

The Theology of the Westminster Standards
WCF 17.3 – The Trials of Perseverance

“And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.” (1 Pet 5:10)

I. Review

A. Preservation (by God) and the perseverance (of the Christian) – Which is more basic?

“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

B. 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)

1. **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 ...”*
2. **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.”*

*“It is obvious that adherents of the Arminian and Calvinistic systems must take opposite sides on this question. The Arminian, as we have seen, holds—(1.) That God elects persons to eternal life only on condition of their voluntary reception of grace and perseverance therein till death, as foreseen by him. (2.) That Christ died to render the salvation of all men indifferently possible, and not as the substitute of certain persons definitely to discharge all their legal obligations, and to secure for them all the rewards of the covenant. (3.) That all men have the same gracious influence of the Holy Ghost operating upon them, and that the reason why one believes and is regenerated, and that another continues reprobate, is that the former voluntarily co-operates with grace and that the other resists it. **Thus in the personal application of redemption the Arminian makes everything to depend upon the free will of the creature.**”*

– A.A. Hodge, *Commentary on the WCF*, 315–16

C. 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. **John 10:28** – *“I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.”*
2. **2 Thess 3:3** – *“But the Lord is faithful. He will establish you and guard you against the evil one.”*
3. **1 John 2:19** – *“They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us.”*

II. The Trials of Perseverance

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. (WCF 17.3)

- A. Does the presence of great and grievous sins indicate that a person will not persevere in the faith? How does Scripture answer this? Can you think of examples?
- B. What are the *causes* of the trials of our perseverance, according to WCF 17.3? What are the *effects* or negative consequences of the sins we fall into as a result?
- C. How do we as Christians sometimes neglect the means of our perseverance? Can you recognize any graces or comforts you have missed recently as a result of neglecting the means to your perseverance, in either large or small ways?
- D. Which particular warning in WCF 17.3 do you think you need to heed? How can we encourage one another not to neglect persevering in the Christian faith?
 1. **Ps 119:67** – *“Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep your word.”*
 2. **Ps 51:1** – *“Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions.”*
 3. **John 21:17** – *“He said to him the third time, ‘Simon, son of John, do you love me?’ Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, “Do you love me?” and he said to him, ‘Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Feed my sheep.’”*

“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)