, God will not allow you to totally or finally fall from a state of grace.

## **CONCLUSION**

I hope that you have an understanding now of the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints. This doctrine teaches that if God has begun a good work of salvation in you, that He will complete it and enable you to persevere in faith and holiness until the end of your life. **This should be of great comfort for those who truly know Christ.** When you are down and ready to give up, remember that God will not give up on you! He will pull you through your trial or temptation! There is no reason to doubt His love for you. When all your friends and relations have turned away from you, remember that God will never, never forsake you! This doctrine should also motivate us as believers to put forth diligent effort in the Christian life, while relying on His grace alone to sustain us until the end. His grace enables us to persevere, but it is we who must do the actual persevering! This teaching also ought to make us to overflow with love and gratitude to God for the security we have in Christ.

The doctrine of perseverance should also be an encouragement for unbelievers to come to Christ. Some will not come to Christ as Savior and Lord because they are afraid they will not be able to stick it out. If you have had that fear, then I hope you have seen that it is a needless fear, for the Lord will keep you. I have talked with a number of individuals over the years who said that they were afraid to make a commitment to Christ out of fear that they would not be able to keep it. But the book of Jude says that God, **"IS ABLE TO KEEP YOU FROM FALLING AND TO PRESENT YOU BEFORE HIS GLORIOUS PRESENCE WITHOUT FAULT AND WITH GREAT JOY."** (Jude 1:24) If you are truly born again of God's Spirit, then you will not – you cannot lose your salvation. But make sure that you have a real work of grace in your heart. Don't be content with the appearance of godliness. You must be born again. If you are born again, then Christ will bring you safely home to live with Him forever. I'll close with a quote from our Confession of Faith from the chapter on the *Perseverance of the Saints*: **"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."**