



Ordo Salutis (Order of Salvation)

Lesson 7: Perseverance

Key Verse: Philippians 1:6

“For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.”

Introduction

A common question among Christians is, “Can I lose my salvation?” Often a Christian will fall into sin and wonder if they have lost their salvation or not. Is it possible for a genuine Christian to trust in Christ and then later in life abandon their faith and ultimately lose their salvation? Is there anything that will keep a Christian from falling away and guarantee that they will remain a Christian until they die? Can Christians have an assurance of their salvation? The topic around all these questions is what is often labeled as perseverance of the saints.

The Definition of Perseverance

Biblical Doctrines defines perseverance of the saints as, “All those who are truly born of the Spirit and united to Christ by faith are kept secure in him by God’s power and thus will persevere in faith until they go to be with Christ in death.”¹ Theologian, Wayne Grudem, has a similar definition but adds to the end, “and that only those who persevere until the end have been truly born again.”² What this means is that there are two parts to perseverance. First, there is assurance that is given to those who are truly born again. This assurance comes because God’s power will keep them as a Christian until the day they die. The second part, what Grudem adds, tells us that continuing in the Christian life is one of the evidences that a person has truly been born again.

This doctrine has been one that has caused significant disagreement among evangelical Christians. Many within the Wesleyan/Arminian tradition hold a position that it is possible for someone who has truly been born again to lose his or her salvation. Those who hold to a Reformed tradition hold to a position that it is not possible for someone who is truly born again to lose their salvation. Most Baptists hold to the Reformed tradition at this point, but they frequently use the term “*eternal security*” or “*the eternal security of the believer*” rather than the term “*perseverance of the saints*.”³ Another term that is used regarding perseverance of the saints is “*preservation of the saints*.”

Since this doctrine teaches that all those who are truly born again will persevere in the faith until death, how do we explain those who fall away? Perseverance of the saints does not teach that all who *profess* the Christian faith are certain of heaven. Many who profess to believe fall away, but they do not fall away from grace, for they were never in grace. True believers do fall into temptations, and they do commit grievous sins, but these sins do not cause them to lose their salvation or separate them from Christ.⁴

¹ John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue, gen. eds. *Biblical Doctrines: A Systematic Summary of Bible Truth* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2017), 644.

² Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 788.

³ *Ibid*, 788-89.

⁴ David N. Steele, Curtis C. Thomas, and S. Lance Quinn, *The Five Points of Calvinism: Defined, Defended, and Documented, second ed.* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2004), 64.

Key Verses:

1. John 3:16. What is promised to the one who believes? _____
2. John 3:36. What is promised to the one who believes in the Son? _____
3. John 6:37. What does Jesus say about the one who comes to Him? _____
4. John 10:27–28. What does Jesus say about His sheep? _____
5. Ephesians 1:13–14. What happens to all who are saved? _____

6. 1 John 2:19. What does John say about those who went out from us? _____

Perseverance and Preservation

When we think about this doctrine, there are two sides we must consider—preservation and perseverance. Preservation of the saints is the divine side where God preserves all those who are His. Perseverance of the saints has to do with the responsibility of those who have been born again to persevere in the faith to the end (striving after holiness), and if a person does not hold out, there is no basis for assurance that God is preserving them.⁵ Just as God’s sovereignty in conversion does not mitigate the responsibility to repent and believe (Rom. 9:14–18; cf. Rom. 10:11–21), and just as God’s sovereignty in sanctification does not rule out the need for sustained effort in pursuing holiness (Phil. 2:12–13; 2 Pet. 1:3–5), so also God’s sovereign preservation is not at odds with the necessity of the believer’s perseverance.⁶

- Preservation: the divine side where God preserves those who are His.
- Perseverance: the responsibility of believers to persevere in the faith to the end.

Scripture issues numerous calls to persevere in the faith, indicating that a failure to persevere means there was a failure to lay hold of salvation. While some give assurance to professing Christians that heaven is theirs no matter how they live after they profess faith—as is popular in forms of antinomianism, quietism, and so-called “free grace” theology—such perceptions of the preserving power of God stand in stark opposition to the teaching of Scripture.⁷

Key Verses:

1. Matthew 10:22. According to Jesus, who will be saved? _____
2. Matthew 24:12–13. What does Jesus say about believers in the tribulation? _____

3. John 8:31. What did Jesus say about true disciples? _____

4. Colossians 1:22–23. Who will Christ present holy and blameless? _____

5. Hebrews 3:12–14. What will partakers of Christ do? _____

⁵ *The Five Points of Calvinism*, 149.

⁶ *Biblical Doctrines*, 647.

⁷ *Ibid*, 648.

