

SOTERIOLOGY: DOCTRINE OF SALVATION

PART 23

KEY TERMS: PERSEVERANCE, PART 3

What about the New Testament? Do we have examples, both good and bad, of perseverance in those books? Yes.

Eleven of the original twelve apostles are wonderful examples of men who were faithful to the end. Peter, of course, denied the Lord during the Lord's appearance before the Jewish authorities (Mt. 26:69-75) but he was restored to service (John 21:15-17). Even the apostles were not beyond sinning but they remained believers and apostles and they kept on persevering. The apostle Paul was faithful from the moment of his new birth until his execution. Stephen is a fine example of perseverance (Acts 7).

But we also have examples of believers who failed to remain faithful to the end. Ananias and Sapphira were divinely disciplined for the sin they committed when they lied to the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:1-10). John Mark abandoned Paul and Barnabas on the first missionary journey (Acts 13:13) but he was restored to useful service and continued to minister (Col. 3:10; 2 Thess. 4:11). Demas left the faith because he grew to love the world more than he loved the Lord (2 Tim. 4:10). Hymenaeus and Alexander rejected the faith and were handed over to Satan for divine discipline (1 Tim. 1:18-20). Alexander the coppersmith turned on Paul (2 Tim. 4:14). In the letters to the churches in Revelation, Jesus counselled the believers in the churches to repent and return to their places of faithful service. Yet, through all that these people were still believers and they possessed eternal life.

Clearly, believers can persevere and believers can fail to persevere. What should perseverance look like in the life of the present day Christian?

Once a person places their faith in Christ Jesus, a life that perseveres is a life that is obedient and faithful to the dictates of Scripture and sound doctrine by serving and glorifying the Lord for the rest of that believer's life. That is not to say that sin and lapses do not occur along the way but the faithful life is a life that exhibits growth and bears fruit until it is no longer possible to do so. Perseverance is strictly a sanctification salvation issue; it has no bearing on the fact that a person has believed at a moment in time in the past and been justified. Neither the lack of perseverance nor egregious personal sins "prove" a person is unsaved. Finally, the doctrine of perseverance does contain elements that inform us faithfulness in the face of persecution is laudable and the Lord will commend that faithfulness at the judgment seat.

James 1:12 ¹²Blessed is a man who perseveres [ὑπομένω] under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.

Revelation 2:10 ¹⁰Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, so that you will be tested, and you will have tribulation for ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.

Revelation 2:2–3 ²I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance [ὑπομονή], and that you cannot tolerate evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false; ³and you have perseverance [ὑπομονή] and have endured [βαστάζω] for My name's sake, and have not grown weary.

Endure, βαστάζω, means to endure, to bear up under; it is to continue to bear up under unusually trying circumstances and difficulties.

The Lord is really commending the perseverance and endurance of the Ephesian church. Yet their perseverance wasn't perfect because at some point they left their first love and they were rebuked for their failure. The word ὑπομονή is used five times in the book of Revelation; it is a doctrine that seems to be extremely important in the Lord's sight. "This Christian quality of endurance in the midst of hard labor has the highest ethical standards. It is the brave patience through which Christians contend against hindrances, persecutions, and temptations that come in their conflict with the world" [Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 1-7: An Exegetical Commentary*, p. 1:134].

The Lord used perseverance to describe Tribulation believers who will remain faithful even in the face of martyrdom. "In view of their hope believers in the Great Tribulation should persevere in obedience and trust, good works and faith in God, plus ethical conduct and reliance on Jesus Christ. This is an encouragement to persevere, not a guarantee that the saints will persevere. Obedience to God's commandments and continuing trust in Jesus will see the faithful through these days of tribulation successfully" [Thomas L. Constable, "Revelation" in *Thomas Constable's Notes on the Bible*].

Revelation 14:12 ¹²Here is the perseverance [ὑπομονή] of the saints who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus.

