



Doctrine of Salvation

Perseverance of the Saints¹

Explanation and Scriptural Basis

- Is there anything that will keep us from falling away from Christ, anything that will guarantee that we will remain Christians until we die and that we will in fact live with God in heaven forever? Or might it be that we will turn away from Christ and lose the blessings of our salvation?
- **Definition of the perseverance of the saints:** *All those who are truly born again will be kept by God's power and will persevere as Christians until the end of their lives, and that only those who persevere until the end have been truly born again.*
- Two Parts:
 - **Assurance** - It indicates first that there is assurance to be given to those who are truly born again, for it reminds them that God's power will keep them as Christians until they die, and they will surely live with Christ in heaven forever.
 - **Evidence** - On the other hand, the second half of the definition makes it clear that continuing in the Christian life is one of the evidences that a person is truly born again. It is important to keep this aspect of the doctrine in mind as well, lest false assurance be given to people who were never really believers in the first place.
- Sometimes in Baptist circles the term *eternal security* has been used in place of *perseverance of the saints*. We opt here to use the term perseverance of the saints as a better descriptive term for the biblical doctrine in view.

All Who Are Truly Born Again Will Persevere to the End

- Many passages teach that those who are truly born again, who are genuinely Christians, will continue in the Christian life until death and will then go to be with Christ in heaven.
- **John 6:38-40** *"For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. ³⁹And 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. ⁴⁰For this is the will of my*

¹ Wayne Grudem, *Bible Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999). This lesson outline contains content directly quoted or adapted from chapter 24 of Grudem.

Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day."

- He says that he will raise that person up at the last day—which, in this context of believing in the Son and having eternal life, clearly means that Jesus will raise that person up to eternal life with him (not just raise him up to be judged and condemned).
- It seems hard to avoid the conclusion that everyone who truly believes in Christ will remain a Christian up to the day of final resurrection into the blessings of life in the presence of God.
- **John 10:27-29** *My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. ²⁹My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand.*
 - Here Jesus says that those who follow him, those who are his sheep, are given eternal life.
 - He further says that that "no one shall snatch them out of my hand" (v 28).
 - Some object, noting that even though no one else can take Christians out of Christ's hand, we might remove *ourselves* from Christ's hand. This is quibbling over words, for "no one" also includes the person who is in Christ's hand. In other words, Jesus's emphasis here is on his power to keep our salvation, not anyone else's power (including our own).
 - Moreover, we know that our own hearts are far from trustworthy. Therefore, if the possibility remained that we could remove ourselves from Christ's hand, the passage would hardly give the assurance that Jesus intends by it.
 - The most forceful phrase in the passage is "They shall never perish" (v 28). Another translation: "and they shall *certainly not perish* forever." This emphasizes that those who are Jesus' "sheep" and who follow him, and to whom he has given eternal life, shall never lose their salvation or be separated from Christ—they shall "never perish."
- There are several other passages that say those who believe have "eternal life."
 - **John 3:36** *Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.*
 - **John 5:24** *Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.*

- **1 John 5:13** *I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life.*
- **Romans 8:30** *And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.*
- Further evidence of God's keeping power for eternity is the "seal" that God places upon us.
 - This "seal" is the Holy Spirit within us, who also acts as God's "guarantee" that we will receive the inheritance promised to us: "In him you also, who have heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and have believed in him, were *sealed with the promised Holy Spirit*, which is the *guarantee* of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory" (Eph 1:13–14).
 - All who have the Holy Spirit within them, all who are truly born again, have God's unchanging promise and guarantee that the inheritance of eternal life in heaven will certainly be theirs. God's own faithfulness is pledged to bring it about.
- **1 Peter 1:3-5** *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, ⁵ who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.*
 - If God's guarding has as its purpose the preservation of believers until they receive their full, heavenly salvation, then it is safe to conclude that God will accomplish that purpose and they will in fact attain that final salvation. Their attainment of final salvation ultimately depends on God's power.

