

The Difficult Doctrines of Perseverance and Preservation

There are two doctrines which for the last century or so have been poorly understood and therefore rarely taught in Bible-believing American churches: the doctrines of perseverance and preservation. As a result, our evangelism has been wonderfully efficient at producing “converts,” but sadly deficient in producing converted lives. And Southern Baptist evangelistic efforts have been as shallow and short-term as any.

We start where should always start: the doctrines of the word of God.

THE DOCTRINE OF PERSEVERANCE

Many passages of Scripture either clearly say or strongly imply that, since professing Christians can finally fall away and be lost, we must be diligent to persevere in our faith and faithfulness. That’s the doctrine of perseverance. Please consider the following:

- Final salvation is for those who endure to the end. (*Matthew 10:22; 24:13; Mark 13:13*)
- If we deny Christ, He will deny us. (*Matthew 10:33; Luke 12:9; 2 Timothy 2:11-13*)
- Ongoing fruitfulness is a necessary evidence of real salvation.
(*Matthew 13:3-9, 18-23; Mark 4:3-8, 13-20; Luke 8:5-15*)
- Those who do not abide in Christ will be cast out. (*John 15:4-6*)
- Believers can and must choose to continue in grace. (*Acts 11:23; 13:43; 14:21-22*)
- It is those who persevere in sowing to the Spirit who will reap everlasting life. (*Galatians 6:7-10*)
- We’ve been reconciled with God through the cross only if we persevere. (*Colossians 1:21-23*)
- We must continue in the truth. (*2 Timothy 3:13-15*)
- If we neglect salvation, we will not escape. (*Hebrews 2:1-3*)
- We are Christ’s own if we persevere to the end. (*Hebrews 3:5-19*)
- If we hold fast, the mercy of Christ will be ours even in our weakness. (*Hebrews 4:14*)
- If we fall away utterly, we’ll be damned irretrievably. (*Hebrews 6:4-8*)
- If we’re diligent in obedient faith, we assure ourselves that we will not fall away. (*Hebrews 6:9-12*)
- The promises of faith are to those who endure in faith. (*Hebrews 10:23-39*)
- Unchecked, apostasy tends to spread among professed believers. (*Hebrews 12:14-17*)
- If we reject the voice of God in the New Covenant, we’re doomed. (*Hebrews 12:18-29*)
- Assurance of final salvation is for those who are diligent. (*2 Peter 1:10-11*)
- Final salvation comes after moral and doctrinal perseverance. (*2 Peter 3:14-18*)
- Final salvation is for those who overcome by enduring to the end.
(*Revelation 2:7, 10, 11, 17, 25-28; 3:5, 11-12, 21; 21:7-8*)

THE DOCTRINE OF PRESERVATION

Many passages of Scripture clearly say or strongly imply that true believers can never finally fall away and be lost, because God sovereignly keeps them in His grace. That’s the doctrine of preservation. I submit for your consideration:

- Our election guarantees our final salvation. (*John 6:37-40*)
- Those who have received eternal life from Christ will never perish. (*John 10:28-29*)
- Absolutely nothing can separate the elect from God. (*Romans 8:28-39*)
- The Holy Spirit seals us and guarantees our final salvation. (*2 Corinthians 1:21-22; Ephesians 1:13-14*)
- Our final salvation rests on the character of Christ. (*2 Timothy 1:12*)
- God knows His own, even when many others fall away. (*2 Timothy 2:17-19*)
- God preserves His own. (*2 Timothy 4:18*)

RECONCILING THE DOCTRINES

Many passages of Scripture clearly explain the relationship between perseverance and preservation.

- Persevering faith and faithfulness are gifts of God's grace.
(*Luke 22:30-31; 1 Corinthians 1:8-9; 1 Thessalonians 3:13*)
- It is those who abide in Christ who are His true disciples. (*John 8:31*)
- Failure to persevere indicates false conversion. (*1 Corinthians 15:1-2*)
- Perseverance through persecution is proof of salvation. (*Philippians 1:27-30*)
- God's work in us is why we work out our own salvation diligently. (*Philippians 2:12-13*)
- We persevere in faith because God is preserving us. (*2 Thessalonians 2:15-17*)
- A faith proven by endurance in trial will be rewarded with eternal life. (*James 1:2-12*)
- It is the power of God at work in our faith that keeps us as His own. (*1 Peter 1:3-5*)
- The genuineness of our faith is demonstrated by our endurance. (*1 Peter 1:6-7*)
- Those who leave the faith only prove that they never really belonged to the faith. (*1 John 2:19*)
- It is the Holy Spirit in us that keeps us abiding in Christ. (*1 John 2:27*)

To sum up:

- 1) A faith that is not grounded in repentance and expressed in obedience is counterfeit.
- 2) A faith that does not continue trusting in and obeying Christ is likewise counterfeit.
- 3) Every believer must go on proving to himself and others that his faith is true.
- 4) Nobody would ever begin believing, much less keep believing, unless the Holy Spirit were at work, invisibly creating and sustaining that repentant faith.
- 5) The true believer's will to persevere is fired and fueled by the gracious work of God as He preserves those He has chosen for His own.

Therefore:

- 1) He who does not persevere in repentant faith has no right to claim he's saved.
- 2) He who does persevere has no reason for pride.
- 3) If our evangelism does not mention perseverance, it's selling sinners short.
- 4) If our evangelism does not mention perseverance, it's selling God cheap.