Clearly, perseverance is a vitally important sanctification salvation doctrine. The Lord commends it and it will be rewarded at the Bema. Whether perseverance is exercised throughout the normal ups and downs of the everyday Christian life or whether it is

exercised in the face of unrelenting and even lethal persecution, it is an expected aspect of the individual Christian's life.

KEY TERMS: SIN

This is obviously a very important doctrine. Sin got us into all this mess that required the death of a Savior to redeem us from it. Sin did not originate with Adam; it originated with Lucifer and the angelic rebellion. Adam [אָדָם] listened to Satan, disobeyed God, and, as a result, introduced the human race to sin. Adam means man or mankind. “[Adam] connotes man in the image of God as to: soul or spirit (indicating man's essential simplicity, spirituality, indivisibility, immortality), physical powers or faculties (the intellect and will with their functions), intellectual and moral integrity (true knowledge, righteousness, and holiness), body (as a fit organ of the soul sharing its immortality, and as the means through which man exercises his dominion), and dominion over the lower creation” [Harris, Archer, and Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, s. v. “אָדָם”]. This is a good description of what we were created to be. What Adam was created to be, we all were created to be but the fall of mankind resulted in a sin nature contrary to the originally intended righteous nature which is ultimately restored only in and through Christ Jesus.

Genesis 2:16–17 ¹⁶The LORD God commanded the man, saying, “From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; ¹⁷but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die.”

Fruchtenbaum has some very important observations concerning the Fall. “The purpose of the prohibition was the test of recognition of and submission to the will of God. Man was not to assume that because he was given authority over the earth he was independent of God and exempt from God's law. The question the prohibition raised was: Will man, like Satan, reject God's right to rule and declare himself independent of God? The test was for the probationary period only. Man was created perfect and holy; but at this point, his holiness was not tested. Theologically, this means that man was created in a state of unconfirmed, creaturely holiness; and he was given the ability of contrary choice, meaning he had the ability to choose contrary to his nature in that he was created perfect and holy, but he had the ability to make an unholy and imperfect choice. Man, on his own, must choose to love and obey God. Man was created with the ability of contrary choice. God Himself does not have that ability. The Scriptures teach that the holiness of God is so absolute that He is unable to commit sin; God is not capable of sinning. He does not have the ability to choose contrary to His holy nature. But He created man with that capacity; and man, on his own, must choose to love and obey God. This testing was for a temporary duration. Had man passed the test, his holiness would have been confirmed; and he would not have the ability to commit sin,

just as will be true with the resurrection body. At the time of the resurrection, the believer's holiness will be confirmed; and he or she will no longer have the capacity to sin. If Adam had passed the test during the probationary period, he would have been confirmed in his holiness and no longer would have the capacity to commit sin. This whole scenario was already experienced by the angels. All the angels were created with the ability of contrary choice, and they underwent a probationary period. One-third of the angels sinned, and now they are confirmed in their unholiness and unrighteousness; they do not have the capacity to become righteous and sinless. However, two-thirds of the angels passed their test, and so their holiness has been confirmed; they no longer have the capacity to choose to sin. That is why in the Bible there are no angels falling throughout history. The angelic fall was a one-time fall. Those who fell were confirmed in their unrighteousness, and those who did not fall were confirmed in their righteousness. In the same way, had Adam passed the test, he would have been confirmed in his righteousness and would have produced righteous children born without the sin nature" [Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *Ariel's Bible Commentary: The Book of Genesis*, pp. 80-81].

It is important to note that God did not, has not, and will not provide for any redemptive program in regards to Satan and the fallen angels. They made their decision and their decision will stand for eternity; they are confirmed in their unrighteousness. At the same time, the angels who did not rebel were eternally confirmed in their righteousness. The lake of fire is specifically said to have been created for Satan and his angels and not for man. As fallen humans, we have the opportunity to return to a state of fellowship with God in the family of God through belief in the person and work of Christ Jesus. We can be restored to righteousness. This is not a righteousness we earn or deserve but it is the righteousness of Christ that gives us a righteous standing before God. Any human being who refuses to accept the redemptive work of Christ performed on their behalf will have their decision confirmed and remain dead, that is, eternally separated from God. In this age, we are given the righteousness of Christ and only when we receive our glorified bodies will we be finally confirmed righteous and unable to sin.