Only Those Who Persevere to the End Have Been Truly Born Again

- While Scripture repeatedly emphasizes that those who are truly born again will persevere to the end and will certainly have eternal life in heaven with God, there are other passages that speak of the necessity of continuing in faith throughout life.
 - They make us realize that what Peter said in 1 Peter 1:5 ("who *by God's power are guarded through faith*") is true, namely, that God does not guard us *apart from* our faith, but only by working *through* our faith so that he enables us to continue to believe in him.
 - In this way, those who continue to trust in Christ gain assurance that God is working in them and guarding them.

- **John 8:31-32** *So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples,³² and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”*
 - Jesus here is giving a warning that one evidence of genuine faith is continuing in his Word, that is, continuing to believe what he says and living a life of obedience to his commands.
 - **Matthew 10:22** *and you will be hated by all for my name's sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved.*
 - **Colossians 1:22-23** *he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him,²³ if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister.*
 - **Hebrews 3:14** *For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end.*
- Scripture speaks of evidences meant to assure us of our salvation *now*, so we should not think that assurance is impossible until we die. The whole book of 1 John addresses perseverance and assurance.
- There are many verses with warnings against falling away. Their purpose is not to cause those presently trusting in Christ worry that sometime in the future they might fall away; rather, they're given to warn those backsliding or who have already fallen away.

Those Who Finally Fall Away May Present External Signs of Conversion

- Is it always clear which people in the church have genuine saving faith and which have only an intellectual persuasion of the truth but without genuine faith in their hearts?
- It is not always easy to tell, and Scripture mentions in several places that unbelievers in fellowship with the church can give some external indications that make them look or sound like genuine believers.
 - Judas, who betrayed Christ, must have acted almost exactly like the other disciples during the three years he was with Jesus.
 - So convincing was his conformity to the behavior pattern of the other disciples, that at the end of three years of Jesus' ministry, when he said that one of his disciples would betray him, they did not all turn and suspect Judas, but rather “began to say to him one after another, ‘Is it I?’” (Matt 26:22).

- However, Jesus himself knew that there was no genuine faith in Judas's heart. See John 6:64, 70.
 - Paul also speaks of "*false brothers* secretly brought in" (Gal 2:4) and says that in his journeys he has been "in danger from false brothers (2 Cor 11:26). He also says that the servants of Satan "*disguise themselves* as servants of righteousness" (2 Cor 11:15).
 - This does not mean that all unbelievers in the church who nevertheless give some signs of true conversion are servants of Satan secretly undermining the work of the church.
 - But Paul's statements do mean that some unbelievers in the church will be false brothers and sisters sent to disrupt the fellowship. Others may simply be unbelievers (professed Christians who fall away) or may even eventually come to saving faith in Christ later. In all cases, however, these give several external signs that make them look like genuine believers, though they are not.
 - **Matthew 7:21-23** *"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. ²² On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' ²³ And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'*
 - **Mark 4:5-6** *Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it did not have much soil, and immediately it sprang up, since it had no depth of soil. ⁶ And when the sun rose, it was scorched, and since it had no root, it withered away.*
 - **Mark 4:16-17** *And these are the ones sown on rocky ground: the ones who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with joy. ¹⁷ And they have no root in themselves, but endure for a while; then, when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately they fall away.*
 - See also John 15:1-7.
- There is no doubt that there will be some who have affiliated closely with the fellowship of the church, presented some apparent sorrow for sin, and received blessings from God (like being exposed to the true preaching of the Word and have appreciated much of its teachings), yet nevertheless fall away.
 - Hebrews 6:4-6 warns very strongly against a person who does this, because a person who commits apostasy after having received all of these blessings from the Lord is willfully rejecting Christ and turning away from his blessings.

- The one who finally falls away—meaning they never truly repent—has actually never truly been born again, for being born again always produces enduring faith and repentance.

What Can Give a Believer Genuine Assurance?

