

Reformed Doctrine of Predestination, Lesson #23

I. The Perseverance of the Saints - Statement of the doctrine

WCF Ch 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.

This doctrine does not stand alone but is a necessary part of the Calvinistic system of theology. The doctrines of Election and Efficacious Grace logically imply the certain salvation of those who receive these blessings. If God has chosen men absolutely and unconditionally to eternal life, and if His Spirit effectively applies to them the benefits of redemption, the inescapable conclusion is that these persons shall be saved. And, historically, this doctrine has been held by all Calvinists, and denied by practically all Arminians.

The nature of the change which occurs in regeneration is a sufficient guarantee that the life imparted shall be permanent. Regeneration is a radical and supernatural change of the inner nature, through which the soul is made spiritually alive, and the new life which is implanted is immortal. And since it is a change in the inner nature, it is in a sphere in which man does not have control. No creature is at liberty to change the fundamental principles of its nature, for that is the prerogative of God as Creator. Hence nothing short of another supernatural act of God could reverse this change and cause the new life to be lost. The born-again Christian can no more lose his sonship to the heavenly Father than an earthly son can lose his sonship to an earthly father. The idea that a Christian may fall away and perish arises from a wrong conception of the principle of spiritual life which is imparted to the soul in regeneration.

II. Our Perseverance is Not Dependent on our own Good Works but on God's Grace

Rom 6:12-14 Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. 13 And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. 14 For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace.

Rom 7:4 Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ

The one who attempts to earn even the smallest part of his salvation by works becomes "a debtor to do the whole law" (that is, to render perfect obedience in his own strength and thus earn his salvation).

WCF 17.2 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.

The infinite, mysterious, eternal love of God for His people is a guarantee that they can never be lost. This love is not subject to fluctuations but is as unchangeable as His being. It is also gratuitous, and keeps faster hold of us than we of it. It is not founded on the attractiveness of its objects.

I John 4:10 In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

Rom 5:8-10 But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. 9 Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. 10 For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.

Here the very point stressed is that our standing with God is not based on our deserts. It was "while we were enemies" that we were brought into spiritual life through sovereign grace; and if He has done the greater, will He not do the lesser? The writer of the book of Hebrews also teaches that it is impossible for one of God's chosen to be lost when he says that Christ is both "the Author and Perfecter of our faith." We are there taught that the whole course of our salvation is divinely, planned and divinely guided. Neither the grace of God nor its continuance is given according to our merits. Hence if any Christian fell away, it would be because God had withdrawn His grace and changed His method of procedure—or, in other words, because He had put the person back under a system of law.

"The sovereign and unmerited love is the cause of the believer's effectual calling. Now, as the cause is unchangeable, the effect is unchangeable. That effect is, the constant communication of grace to the believer in whom God hath begun a good work. God was not induced to bestow His renewing grace in the first instance, by anything which He saw, meritorious or attractive, in the repenting sinner; and therefore the subsequent absence of everything good in him would be no new motive to God for withdrawing His grace. When He first bestowed that grace, He knew that the sinner on whom He bestowed it was totally depraved, and wholly and only hateful in himself to the divine holiness; and therefore no new instance of ingratitude or unfaithfulness, of which the sinner may become guilty after his conversion, can be any provocation to God, to change His mind, and wholly withdraw His sustaining grace. God knew all this ingratitude before. He will chastise it, by temporarily withdrawing His Holy Spirit, or His providential mercies; but if He had not intended from the first to bear with it, and to forgive it in Christ, He would not have called the sinner by His grace at first. In a word, the causes for which God determined to bestow His electing love on the sinner are wholly in God, and not at all in the believer; and hence, nothing in the believer's heart or conduct can finally change that purpose of love." - Robert L. Dabney

"God's decree of predestination is firm and certain; and the necessity resulting from it is, in like manner, immovable, and cannot but take place. For we ourselves are so feeble, that if the matter were left in our hands, very few, or rather none, would be saved; but Satan would overcome us all." - Martin Luther

The more we think of these matters, the more thankful we are that our perseverance in holiness and assurance of salvation is not dependent on our own weak nature, but upon God's constant sustaining power...Arminianism denies this doctrine of Perseverance, because it is a system, not of pure grace, but of grace and works; and in any such system the person must prove himself at least partially worthy.