Matthew 25:41 ⁴¹"Then He will also say to those on His left, 'Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels;

When God said to Adam, "you will surely die," there was tremendous meaning in that truth. Unger commented on the meaning of that truth and pointed out that this death has three aspects. "The penalty was threefold: (1) immediate spiritual death or loss of fellowship with God; (2) eventually physical death or separation of the body from the soul and spirit; and (3) inevitable eternal death in separation from God in Gehenna. This threefold death passed upon all Adam's posterity as a result of the Fall" (Merrill F. Unger, *Unger's Commentary on the Old Testament*, p. 13]. Obviously, Adam did not physically

die on that day; his physical death came much later. He did die in a spiritual sense on that day, that is, he became separated from His Creator God. The Hebrew, מות תמות, literally reads, “dying you will die” but it is very emphatic in meaning; it is the pronouncement of a death sentence.

Adam was mankind when he sinned; therefore, mankind sinned resulting in a sin nature that is endemic to all of mankind.

Romans 5:14–19 ¹⁴Nevertheless death reigned from Adam until Moses, even over those who had not sinned in the likeness of the offense of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come. ¹⁵But the free gift is not like the transgression. For if by the transgression of the one the many died, much more did the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abound to the many. ¹⁶The gift is not like that which came through the one who sinned; for on the one hand the judgment arose from one transgression resulting in condemnation, but on the other hand the free gift arose from many transgressions resulting in justification. ¹⁷For if by the transgression of the one, death reigned through the one, much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ. ¹⁸So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men. ¹⁹For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous.

A lot of words are used in both Hebrew and Greek to define sin. We will look at only the main words used to define it. Ryrie pulled together the definitions of all these words to come up with one definition of sin. “...it might be a good idea to define it [sin] thus: sin is missing the mark, badness, rebellion, iniquity, going astray, wickedness, wandering, ungodliness, crime, lawlessness, transgression, ignorance, and a falling away” [Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, p. 243].

Various theologians have defined sin in various ways but they all generally agree that sin is an offense against God in one way or another. “Theologically, sin is the human condition of separation from God that arises from opposition to God's purposes. It may be breaking God's law, failing to do what God wills, or rebellion. It needs forgiveness by God” [*The Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms*, s. v. “sin”]. Enns and Thiessen both identified sin as a broad concept encompassing several facets. Enns defines sin as a transgression of the law of God, a failure to conform to the standard of God, a principle within man, rebellion against God, and wrongful acts toward God and man [Paul Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology*, p. 322]. Thiessen defines it as a specific type of evil, that is, a moral evil, a violation of the law of God, a principle or nature as well as an act, it results in pollution as well as guilt, and it is essentially selfishness. Sin can

be the failure to do what is right as well as the overt commission of that which is not right.

Our sin nature results in separation from God. Human beings have a problem grasping this truth. We tend to rank various personal sins on a scale from especially heinous to somewhat benign and we can therefore minimize our offenses by minimizing our personal sins. You can hear this thinking in cliché's such as "I'm only human" or "no one is perfect." In terms of humanity and our relationship to and with one another and to society in general, there is some merit to that approach. Murder is a more serious offense against other human beings and against society than is shoplifting a pack of gum from the convenience store. But as an offense against God, both separate us from Him. However, our real problem is our sin nature and not necessarily the personal sins we commit as a result of that sin nature. Failing to understand this issue has very real and very dire consequences. When a person only examines their personal sins, they can make the determination, in their own mind, that they can be acceptable to God if they are only a good enough person and live a good enough life especially in comparison to other people who are really bad. This failure to understand their sin problem creates a barrier to understanding their need for the Savior.

