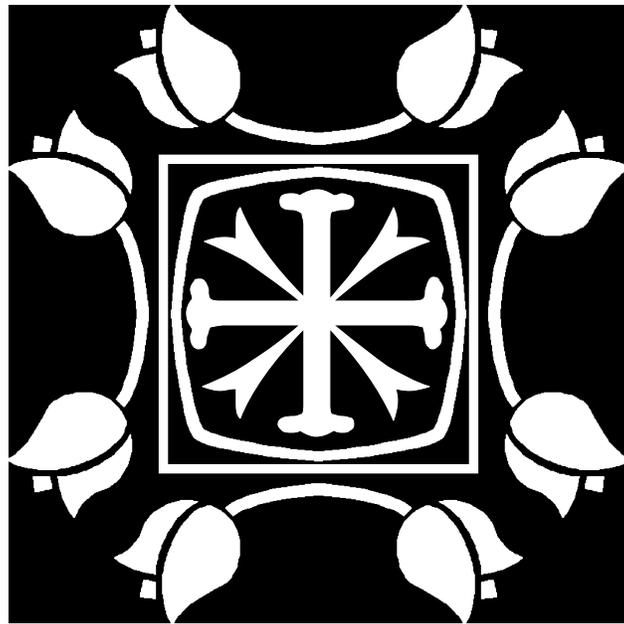


# **Once Saved, Always Saved?**



**Book P**

**TULIP SERIES**

# THE WORD OF HIS GRACE

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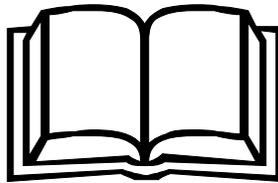
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And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified.

--Acts 20:32--



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Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are from the  
KING JAMES VERSION of the Bible.

VERILY, VERILY, I SAY UNTO YOU, HE THAT HEARETH  
MY WORD, AND BELIEVETH ON HIM THAT SENT ME,  
HATH EVERLASTING LIFE, AND SHALL NOT COME  
INTO CONDEMNATION; BUT IS PASSED FROM DEATH  
UNTO LIFE.

In the above verse, John 5:24, Jesus speaks of the salvation of the believer as an accomplished fact. He also says that the believer has everlasting or eternal life. Can He possibly mean that a Christian can never lose his salvation? Is "Once saved, always saved" a biblical truth or a dangerous deception that leads to licentiousness and damnation for its unwitting adherents? Can a saved person lose his or her salvation? Is there a point beyond which God will withdraw His gift of salvation from a backsliding sinner? If so, what is that point?

Because these questions have been a topic of much debate among Christians, one would think that God has not given clear answers to them in the Bible. But, in fact, He has; and the debate continues only because one side refuses to accept the Bible's answers. Instead, they force unnatural interpretations upon the Bible. They do this because the plain and natural understanding of the Scriptures, taken in context, conflicts with their predetermined ideas of what the answers should be. In this book, we'll see what the Bible says about this important topic. First, however, let's more precisely define the doctrine in question.

### **Perseverance of the Saints**

Often discussed with the perseverance of the saints are the doctrines of preservation and eternal security. For the sake of both brevity and clarity, in this booklet, I am combining the doctrines of preservation, the perseverance of the saints, and eternal security together. I will briefly explain.

The term "perseverance of the saints" is sometimes used by theologians to refer to the believer's continued outward working of the salvation that God is working in him (such as in Philippians 2:12-13). In other words, as saved people we do the "good works, which God hath before ordained" that we should do (see Ephesians 2:10), and we do them to the end of our lives. Properly understood, this is correct. But a problem arises when people use this strict definition to so focus on works that people begin using works as a measure of their salvation. The thinking becomes, "I just got so mad that I kicked the cat, so I must not be saved," or, "I don't feel the zeal I used to feel, so

maybe I was never really saved,” or, “Does my feeling chronically depressed mean that I am not a Christian?” Eternal salvation becomes equated with a successful Christian life, and what defines success can be very subjective.

“Preservation,” on the other hand, can be abused in an opposite direction. Preservation simply means that all who are saved can never be lost. God preserves them. It says nothing of their Christian life. Therefore, some accuse those who hold to preservation of believing that, because someone has at some point in his life professed belief in Jesus as Savior, that person can then live wickedly to this last breath and still be saved. According to this false understanding, those whom God preserves He does not necessarily cause to persevere.

Obviously, there are problems with both of these abuses of preservation and perseverance. First, we must realize that there is such a thing as a false profession or false conversion experience. I will say more about this later when discussing the parable of the sower. We must also realize that our salvation is from first to last completely of God’s grace and is entirely independent of our works: “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast” (Ephesians 2:8–9). In other words, God preserves us apart from our works. But Ephesians 2:10 goes on to say, “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.” So, while God preserves us apart from our works, He also makes sure that we do the works that He has ordained for us to do. That is, God both preserves us and makes sure that we persevere. But our persevering is up to God’s standards and not necessarily our own standards that can, among other problems, become legalistic or based on subjective experience or our personal ideas of “experimental religion.”