False Converts and Those Who Fall Away

It is not always clear to know who the genuine believers in the church are and who the “false brethren” who have no genuine faith are. The Scriptures are clear that there are unbelievers in the fellowship of the visible church who give external signs of indications that make them look or sound like genuine believers. For example, Judas Iscariot, who betrayed Jesus, was not known by the other apostles as the one who would betray Christ (Mark 14:17–19). However, Jesus knew there was no genuine faith in his heart (John 6:70). Paul also speaks of “false brethren secretly brought in” (Gal. 2:4) who were teaching a false gospel. Paul also says that the servants of Satan “disguise themselves as servants of righteousness” (2 Cor. 11:15). Jesus said that at the last judgment “many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me you who practice lawlessness’” (Matt. 7:22–23). These people who say “Lord, Lord” were never genuine believers.

There are also passage of Scripture that teach about those who fall away. Paul warns Timothy that “in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons” (1 Tim. 4:1). The author of Hebrews warns his readers not to be one who falls away for “it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame” (Heb. 6:6). Those that have fallen away are not those who were saved and later lost their salvation. These who have fallen away were never saved. These are people who have been in fellowship with the church, have had some sorrow for sin (“repentance”; Heb. 6:6), have clearly understood the gospel (“enlightened”; Heb. 6:4), have been where the Holy Spirit has been ministering (“partakers”; Heb. 6:4), and have been exposed to the true preaching of the Word and have even appreciated much of its teaching (“tasted of the good word”; Heb. 6:5). Yet, they have been unwilling to follow Christ and reject His salvation.

Key Verses:

1. 2 Corinthians 11:26. How does Paul describe those who were endangering him? _____
 2. Luke 8:13. What does Jesus say about those who fall away? _____
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The Preserving Power of the Triune God

The eternal security of the believer who is in Christ rests ultimately upon the preserving power of the triune God. First, the believer’s security is found in the unchanging love, infinite power, and saving will of the Father. God’s love was set upon all those whom He has elected in eternity past (2 Tim. 1:9). All those whom the Father has elected are predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son (Rom. 8:29). It is impossible for those whom the Father has predestined to Christlikeness to fail to attain that end. Paul tells of the glorification of God’s elect as a done deal in Romans 8:30. This is God’s own guarantee that all those whom He foreknew, predestined, called, and justified are preserved to the end when they will be glorified.

Second, the eternal security of the believer is grounded in the finished work of Christ. Through the death of Christ, He has fully propitiated the Father’s wrath against His people (1 Peter 2:24; 1 John 2:2). Through the resurrection of Christ, the Father has certified that Christ’s death was sufficient to atone for sin (1 Tim. 3:16). Therefore, there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ (Rom. 8:1) and all those who are in Christ have eternal life (1 John 5:13).

Third, the eternal security of the believer is grounded in the sealing ministry of the Holy Spirit. At the moment of regeneration, God seals the believer with the Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:13–14). In Paul’s day,

affixing one's seal to something expressed the concepts of security, authentication, and ownership.⁸ God gives the believer the Holy Spirit as a pledge of our inheritance (2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5). As Grudem says, "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."⁹

Key Verses:

1. Romans 8:30. What does God promise to those who are predestined, called, and justified? _____

2. Romans 8:38–39. What can separate true believers from God's love? _____
3. Romans 8:1. What is promised to those who are in Christ? _____
4. Ephesians 1:14. Why are believers sealed with the Holy Spirit? _____

Genuine Assurance

How can a genuine believer be assured that they are a true believer in Christ and is one who is not going to fall away someday? Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians 13:5, "Test yourselves *to see* if you are in the faith; examine yourselves!" John also writes in 1 John 5:13, "These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life." John gives a series of tests to determine whether you possess eternal life or not. The following are evidences—largely drawn from 1 John—so that you may know whether you are saved or not and gain assurance of your salvation.¹⁰

- You enjoy fellowship with Christ and with the Father. (1 John 1:2–3; 5:1–2)
- You are sensitive to sin. (1 John 1:5–10)
- You obey God's Word. (1 John 2:3)
- You do not love the evil world. (1 John 2:15–17)
- You eagerly await Christ's return. (1 John 3:2–3)
- You see a decreasing pattern of sin in your life. (1 John 3:4–10)
- You love other Christians. (1 John 2:9–11; 3:10, 15–18)
- You experience answered prayer. (1 John 3:21–22; 5:14–15)
- You experience the ministry of the Holy Spirit in your life. (1 John 3:24; 4:13)
- You can discern between spiritual truth and error. (1 John 4:1–6)
- You have suffered rejection because of your faith. (1 John 3:11–13; John 15:18–19)

⁸ *Ibid*, 646.

⁹ *Systematic Theology*, 791.

¹⁰ Adapted from *Is It Real?: Eleven Biblical Tests of Genuine Salvation* (John MacArthur, *Is It Real?: Eleven Biblical Tests of Genuine Salvation* (Panorama City, CA: Grace To You, 2004).)