A major problem we have in understanding sin is our human tendency to minimize or downplay our own particular personal sins. People often attempt to rationalize their personal sins by comparing themselves to other people and their personal sins. Then the thinking goes, "At least I'm not as bad as so-and so." People imagine they can be acceptable to God because they think they are pretty good when compared to others and all-in-all they believe they are pretty good people so God should find them acceptable. They concentrate on the attributes of God they find acceptable to their way of thinking such as mercy, kindness, and love to the exclusion of His attributes such as righteousness, holiness, and justice. They substitute their flawed, sinful thinking for the Word of God. The problem is that sin has alienated every human being from God and no one is acceptable to Him. There is no level of good works or of being a good person that can make a person acceptable to God apart from the Son.

All human beings, without exception, are completely alienated from God due to our sin nature. Most people fail to understand that and they also fail to understand that personal sins are not so much the problem as they are the result of the problem; therefore, they imagine some relative, subjective type of personal sin standard with which they try to evaluate their life and the lives of others. They imagine that by being, in their mind, "better" than other people they are acceptable to God and therefore He must let them get into whatever they imagine "heaven" to be. Our sin nature is ultimately a justification salvation problem; our personal sins are more of a sanctification salvation problem which, of course, is a problem only for believers. Unbelievers are

sinners by nature and all they can do is commit personal sins; they have no capacity to do otherwise.

The problem for these misguided people is we have a holy, righteous, and just God who cannot tolerate any sin in His presence. There is no such thing as a comparative personal sin standard between and among people of the world. Everyone has a sin nature and is therefore spiritually dead and alienated from God and as a result everyone commits personal sins.

Romans 3:23²³for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

Romans 5:12¹²Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned—

Here is my analysis of the sin situation. The good news is that Christ Jesus is the remedy—the only remedy—for this sin problem of ours. The sin problem is a twofold problem; we have a sin nature that alienates us from God and because we are sinners we commit personal sins. Everything about us is tainted by sin. It's what we are and it's what we do as unregenerate human beings; we can't be or do anything else. Christ has therefore provided a twofold remedy. First, by believing in Him we are born again and given a righteousness that is acceptable to God. We are not made into a righteous person; we are given the righteousness of Christ as a free grace gift based on belief in the person and work of Christ Jesus. Second, He paid the sin debt created by that sin nature and its attendant personal sins.

John 1:29²⁹The next day he saw Jesus coming to him and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin [sin nature] of the world!

John the Baptist was referring to the sin nature and not to personal sins. "John speaks of sin, not sins. He is referring to the totality of the world's sin rather than to a number of individual acts" [Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, p. 130]. "In the present passage, as in most places in the Gospel, John refers to sin in the singular, and so the focus is on the sinful condition of the world, rather than on particular sinful deeds" [Barclay M. Newman and Eugene A. Nida, *John: A Translator's Handbook on the Gospel of John*]. I checked about thirty commentaries on John and only these two (plus one other that referred to Morris) dealt with the fact that this Scripture is dealing with the sin nature. Most of them interpreted this verse as though it was referring to personal sins.

1 John 2:2²and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins [personal sins]; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world.

“Clearly, the sinning believer’s Advocate is perfect. God looks at Him with complete satisfaction—He is completely *propitiated* or appeased with regard to any sin we commit. He is thus fully disposed to respond to our Advocate’s intercession for us, since no matter what our sin may be, Christ has made satisfaction for it. Indeed, as propitiation for sin, He more than *just barely* ‘satisfies’ God or our personal sins, or even for all the *sins* of all Christians everywhere. The astounding fact is that this propitiation covers the sins of all humanity, not for ours only but also for the whole world” [Zane C. Hodges, *The Epistles of John: Walking in the Light of God’s Love*, p. 71]. The personal sin debt is paid; the remaining issue for humanity concerns sin. People must believe in Christ in order to obtain the free gift of His righteousness that enables the believing person to be accepted into the family of God.

John 3:3 ³Jesus answered and said to him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

John 3:16 ¹⁶“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.