Therefore, in this booklet, perseverance of the saints includes preservation of the saints but with these clarifying points: 1) “Once saved, always saved” is true but not everyone who thinks he is saved is really saved; 2) Salvation is based on the objective standard of the finished work of Jesus Christ; 3) Those who truly trust in Jesus Christ alone as their Savior are saved despite whatever sins, experiences, emotions, depressions, or whatever they may meet in life; 4) Those who seem to exhibit pious lives and do “good works” unto the end but who do not truly trust in Jesus Christ alone as their Savior are not saved; 5) God preserves His saints so that they always are finally saved, and—even though they may at times fall into sin, seem to fall away, backslide, or lose interest in Christ—they will always accomplish the works God has ordained for them to do, even though these works may not always meet the standards of men, including even the saint’s

own standards. This results in a true, eternal security of the believer that rests entirely upon the finished work of Jesus Christ alone. I will now show that the Scriptures teach this view of the perseverance of the saints.

### **Perseverance in the Bible**

Let's begin our examination of the Scriptures with the words of Jesus. In the parable of the Good Shepherd (Jesus is the Good Shepherd) we read, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand" (John 10:27-29).

The sheep in this parable are Christians, God's elect, the saints. Jesus says He gives them eternal life. Eternal life, of course, doesn't end. Therefore, it would make no sense for someone to be able to have eternal life and then lose it, as that would mean the person's eternal life ended. What is eternal cannot end. This in itself is excellent evidence for the perseverance of the saints.

Also excellent evidence is what Jesus says next. He says "they shall never perish." If saved people were to lose their salvation, they would perish. But Jesus says that will not happen. They will not perish whatever the potential cause. This is a general statement. He then gives a more specific statement: "neither shall any man ["man" is not in the Greek, so this refers to any creature] pluck them out of my hand." Nothing anyone can do, and the saint himself is included in this, can cause a saint to lose eternal life. Jesus then repeats this theme, this time saying no one can pluck His sheep out of the Father's hand. The saints are in Jesus' and the Father's hands, and no one has the power to remove them from that eternally secure position.

The Scripture quoted at the beginning of this book, John 5:24, is another that should be examined. In it, Jesus says that believers—Christians—have "everlasting life." Again, the fact that this life is called everlasting or eternal life implies that it cannot end by being taken away or lost.

Jesus also says that the Christian "shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life." Notice that Jesus rules out future condemnation for the believer and says that the believer is passed from death unto life. This would seem to rule out the possibility of Christians losing their salvation and coming under condemnation.

In John 6:37–40 Jesus says,

All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out. For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me. And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day. And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day.

These verses can be broken down into these points: 1) There are people whom the Father is giving to Jesus, and these people will come to Him. 2) Jesus will refuse none of these people. 3) Jesus came from heaven to do the Father's will. 4) The Father's will is that Jesus should lose none of the people whom the Father has given Him, and that He should raise these people on the last day. 5) It is also the Father's will that all regenerate believers (those who "seeth" and "believeth") have eternal life and Jesus will raise them on the last day.

This is extremely convincing evidence that none of the saints will be lost but will be raised on the last day. It is further supported by John 3:15, "That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life," and John 3:36, "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him."

Now let's examine some of the passages where Paul addresses this subject. A good place to start is Romans 8:1: "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." There is no condemnation for the saints, who are described as not led by carnal desires but by the Spirit. Naturally, if there is no condemnation, the saints persevere. But someone might argue that this verse can be taken as meaning that there is no condemnation as long as they remain in Christ and walk after the Spirit; but they may be able to turn away, and if they do so they may be condemned. Therefore, additional Scriptures are needed to establish Paul's understanding of this matter.

Some of these are also found in Romans 8, beginning with verses 28 and 29:

And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that

he [Jesus Christ] might be the firstborn among many brethren.

What we will find as we work our way toward verse 39 is that Paul is developing an argument for the perseverance of the saints. In these two verses, he begins by saying that all things work for good for the saints (therefore, nothing works for their bad). Why? Because God predestinated the elect to be conformed to the image of Christ so that Christ would be the firstborn of many brethren. Paul expects his readers to understand that, since God is all-powerful, nothing will stop His purpose. This is reinforced in the next verse:

Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called:  
and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he  
justified, them he also glorified.

verse 30

Paul here states the glorification of the elect as an established fact. He leaves no chance for any who are predestinated to glorification to not reach the destiny God has determined for them. All the saints will be glorified, and, therefore, all the saints will persevere.

Paul then continues with an argument based on God's omnipotence, His exclusive power to justify, the power of Christ's death and resurrection, and His complete effectiveness in interceding for the saints:

What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us,  
who can be against us? He that spared not his own Son,  
but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him  
also freely give us all things? Who shall lay any thing to  
the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is  
he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that  
is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who  
also maketh intercession for us.

verses 31-34

In short, God is on our (the elect's) side, boldly demonstrated by His delivering His own Son to die for us. If He has done this, we should be confident that He will freely give us all things (and if it is freely, it does not depend on anything we do or don't do). God justifies us, and therefore no one can bring a condemning charge against us. Jesus Christ has died and risen and makes intercession for us, making condemnation impossible.

