

CALVINISM (6)

PERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS

Introduction

- 1) **Calvinism** is a theological system of interconnected doctrines which emphasizes divine sovereignty and predestination and denies the free will of man to yield to God's will
- 2) Five points of Calvinism (TULIP): **T**otal Hereditary Depravity, **U**nconditional Election, **L**imited Atonement, **I**rresistible Grace, **P**erseverance of the Saints
- 3) This lesson will examine *Perseverance of the Saints* in the light of Biblical teaching

I) **The Doctrine of Perseverance of the Saints Defined**

- A) "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" (*The Westminster Confession of Faith*)
- B) "The simplest, shortest description of the perseverance of the saints is: Once saved, always saved. It is one of the greatest thoughts in the Bible! Once you believe, you can never be lost, you can never go to hell. Christ will always be your Savior. It is possible to get your eternal destiny settled once for all so that you never have to worry about it" (Edwin H. Palmer, *The Five Points of Calvinism*, 68)
- C) "All the prayers a man may pray, all the Bibles he may read, all the churches he may belong to, all the services he may attend, all the sermons he may practice, all the debts he may pay, all the ordinances he may observe, all the laws he may keep, all the benevolent acts he may perform will not make his soul one whit safer; and all the sins he may commit, from idolatry to murder, will not make his soul in any more danger....The way a man lives has nothing whatever to do with the salvation of his soul" (Sam Morris, *Do a Christian's Sins Damn His Soul?*)

II) **Examining Bible Texts Used to Support Perseverance of the Saints**

- A) **John 3:36; 5:24; 1 John 5:11-13** – "He who believes has everlasting life" "God has given us eternal life"
 - 1) The faithful in Christ have "eternal life" because spiritual life is in Christ now and is also a promise of God we hope for eternally (Jn. 6:63; 11:25; Titus 1:2; 3:7; Rom. 2:6-7)
 - 2) Our possession of this life is conditioned upon being in Christ (Jn. 6:66-69; 8:24)
- B) **John 10:27-29** – "My sheep...shall never perish"
 - 1) Jesus is emphasizing the power of God to secure and protect the sheep who hear His voice and follow Him. What if a Christian refuses to hear and follow Christ (Jas. 5:19-20)?
 - 2) Why would God be concerned about returning a lost sheep if God's sheep cannot be lost (Lk. 15:4-7)? This parable makes no sense if a Christian cannot become lost in sin
- C) **Romans 8:35-39** – "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ"
 - 1) The "love of Christ" could be understood as the love we have for Christ (cf. v. 28)
 - 2) The point is that this strong love (either of God for us or our love for God) cannot be overcome by outward forces which are not as strong; the faithful Christian has security!!
 - 3) Note that the inward problem of an unbelieving heart is not included (Heb. 3:12)
- D) **1 John 3:4-9** – "Whoever has been born of God...cannot sin"
 - 1) Cannot mean that it is impossible for Christians to sin because John would then be contradicting himself (1:8-2:2)
 - 2) The contrast in the context is one's manner of living – practicing righteousness vs. practicing sin; those who practice righteousness cannot practice sin at the same time
 - 3) Some wrongly argue that God "transfers" the righteousness of Christ to us to cover our sins so that He does not "see" them – doctrine of the "imputed righteousness of Christ"
 - a) Impute is not "transfer"; God imputes [credits] righteousness to the believer (Rom. 4:3)

III) Bible Teaching that Refutes Perseverance of the Saints

A) *A Christian can Fall from Grace*

- 1) **Galatians 5:4** – brethren in Christ [3:15, 26-27; 6:1] can become estranged [severed] from Christ and fall from grace
- 2) **Calvinist position** – “The doctrine of perseverance of the saints does not maintain that all who *profess* the Christian faith are certain of heaven. It is saints -- those who are set apart by the Spirit -- who persevere to the end. It is believers -- those who are given true, living faith in Christ -- who are *secure* and *safe* in Him. Many who profess to believe fall away, but they do not fall from grace for they were never in grace. True believers do fall into temptations, and they do commit grievous sins, but these sins do not cause them to lose their salvation or separate them from Christ” (Steele and Thomas, *The Five Points of Calvinism, Defined, Defended, Documented*, 56)
 - a) The Galatian brethren were true believers and sons of God (3:26-27), but some had been “severed” from Christ and “fallen from grace” (5:4); Calvinism claims that this is impossible, but Paul said it had happened. The apostle Paul refutes Calvinism!

B) *A Christian can Sin and be Lost*

- 1) **John 15:5-6** – branches [disciples] in Christ are cut off and burned (cf. Rom. 11:22)
 - 2) **1 Corinthians 10:12** – he that stands take heed lest he fall – danger to Christians (1:2)
 - 3) **1 Timothy 4:1** – cannot depart from the faith if not in the faith (cf. 1:19-20)
 - 4) **2 Peter 2:20-21** – if a Christian turns back to the world, the end is worse than beginning and been better not to have known way of righteousness
 - 5) **Revelation 3:5; 22:19** – one can be blotted out/his part taken away from the Book of Life
 - 6) **Acts 8:18-24** – Simon, a baptized believer (v. 13), sinned and needed forgiveness
 - 7) **Hebrews 3:14** – can depart from the living God with a heart of unbelief
 - 8) **Hebrews 6:4-6** – someone once enlightened can fall away and refuse repentance
 - 9) **Hebrews 10:29** – sanctified person can become worthy of God’s punishment (cf. v. 39)
- C) **Perseverance of the Saints** is a false doctrine that denies the conditional nature of our salvation and the many scriptural warnings about the possibility of falling away

Conclusion – **The Fall of Calvinism**

- A) There is an interconnected logic among the points of Calvinism – since a man is **totally hereditarily depraved** and cannot choose to do good, the **unconditional election** of God must place him among the chosen to be saved. God will then save him by the **limited atonement** of Jesus through the Spirit’s inward call of **irresistible grace**. Since he did nothing to obtain this salvation, he can do nothing to lose it, thus he enjoys the **perseverance of the saints**.
- B) But, what men may claim is logical is not always scriptural or true (Col. 2:8; 1 Tim. 6:20)
- **Observe step-by-step the complete and total fall of Calvinism:**
- 1) The child of God can fall from grace (Gal. 5:4; Heb. 6:4-6; Acts 8:9-24). The **Perseverance of the Saints** is not a valid Bible doctrine, and therefore...
 - 2) If the child of God can fall from grace, then God’s grace must not be irresistible. The doctrine of **Irresistible Grace** falls.
 - 3) If God’s grace is not irresistible, then any person is free to choose whether he will accept that grace or not. The doctrine of **Unconditional Election** falls.
 - 4) If any person can make a good choice to accept God’s grace, then Jesus’ atoning death can save anyone. The doctrine of **Limited Atonement** falls.
 - 5) If any person can make a good choice to accept God’s grace, then he is not born totally depraved in sin. The doctrine of **Total Hereditary Depravity** falls.

The whole system of Calvinism falls when one learns and applies the truth of God’s Scriptures (2 Cor. 5:3-5). Let us not be deceived by the doctrines of men, but humbly hear and respond to the free and gracious invitation of God (Rev. 22:17).