- If it is true that those who are unbelievers and who finally fall away may give many external signs of conversion (like going to church, living outwardly moral lives, giving financially to the church, participating in the church's ministry, etc.), then what will serve as evidence of genuine conversion? What can give real assurance to a real believer?
- We can list three categories of questions that a person could ask of himself or herself.
 - ***Do I have a present trust in Christ for salvation?***
 - See Col 1:23; Heb 3:14; John 3:16.
 - A person should ask himself or herself, "Do I today have trust in Christ to forgive my sins and take me without blame into heaven forever? Do I have confidence in my heart that he has saved me? If I were to die tonight and stand before God's judgment seat, and if he were to ask me why he should let me into heaven, would I begin to think of my good deeds and depend on them, or would I without hesitation say that I am depending on the merits of Christ and am confident that he is a sufficient Savior?"
 - This emphasis on *present* faith in Christ stands in contrast to the practice of some church testimonies where people repeatedly recite details of a conversion experience that may have happened decades ago. If a testimony of saving faith is genuine, it should be a testimony of faith that is active today, not just at some point in the past.
 - ***Is there evidence of a regenerating work of the Holy Spirit in my heart?***
 - **First**, there is the inward testimony of the Holy Spirit within our hearts bearing witness that we are God's children.
 - **Romans 8:14-16** *For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. ¹⁵For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" ¹⁶The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God...*
 - **1 John 4:13** *By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit.*

- **Second**, if the Holy Spirit is genuinely at work in our lives, he will be producing the kind of character traits that Paul calls “the *fruit of the Spirit*.”
 - **Galatians 5:22-23** *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.*
 - **Matthew 7:16-20** *You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? ¹⁷ So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. ¹⁸ A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. ¹⁹ Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ²⁰ Thus you will recognize them by their fruits.*
- **Third**, another evidence of work of the Holy Spirit is *continuing to believe and accept the sound teaching of the church*.
 - The eventual rejection of doctrine demonstrates an ultimate commitment to idolatry and sin. Good doctrine is what the Spirit uses to root out idolatry from our hearts; an unregenerate person will eventually reject good doctrine in favor of sin.
 - **1 John 2:23-24** *No one who denies the Son has the Father. Whoever confesses the Son has the Father also. ²⁴ Let what you heard from the beginning abide in you. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, then you too will abide in the Son and in the Father.*
 - **1 John 4:6** *We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us; whoever is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error.*
- **Fourth**, another evidence of genuine salvation is a *continuing personal relationship with Jesus Christ*. See John 15:4, 7; 1 John 2:4–6.
- **Do I see a long-term pattern of growth in my Christian life?**
 - The first two areas of assurance dealt with present faith and present evidence of the Holy Spirit at work in our lives. But Peter gives one more kind of test that we can use to ask whether we are true believers.
 - He tells us that there are some character traits which, if we keep increasing in them, will guarantee that we will “never fall” (2 Pet 1:10).

- He tells his readers to add to their faith “virtue ... knowledge ... self-control ... steadfastness ... godliness ... brotherly affection ... love” (2 Pet 1:5–7).
- He adds that they are to “be the more zealous to confirm your call and election” and says then that “if you do this [referring to the character traits] you *will never fall*” (2 Pet 1:10).
 - The way that we confirm our call and election, then, is to continue to grow in Christian knowledge, faith, character, and action.
 - Every year that we add to these character traits in our lives, we gain greater and greater assurance of our salvation.
- The result of these questions should be to give strong assurance to those who are genuinely believers. In this way, the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints will be a tremendously comforting doctrine.
- On the other hand, this doctrine, if rightly understood, should cause genuine worry, and even fear, in the hearts of any who are “backsliding” or straying away from Christ.
 - Such persons must be clearly warned that only those who persevere to the end have been truly born again. If they fall away from their profession of faith in Christ and life of obedience to him, they may not really be saved—in fact, the evidence that they are then giving is that they are not saved, and they were never really saved.
 - Once they stop trusting in Christ and obeying him, they have no genuine assurance of salvation, and they should consider themselves unsaved and turn to Christ in repentance and ask him for forgiveness of their sins.

Questions for Personal Application

- Do you have assurance that you are truly born again? What evidence do you see in your own life to give you that assurance? Do you think that God wants true believers to have this assurance? (See 1 John 5:13.)
- Have you seen a pattern of growth in your Christian life over time? Are you trusting in your own power to keep on believing in Christ, or in God’s power to keep your faith active and alive?
- If you have doubts about whether you are truly born again, what is it in your life that is giving reason for those doubts? What would Scripture encourage you to do to resolve those doubts (see 2 Pet 1:5–11; also Matt 11:28–30; John 6:37)?