Paul's focus is now on the tenacious love Jesus Christ has for His saints:

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

verses 35–39

Clearly, Paul is saying that nothing anything or anyone (including we) might do can loosen the grip of Jesus Christ's love for His saints. Surely, here is the perseverance of the saints taught in the inspired Word of God. And yet I will quote even more Scriptures.

In 1 Corinthians 1:8, Paul writes of Jesus, "Who shall also confirm you unto the end, that ye may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ." The Greek word translated "confirm" in this verse means to make firm, to establish, to make secure. Jesus Christ will make the saints secure unto the end when they shall be found blameless (because of Christ's work on the cross, not their own righteousness); this is eternal security or the perseverance of the saints.

Paul expresses a similar thought to the Thessalonians: "But the Lord is faithful, who shall stablish you, and keep you from evil" (2 Thessalonians 3:3). Again, Paul is saying that the Lord is faithful, and He will establish His saints.

The apostle says this in a very simple and plain way in Philippians 1:6: "Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ." Paul was doing more than giving the Philippian church a pep talk. If the salvation of the Philippian brethren—those in whom God had begun His good work—were not sure (as it could not be sure if it depended on the Philippians), Paul could not honestly say that he was confident that God would continue to perform that work until the day of Jesus Christ.

The perseverance of the saints can also be found in Peter's epistles. In 1 Peter 1:3–5, we read,

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

Peter says of the saints to whom he is writing that their incorruptible inheritance is reserved in heaven for them. He also says that they are kept, not by their power to obey, but by the power of God through faith (and we already know that even faith itself is a gift of God, Ephesians 2:8–9). Peter confirms what we have already seen was taught by Jesus and Paul: the salvation of the elect is not in their own hands where it can be lost; it is in God's hands where it is sure.

Now let's see what the apostle John says, beginning with 1 John 3:5–11:

And ye know that he was manifested to take away our sins; and in him is no sin. Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him. Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous. He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil. Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother. For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.

The reason I have chosen to quote this passage is that it brings out a point related to the perseverance of the saints that those who reject the doctrines of grace fail to understand. In verse 6, John affirms that "whosoever abideth in him sinneth not." He further identifies these people in verse 9 as all regenerated Christians by saying, "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin." Since John himself admits that everyone sins (1:8–10), this cannot mean that regenerated Christians don't ever sin. Regenerated Christians do sin, but sin is no longer their way of life and their sins are not counted against them (this will be discussed more fully later). The passage

goes on to say that unrighteousness as a way of life distinguishes the children of the devil from the children of God. Humanity is divided between the elect and the reprobate, with the elect person becoming manifest with his or her regeneration. The elect, therefore, do not sin as a way of life, and it would have been pointless for John to state this if it were possible for God's people to sin to the point of losing their salvation.

John says something similar in 1 John 5:4–5: "For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?" If the born again Christian has overcome the world by faith in Jesus Christ, it simply makes no sense to say he can lose his salvation and return to the world.

1 John 5:11–13 reads: "And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life. These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God." John states his purpose for writing these things as promoting among his readers who "believe on the name of the Son of God" the assurance that they have eternal life. Yet they could have no such assurance if they could lose their eternal life. Also, as I stated earlier, it is nonsense to say that eternal life can be lost, for if it could it would not be eternal.

1 John 5:16–19 concerns "sin not unto death" and "sin unto death":

If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death: I do not say that he shall pray for it. All unrighteousness is sin: and there is a sin not unto death. We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not. And we know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness.

These verses again show the division in humanity between those who "sinneth not" (they still sin because of their human frailty, but do not sin as a way of life because they are "born of God") and those who do sin as a way of life because they are of the "world that lieth in wickedness."

In verses 16 and 17, it is likely that the death John has in mind is eternal death. Some have mistakenly assumed that these verses say that a "brother," a born-again Christian, can sin a sin unto death. This would mean that saints can lose their salvation, and it would be fatal to the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints. But John does not say this.

In verse 16, John says that it is possible we may see a brother sin a sin not unto death. He says this is something we should pray about. He then says that there is such a thing as a sin unto death. But he never says that it is possible for a brother to sin such a sin. Only those who are not saints can sin unto death; those who are not elect will die in their sins.

### **Arguments Against Perseverance**

Arguments against the perseverance of the saints usually incorporate Ezekiel 18:24:

But when the righteous turneth away from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, and doeth according to all the abominations that the wicked man doeth, shall he live? All his righteousness that he hath done shall not be mentioned: in his trespass that he hath trespassed, and in his sin that he hath sinned, in them shall he die.

This verse speaks of "all his righteousness that he hath done," meaning the righteousness of the hypothetical person this Scripture is about. It says nothing of the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ. Comparing this verse with verses 20–22 and 26–28, it becomes obvious that God is saying that anyone who is perfect in all his ways, in keeping the law, will live; but this is negated by sin, which brings death.

