

The Theology of the Westminster Standards
WCF 17.1 – The Certainty of Perseverance

“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.” (Phil 1:6)

I. Introduction

A. Preservation (by God) and perseverance (of the Christian)

“It is not a 50/ 50 undertaking (not even 99.9% God and 0.1% ourselves!). Involved here is, as it could be put, the ‘mysterious math’ of God’s covenant, of the relationship, restored in Christ, between the creator and his image-bearing creature, whereby 100% + 100% = 100%. Sanctification is 100% the work of God and, just for that reason, is to engage the full, 100% activity of the believer.” – Dr. Richard Gaffin

1. **John 10:28–29** – *“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. ²⁹ 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.”*

II. The Certainty of Perseverance (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. (WCF 17.1)

- A. Joel Beeke posits that the statement, “once saved, always saved” can be taken as a half-truth. How so? (Consider the following verses)
 1. **Col 1:21–23** – *“And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, ²² 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 ...”*
 2. **Heb 3:6** – *“Christ is faithful over God’s house as a son. And we are his house, if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope ...”*
 3. **John 15:4** – *“Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me.”*
- B. How does the promise expressed in WCF 17.1 dovetail with the verses above?

C. Opposing Views

- A. *“That those who are incorporated into Christ by true faith, and have thereby become partakers of his life-giving Spirit, as a result have full power to strive against Satan, sin, the world, and their own flesh, and to win the victory ... But whether they are capable, through negligence, of forsaking again the first beginning of their life in Christ, of again returning to this present evil world ... that must be more particularly determined out of the Holy Scripture, before we ourselves can teach it with the full confidence of our mind.”* (Article 5, “Five Articles of Remonstrance,” 1610)
- B. *“True believers can fall from true faith and can fall into such sins as cannot be consistent with true and justifying faith; not only is it possible for this to happen, but it even happens frequently. True believers are able to fall through their own fault into shameful and atrocious deeds, to persevere and to die in them; and therefore finally to fall and to perish.”* (“Opinion Articles of Remonstrance,” 1618)
- C. *“If any one saith, that a man once justified can sin no more, nor lose grace, and that therefore he that falls and sins was never truly justified ... let him be anathema.”* Council of Trent, 6th Session, Canon XXIII

D. The Grounds of Perseverance

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. (WCF 17.2)

1. WCF 17.2 says that our perseverance does not depend on “[our] own free will.” Is this statement prone to misunderstanding? How so?
2. What four (or five) things ground the Christian’s perseverance to the end, according to WCF 17.2? What is the role of each person of the Trinity in your perseverance?
3. How would you explain the doctrine of perseverance in simple terms, as to a child?

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again ... 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.” (1 Pet 1:3, 4–5)