

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. Agreement & Disagreement

Calvinists and Arminians agree: Christians must persevere in the faith to be finally saved.

1. We must continue to believe the gospel (Col. 1:21–23)
2. We must continue to abide in Christ (John 15:1–9)
3. We must continue to live in holiness (Heb. 12:14)

Calvinists and Arminians disagree on whether this perseverance is *inevitable*. Arminian view: perseverance is necessary but not guaranteed. Reformed view: God guarantees that everyone he has truly saved will persevere.

III. Warning Passages in Hebrews

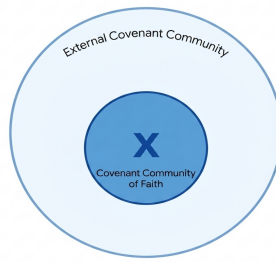
Hebrews contains five warning passages (2:1–4; 3:7–18; 6:4–12; 10:26–31; 12:25–29). The author writes to a mixed audience. Some are genuine believers. Others are part of the outward covenant community but have never come to saving faith. God uses these warnings both to call the lost to believe and to spur true believers on to remain faithful.

Hebrews 6:4–12

- Describes people who were “enlightened,” who “tasted the heavenly gift” and “shared in the Holy Spirit” — and then committed apostasy.
- Reformed view: these people were never genuine believers. They tasted real covenant blessings but were never born again. They are like land that receives rain yet produces only thorns (vv. 7–8).
- The author is confident most of his readers are the “good soil” (v. 9). The warning is aimed at a minority in danger of walking away.

Hebrews 10:26–31

- Describes those who “received the knowledge of the truth” and were “sanctified” by the covenant, then deliberately renounced Christ.
- “Sanctified” here means set apart as a covenant member (e.g., a covenant child or an insincere professor) — not necessarily regenerate.
- Argument from lesser to greater: if apostasy under the Old Covenant brought death, how much worse the judgment for spurning the New Covenant.
- The author reminds readers of their past faithfulness (vv. 32–34) to spur them on, and voices confidence (“we”) that they will persevere to final salvation.
- Thesis: these warnings target professed believers who have not truly come to faith. The majority are genuine and are encouraged to continue; the minority are warned.



The visible church includes both the outward covenant community and the true, inward community of faith.

IV. Summary

The Reformed View of the Warning Passages

- The warnings are real and effective — they are one of the means God uses to keep his people watchful and persevering, not proof that a true believer can lose salvation.
- Hebrews addresses a mixed covenant community: those who ultimately apostatize show by their falling away that they were never truly regenerate, even though they had a genuine place in the outward covenant community.
- For genuine believers, these warnings function as God's appointed means of preservation — driving them to persevere, not to despair.

V. Questions

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).
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.