However, God never says that it is possible to keep the law perfectly. In fact, since it is impossible, all are worthy of death. In fact, the Israelites God was addressing through Ezekiel were already spiritually dead because of their sins. Therefore, what must specifically be in view here is not eternal salvation for obedience and damnation for disobedience, but the life of national Israel for obedience and the death of national Israel through the sword and captivity for disobedience. This is made clear in verse 31 where Ezekiel makes plain that he is addressing Israel for its national sins when he says, "for why will ye die, O house of Israel?" Obviously, then, this Scripture has nothing whatsoever to do with the perseverance of the saints, who

depend on God—not their own righteousness—for their eternal security.

Those who oppose the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints often point to the parable of the sower, found in Matthew 13. Jesus tells the parable in verses 3b–8:

Behold, a sower went forth to sow; and when he sowed, some seeds fell by the way side, and the fowls came and devoured them up: some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth: and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth: and when the sun was up, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away. And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprung up, and choked them: but other fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold.

He then explains the parable to His disciples in verses 18–23:

Hear ye therefore the parable of the sower. When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the way side. But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it; yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended. He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful. But he that received the seed into good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it; which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.

A superficial reading of this parable can leave one with the impression that it is about Christians enduring for a while and then losing their salvation. Unfortunately, many people never go beyond such hasty conclusions.

A more careful examination reveals that this parable is about no such thing. It is about how the carnally minded can go through a false conversion experience and then return to their worldly ways. The only Christians in the parable are those who persevere.

In verse 19, Jesus says that there are those who hear the word of the kingdom, the Gospel, and don't understand it. The Greek word translated "understand" is the same one found in verse 13, where Jesus says that the multitudes who hear Him don't understand. Jesus, in these verses, is using this word to refer to a spiritual understanding of truth. Those who hear the Gospel but don't perceive the truth of it and therefore don't believe it have what little entered their mind taken away by Satan. Since the Holy Spirit gives the elect the faith to believe, this cannot refer to the elect (Ephesians 2:8; 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14).

Verses 20-21 are also about those who are not elect. When these people hear the Gospel, they receive it with joy: forgiveness of sin, it sounds great! But the Holy Spirit has not prepared their minds (symbolized by their not having depth or root); they do not have the faith to truly believe the Gospel. They have had only an emotional reaction to it, likely reacting to the chance to have their sins forgiven. But when their faith is tested through tribulation or persecution, they are found lacking; they have no faith and give up. These people do not persevere because they are not among the saints.

Jesus, in verse 22, describes those for whom worldliness, the cares of this physical life, is more important than eternal life. Once again, this is because they are not born again; they are not elect; they are not saints.

But in verse 23, Jesus speaks of the elect saints of God. These have good ground, meaning that the Holy Spirit has prepared their minds to receive the Gospel. They perceive the Gospel as the truth and believe it. They persevere in their Christian lives and bear fruit, each to the degree that God has determined. Contrary to the way some have misused it, this parable supports the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints.

John 15:2 and 6 are sometimes thought of as teaching that saints can become unfruitful and lose their salvation. Let's read these verses in context:

I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit. Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. If a

man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned.

John 15:1-6

In these verses, Jesus likens Himself to a vine, the true Vine, and His Father to the Husbandman or Vinedresser. He tells His listeners that, just as a branch of a vine cannot bear fruit by itself apart from the vine, so they cannot bear fruit except they abide in Him (verse 4). In fact, He says in verse 5 that when a person abides in Him and He abides in that person, then that person will bear much fruit.

The part I have emphasized above is important to understanding this illustration, yet it is often overlooked. In verse 2, Jesus says that every branch in Him that doesn't bear fruit the Father will take away. But, as we have just seen, in verse 4, Jesus explains that when a branch abides in Him and He in the branch, that branch will bear fruit. Verse 2 says nothing of Jesus being in the branch that bears no fruit and is taken away.

Another important point concerns the word "abide." Neither in verse 2 nor in verse 6 are the branches taken or cast away said to abide in the Vine. In fact, verse 6 says, "If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch." The branch in verse 2 that is taken away is said to be only "in" Him, a completely different word from abide.

So we see that while a branch "in" the Vine might bear no fruit and be removed, a branch that abides (the Greek word can also be translated "dwells") in the Vine and has Jesus abiding in it will bear fruit and will not be removed. (It should be pointed out that all those who abide in Christ are also in Him, but not all who are in Christ, abide in Him.) Obviously, those who abide in Jesus and have Jesus abiding in them are true Christians, the saints, and they persevere.

Who are those who are only "in" the Vine and are removed for not bearing fruit? Since they are dead branches fit only to be burned and do not have Jesus abiding in them, they cannot be true Christians. These branches are Christians only in outward appearance, names on church registers, spiritual corpses sitting in pews.

