

WHAT IS REFORMED THEOLOGY?

The Perseverance of the Saints

I. Definition

Perseverance of the Saints is the view that all whom God has chosen to be saved will be saved. His people will not fall away from the faith but will persevere to the end.

This doctrine does not rest on the strength of the human will, but on God's covenant faithfulness – the elect continues in the faith because God enables them to continue. This is the logical outcome of the previous doctrines.

II. The Westminster Confession of Faith

Of the Perseverance of the Saints

WCF 17.1

"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."

God completes what he begins.

Philippians 1:6 "And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ."

Christ secures the eternal destiny of his sheep.

John 10:28-29 "I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My 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."

The Holy Spirit sanctifies all whom he saves

1 John 3:9 "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."

The Ground of Perseverance

WCF 17.2

"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."

The immutability of election

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*.”

God’s love does not change

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

Christ’s praises uphold his people

Hebrews 7:25 “Consequently, 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.”

The Holy Spirit dwells in his people

John 14:16-17 “And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.”

God’s covenant of grace is unbreakable

Jeremiah 32:40 “I will make with them an everlasting covenant, that I will not turn away from doing good to them. And I will put the fear of me in their hearts, that they may not turn from me.”

The Faithfulness of God

2 Thess. 3:3 “But the Lord is faithful. He will establish you and guard you against the evil one.”

Chapter 17.3 — Temporary Falls Distinguished from Total Apostasy

WCF 17.3

“Nevertheless, they may, through the temptations of Satan and of the world, the prevalency of corruption remaining in them, and the neglect of the means of their preservation, 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 doctrine does not teach that all who *profess* faith in Christ are saved. Many who profess faith in Christ fall away, but they do not fall away because they lose their salvation. They fall away because they were never saved to begin with.

It is also possible for true believers to fall into temptations and commit grievous sins, but these sins do not cause them to forfeit their salvation or separate them from Christ.

III. Objections and Common Questions

Q: Doesn't this teach that Christians can live however they want, since they're guaranteed to be saved?
A: No. Perseverance is not a license to sin but a promise that God's grace will produce ongoing faith and repentance. This doctrine does not deny perseverance in sanctification (Titus 2:11–12; 1 John 3:9).
Q: What about warning passages like Hebrews 6:4–6 or 10:26–29, which describe people falling away?
A: Reformed theologians read these as real, sobering warnings that God uses as means to keep his people persevering — not as proof that a truly regenerate person can be lost. The text itself (Heb. 6:9) says the writer is convinced of better things for his readers. See also 1 John 2:19: those who left were not of us.
Q: If someone professes faith and later abandons Christianity entirely, were they ever really saved?
A: The Reformed answer, following 1 John 2:19, is that a final, total apostasy reveals a faith that was not saving faith to begin with — whether temporary, superficial, or merely outward (cf. the seed on rocky/thorny soil in Matt. 13:20–22). This is a hard pastoral reality, not a tidy formula for judging any individual case.
Q: Doesn't perseverance undermine human responsibility to keep believing and obeying?
A: No. We persevere in faith through the ordinary means of grace. Peter says to make our calling and election sure (Phil. 2:12–13; 2 Pet. 1:10). God's sovereign preservation and the believer's active perseverance are not competitors; the latter is the fruit and evidence of the former.
Q: How is this different from popular 'once saved, always saved' teaching?
A: The two are often confused. "Once saved, always saved" rests on a past decision, regardless of a person's subsequent life. Perseverance of the saints grounds assurance in God's unchanging character and effectual calling, with the expectation that grace will produce a sanctified imperfect, life of faith.
Q: How can I know whether I am one of the elect who will persevere?
A: Reformed theology points believers away from speculating about hidden election and toward the marks of grace in their own lives: a present, if imperfect, trust in Christ, sorrow over sin, and a desire to obey (WCF 18; 2 Pet. 1:10). Assurance grows through the ordinary means of grace, not through introspection alone.