There is one short verse that certainly seems to give credence to those who believe Christians can lose their salvation. It is 1 Corinthians 10:12: "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." While this verse might seem to suggest that saints can finally fall away, it doesn't say so. It is not immediately clear from the verse what "fall" means. But the thought continues into the next verse where it is explained:

There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.

God will not allow His saints to be tempted beyond what they can endure, but will always make a way of escape. This does not sound like saints losing their salvation, but rather God holding them up (see Romans 14:4). "Fall" in verse 12, therefore, cannot mean a permanent falling away but only a temporary fall into sin. The Old Testament examples referred to in the verses that precede these may concern Israelites who were destroyed because of their rebellion, and the saints of God would do well to be cautioned by these examples lest they find themselves in need of God's chastisement, but the fate of the rebellious Israelites cannot be the fate of God's saints for whom God always makes a way of escape.

But what of Paul himself? Doesn't he imply in 1 Corinthians 9:27 that he could lose his salvation? He says, "But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway." We who believe in sovereign grace are sometimes asked, "If God has really predetermined our fate, then why bother living the Christian life? If God has predestinated us to be saved, we will be saved whether we live a good Christian life or not, so why not 'live it up?' And perhaps some who are living a good Christian life are wasting their time because God may have predestinated that they will not be saved."

This verse, 1 Corinthians 9:27, is one of the Scriptures that exposes this flawed thinking. Clearly, Paul believed himself to be among those chosen or predestinated "before the foundation of the world" to be "holy and without blame" (Ephesians 1:4; see also verses 5-6). But he realized that this did not give him license to live as a sinner.

He knew that while God predestinated whom He would save, He used certain means to accomplish that salvation: Jesus' atonement, the preaching of the Gospel, the Holy Spirit's impartation of saving faith to the elect sinner, the imputation of Jesus' righteousness, the sinner's regeneration, and God's working sanctification in the Christian's life are among these. In other words, if we are predestinated to be saved, God has also foreordained that we will be born again, exercise saving faith in Jesus Christ alone as Savior, "grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18), do the "good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10), "cleanse ourselves

from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (2 Corinthians 7:1), and come "unto the measure of the stature of the fulness Christ" (Ephesians 4:11–15).

The elect is as much foreordained to grow in a holy life as he or she is to accept Jesus as Savior. Therefore, Paul likens the Christian life to running a race; there is a discipline involved (1 Corinthians 9:24–26). He keeps his body under subjection. If he allowed himself to be ruled by his flesh—living carnally, sinfully—it would indicate that, even though he might preach the Gospel to others, he himself is not converted. Every part of the elect's salvation has been foreordained by God, including his working outwardly "with fear and trembling" the grace God is working inwardly (Philippians 2:12–13).

First Corinthians 9:27, then, is not evidence against the perseverance of the saints. Rather, it shows Paul's excellent understanding of election.

There are several places in the Bible in which falling from grace, or failing of the grace of God, or receiving the grace of God in vain are mentioned. Galatians 5:4, Hebrews 12:15, and 2 Corinthians 6:1 are examples of these. These are sometimes mistakenly assumed to refer to falling from a state of being saved to a state of being unsaved. But such an assumption is unwarranted. In Galatians 5:4, for example, Paul is merely saying that by depending on the law to justify them, the Galatians are no longer depending wholly on grace. This does not mean that they have lost their salvation, but that they have become confused about the proper means of justification. This might happen to any Christian for a time. Also, some Scriptures may refer to replacing a proper understanding of the doctrine of grace with a misunderstanding that turns grace into license to sin.

First Timothy 1:19 says, "Holding faith, and a good conscience; which some having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck." This verse is sometimes pointed to as an example of Christians losing their salvation. But the verse does not say this.

Admittedly, if the verse is considered as standing alone, it is not clear just what "having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck" means. But in the next verse, Paul continues, "Of whom is Hymenaeus and Alexander; whom I have delivered unto Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme." Paul cites Hymenaeus and Alexander as an example of those who have thrust away a good conscience and suffered shipwreck concerning the faith. But he has also pronounced a chastisement upon them "that they may learn not to blaspheme."

Losing one's salvation—which would entail having the Holy Spirit withdrawn, being separated from God, and becoming spiritually dead once again—could not possibly teach one how to behave as a

Christian. Because it would be a return to a completely carnal mind, it would have the opposite effect. So being delivered to Satan cannot mean losing one's salvation. It might mean being cut off from church fellowship for a time, or it might refer to a special curse of physical affliction that the apostles had the power to pronounce. Whatever it was, it was done with the purpose of bringing Christians back to their senses, and it has nothing to do with Christians losing their salvation.

But what about Hebrews 6:4–12? These verses are sometimes taken to refer to the falling away of saved Christians. Those who believe this should find themselves very uncomfortable, however. This is because most who teach that a saint can lose his or her salvation also teach that it is possible for the saint to repent and be restored any number of times as long as he or she did not specifically blaspheme the Holy Spirit. But Hebrews 6:4–6, if it is to be understood to refer to saints, says that such repentance and restoration is impossible. So, for those who believe that saints can lose their salvation and be restored, these verses contain a contradiction these people cannot satisfactorily explain.

But, in fact, these verses do not even refer to saints. Matthew Henry, in his *Commentary on the Whole Bible* [(reprint, one volume edition, Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1991) 2389], gives one of the clearest explanations. I'll briefly summarize it: "Enlightened" (verse 4) can refer to being given some knowledge (such as what one might hear in church) but not saving grace—even Balaam's eyes were opened, but he was certainly not saved. "Tasted of the heavenly gift" (verse 4) can mean to taste something of religion, but—like someone in a market who has a taste but does not buy because he is not willing to pay the price—never go further than the taste because the price of denying oneself and taking up one's cross and following Christ is too high. "Were made partakers of the Holy Ghost" (verse 4) says nothing of the Holy Spirit's indwelling in their hearts, but only of their benefitting from His gifts. In the apostolic age especially this may have included many miracles. "Tasted the good word of God" (verse 5) means to hear the preaching of the Word of God, which many do each week in church without ever being converted. Having heard the Word of God preached, they might easily have tasted "the powers of the world to come" (verse 5) and, with a false hope, thought they would have a part in that world. Such a person "drinketh in the rain"—benefiting from the gifts of the Holy Spirit, the Word of God, the church, etc.—but bears only "thorns and briers" (verses 7–8).

Nothing in these verses describes these people as converted or justified. They are not converted and their end is to "be burned" (verse 8). But the writer of Hebrews is only making a hypothetical case. To those to whom he is writing—the saints—he says, "But, beloved, we

are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak" (verse 9). In other words, the writer believed that those to whom he was writing were converted and could not permanently fall away. Those who are saved, then (while they might backslide for a time), do not fall away finally and forever.

The reference in Hebrews 6 to the burning of the unconverted is very different from another reference to burning found in 1 Corinthians 3:11–15. Paul is writing of saved Christians who build on the foundation of Jesus Christ. They may build on the foundation with not only right doctrines, but also with some aberrant teachings. Without question, Paul teaches that the works will amount to nothing, the Christian will be chastised, but he or she will be saved.

Hebrews 10:26–28 and 38–39 are also used to try to prove that saints can lose their salvation. But notice that the "if we" in verse 26 makes it a hypothetical case while the clear statement of fact about the state of the true saints is found in verse 39: "But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul." The only people who can fit the description in the other verses of those who willfully sin after receiving the knowledge of the truth are those who reject the sacrifice of Christ and can only look forward to "judgment and fiery indignation" (verse 27); who have no faith and are therefore not justified (verse 38). As described in Hebrews 6, such people may look like Christians, but, in fact, they have rejected the grace of God because they are not elect.

Second Peter 2:20–22 states:

For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them. But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire.

Taken out of context, these verses might seem to be about saints who return to the sinfulness of the world and lose their salvation. But the previous verses in the chapter, beginning with verse 1, reveal that Peter is writing about "false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction."

I cannot continue without an explanation of “denying the Lord that bought them.” Totally overlooked by many who believe that elect Christians can deny Jesus Christ and bring destruction upon themselves are two facts. The first is that when our redemption by Jesus Christ is mentioned in the Bible, there is also usually a further description—often the means or price is mentioned, but sometimes the group from whom we are redeemed is noted—that makes the sense clear. But there is no such description here.

The second fact is that “denying the Lord that bought them” stems from the Old Testament. When Peter wrote, the church was still largely Jewish, and Peter was an apostle to the Jews (Galatians 2:8). Notice that many of the references in Peter’s writings, including in 2 Peter 2, are to the Old Testament. Even in verse 1, Peter likens these false teachers to the false prophets of the Old Testament.

“Denying the Lord that bought them” is based on Deuteronomy 32:6: “Do ye thus requite the Lord, O foolish people and unwise? is not he thy father that hath bought thee? hath he not made thee, and established thee?” This buying, then, is something that occurred in the Old Testament; it is the redeeming of Israel out of Egypt (see Exodus 15:16).

The false teachers Peter is writing about are Jews who, through their damnable heresies, are even denying the Lord who redeemed them out of Egypt. In other words, this is not a reference to their having been purchased with the blood of Jesus Christ and then denying Him.

As Peter continues, it becomes increasingly obvious that these people were reprobate from the beginning and have never had a chance for salvation:

But these, as natural brute beasts, made to be taken and destroyed, speak evil of the things that they understand not; and shall utterly perish in their own corruption; and shall receive the reward of unrighteousness, as they that count it pleasure to riot in the day time. Spots they are and blemishes [notice again the allusion to Deuteronomy 32:5], sporting themselves with their own deceivings while they feast with you.... These are wells without water, clouds that are carried with a tempest; to whom the mist of darkness is reserved for ever.

2 Peter 2:12–13, 17

Getting back to verse 22, a dog that turns to his own vomit again has always been a dog, even if he temporarily turns from his vomit. And a washed sow is still a sow when she is washed, and her

returning to her wallowing in the mire only shows her up for what she has been all along. Verses 20–22 of 2 Peter refer to those who may appear to be Christians for a time—they may even be teachers in the church—but who eventually return to the pollutions of the world because they were never really saved for they were not elect.

Romans 11:17–21 reads,

And if some of the branches be broken off, and thou, being a wild olive tree, wert grafted in among them, and with them partakest of the root and fatness of the olive tree; boast not against the branches. But if thou boast, thou bearest not the root, but the root thee. Thou wilt say then, The branches were broken off, that I might be grafted in. Well; because of unbelief they were broken off, and thou standest by faith. Be not highminded, but fear: for if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee.

This may seem to say that since the olive tree's natural branches—the Jews—were broken off, then the wild branches that were grafted in—the Gentile saints—can also be broken off, meaning that they can lose their salvation. But Paul is not writing of personal salvation here; he is writing of nations. National Israel lost their standing as God's nation, the olive tree, because of their unbelief. Their branches were broken off. Gentile nations—not entire nations, but the elect in those nations—were grafted into the tree in their place. The tree has become largely Gentile. But if, after some time or generations have passed, these Gentile nations no longer have faithful people, their branches will be broken off the tree. This is similar to Jesus threatening to remove the candlestick of unfaithful churches (Revelation 2:5). But it has this added thought: These Gentile nations may be replaced by the Jews. That is, in a time of great apostasy among the Gentiles, God may once again turn to the Jews, making the tree largely Jewish as it was at the beginning. But notice that it is always the same tree, the same body. There are not separate bodies for Jews and Gentiles. Whether the tree is largely Jewish or largely Gentile, it is always God's one chosen generation, royal priesthood, holy nation, and peculiar people (1 Peter 2:9; Romans 9:6–8; Ephesians 2:12–22). Paul is not suggesting that anyone could lose his or her salvation. No one lost their salvation when the branches representing national Israel were broken off. Therefore, this has nothing to do with believers losing their salvation.

## **Can a Child Be Unborn?**

There are many Scriptures that directly refer to the perseverance of the saints, and we have examined some of them. We have also looked at some passages that may seem at first to contradict perseverance of the saints. We've seen that careful scrutiny reveals that these Scriptures do not teach against this doctrine. Now let's look at another powerful, yet simple, argument for the perseverance of the saints.

Christians are the children of God. I have three sons. They are my children through generation, as Christians are the children of God through regeneration. When my sons are well behaved, I am pleased because such behavior shows that they are properly maturing. This will lead, hopefully, to more success and happiness in their lives. Yet, I would never expect perfection.

If they were to become consistently badly behaved, I would be concerned because this would indicate a faulty maturing process and lead to problems in their lives. I would seek to correct the problem and chastisement would likely be a part of that correction process. Neither their good behavior nor their bad behavior, however, would make them any more or any less my sons. They cannot earn their position as sons as they are already my sons. They cannot lose their sonship because they are my sons by birth.

God, in His love and concern for His children, may be more or less pleased with their behavior. Because they are sons by rebirth, however, their behavior does not earn them more sonship or cause them to lose their sonship. God may chastise for consistent problems, but His sons remain his sons. In fact, the chastisement is evidence of steadfast sonship (Hebrews 12:4-11).

Why does God chastise? Because He has taken the responsibility of making sure that His sons become "a perfect [meaning "complete" or "mature" or, as in *A Literal Translation of the Holy Bible* by Jay P. Green, Sr., "full-grown"] man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:13) in what we call sanctification.

My point is this. However much God may chastise His children, they remain His children, His seed remains in them (1 John 3:9), because they are born again, "not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever" (1 Peter 1:23).

## **A License to Sin?**

Some people criticize the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints because, they say, it can be a license to sin; that is, if a person knows

his salvation is sure, then he will sin as much as he wants without fear. But the Bible does not support this.

If Jesus were concerned that a sure knowledge of one's salvation would lead to licentiousness, He might have said to his disciples, Rejoice, because your names might be written in heaven if you keep from sin. But He never said this. Instead, He said, "rejoice, because your names are written in heaven" (Luke 10:20). Jesus understood that knowing one's salvation is sure does not lead to sin.

Anyone who, believing his salvation is sure, then lives an unrepented of life of sin, is not born again and is not saved. A truly regenerated Christian, on the other hand, wants to please God. Though he may sin, it is no longer his way of life. If his conscience does not lead him to repentance, God will chasten him to repentance. A saint will not use his Christian liberty as a license to lead a sinful life. Instead, his liberty motivates him to want to obey out of gratefulness, and frees him to try to obey without fear. That is, he wants to do what is right, but he can be assured that even if he slips up, he will not lose his salvation.

### **1 John 3:5-11**

Earlier, I quoted 1 John 3:5-11 and said that this cannot mean that regenerated Christians don't ever sin. Regenerated Christians do sin, but sin is no longer their way of life. But there is more implied. We often say that through Jesus Christ's death our sins are forgiven. This is true, but the word forgiven may not fully convey how clean the slate is wiped. Speaking of the cup of wine at the Lord's Supper, Jesus said, "For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins" (Matthew 26:28). Notice the word remission.

Of Jesus, Peter said, "To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins" (Acts 10:43). Hebrews 9:22 says, "And almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission [of sins]." And in chapter 10 of the same book, we read, "For by one offering he [Jesus] hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified. Whereof the Holy Ghost also is a witness to us: for after that he had said before, this is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them; and their sins and iniquities will I remember no more. Now where remission of these is, there is no more offering for sin" (verses 14-18).

Remission is the noun form of the verb remit. Definition number 2a for remit in *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, Eleventh Edition, is, "to release from the guilt or penalty of <~sins>." The

Greek word translated "remission" in the above Scriptures is *aphesis*. It means a dismissal or release. In other words, as the Scriptures above explain, once someone's sins are remitted through the shed blood of Jesus Christ, the record of all of the person's sins—past, present, and future—is blotted out. It is as if they never did, never do, and never will occur. Isaiah 43:25 says, "I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins."

This concept of remission adds a new dimension to John's statements in 1 John 3:6 and 9 that "whosoever abideth in him sinneth not" and "whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin." The implication of the combination of these verses and 1 John 1:8–10 for the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints is clear: Christians do not want to sin and do not sin as a way of life, but to their chagrin, they still do sin. Nevertheless, because all of the sins—past, present, and future—of God's saints are blotted out, then no sin can possibly be the cause of God's withdrawing salvation from a saint.

### **Assurance**

All of this should be very assuring to the Christian who has put his or her trust in Jesus Christ, but this assurance should not be confused with perseverance or eternal security. Assurance is simply the Christian's response to security. If we know that God has secured our salvation, then we are assured. Sometimes a Christian may falter in his or her assurance. This does not mean, however, that the Christian's salvation is any less secure: Security is God's work, not the believer's.

What good news! Despite our depravity and not based on our works, God is saving His people through His Son, and He will make sure they persevere to the end when He will glorify them and they will then be with Him for eternity. Dear readers, if you trust in Jesus Christ alone as your Savior, then "rejoice, because your names are written in heaven."

## Who We Are

I hope this little booklet has been a blessing to you. I was a member of and writer for the Worldwide Church of God until 1991. My wife, Mary, was also a member and a production assistant in the church's television department. But then God began revealing to us the truth of His glorious Gospel of the free gift of grace by Jesus Christ. So, in 1991, we left the Worldwide Church of God, our friends, our worldview, and our employment.

In the mid-1990s, I began writing articles that exposed the heresies and spiritual abuses that were continuing in the Worldwide Church of God even after the death of its founder, Herbert W. Armstrong. These articles appeared in *The Quarterly Journal of the Personal Freedom Outreach*, a well-respected Christian apologetics journal. Many people who read the articles wrote asking for help for themselves or loved ones exiting Armstrongism, to ask doctrinal questions, or to share their experiences in Armstrong-type sects.

I soon came to see that cults and unbiblical teachings are flourishing because too many people are ignorant of the basics of biblical Christianity and only give lip service to following the Bible alone. Toward the end of 2000, I launched *Word of His Grace* to address these issues through both print and our website, [wordofhisgrace.org](http://wordofhisgrace.org).

The website has since grown in impact and respect. Our increasing number of articles are reproduced and favorably cited on websites around the world. We publish Gospel tracts and small books that have been widely requested and used by a number of missionaries and other Christian teachers. We also publish an email newsletter. Everything we write is centered on Jesus Christ and our commitment to take the Bible alone for our doctrine.

We are family-based. Mary and I are truly a team and always thank God for having given us to each other. We try to be good stewards of the resources God provides. To this end, we have recently put all of our literature on our website. This has enabled us to scale-back our print publishing, which had been growing increasingly expensive as costs rise. We now send printed materials only to those who do not have access to the internet.

We trust that as long as we continue to please God in what we teach, and we remain good stewards of what He supplies, He will provide everything needed to continue these activities. We do not ask humans for money, or anything, but bring our needs in prayer to God.

This does not mean that God has not used people to provide our needs. He has. It means that we make our needs known to God, and if He then makes them known to you, well, that is between you and Him. This is a lesson in faith. You can trust in God's promises found in Scripture: "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matthew 6:33). If you are like-minded with us, we would love to fellowship with you. Email us.

By His grace alone,

Peter Ditzel

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Our TULIP series of booklets have been read by Christians around the world and have been used by missionaries and other teachers to disciple their brothers and sisters in Christ.

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#### **What Is the Gospel?**

Paul warned the Galatians, "But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed." But what is the Gospel? And what are some of the false gospels being promoted?

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This Gospel tract emphasizes God's sovereignty, man's inability, and Jesus Christ's totally effectual atonement in salvation. It gives enough information to avoid the pitfall of briefer tracts of being so general they either mislead or leave the reader with more questions than answers.

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