

“P” – Perseverance of Saints

True or False?

Bible Answers About Denominations

The “Perseverance of Saints” is the fifth major error in John Calvin’s system of doctrine which we have come to identify by the familiar acrostic of the word “tulip.” For a discussion of the first four (Total Hereditary Depravity, Unconditional Election, Limited Atonement, and Irresistible Grace) obtain the tracts by those names in this series at the Monte Vista church of Christ.

The doctrine of the Perseverance of the Saints declares that because the number of the elect is set and secure and will not change, then one who has been elected can NEVER be lost. Calvinists declare that the elect can do nothing to be saved, and, therefore, can do nothing to be lost. Their salvation is unconditional and so is their preservation unto God. The same Spirit who miraculously and irresistibly regenerated them is the same Spirit who miraculously and irresistibly keeps them. They cannot so sin as to be eternally lost. This last tenet, the Perseverance of the Saints, is also known as the doctrine of “Once Saved, Always Saved,” “the Eternal Security of the Believer,” and “the Impossibility of Apostasy.”

The foolishness of the impossibility of apostasy was succinctly stated by the Baptist preacher, Sam Morris, who declared “that all the sins a child of God might commit, from idolatry to murder, would not endanger his soul one bit.” Ben M. Bogard, Baptist preacher in his debate with N. B. Hardeman, declared, “Jesus Christ remains in us. That prevents sin. My soul sin? No! Has brother Bogard ever sinned? In my soul, I do not. I am as perfect as God Himself as far as my soul is concerned. Then what about my body? It does sin.”

This doctrine ought to be rejected because it too is false for a number of reasons. First, one must recognize the fact that the Bible warns in some way on nearly every page against the danger of the child of God sinning and being lost eternally. In writing to the churches of Galatia the apostle Paul said, “You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace” (Gal 5:4 NAS). These people had been brought into the grace of the Gospel; and now, by readopting the Mosaic ordinances, they had apostatized from the Gospel and lost the grace communicated to their souls. The peace and love of God, received by Jesus Christ, could not remain in the hearts of those who had rejected Christ. They had, therefore, in every sense of the word, fallen from grace (Cf. 1 Cor. 9:27; 10:1-13; 2 Cor. 13:5; 2 Tim. 4:10; Heb. 3:12-4:6; 10:22-31; 2 Pet. 2:20-22).

Secondly, the Bible records many examples of those who did “fall away” from God’s grace or “favor.” We read of King Saul who had the Spirit of God before the Spirit departed from Saul (1 Sam. 16:14). There was also the young prophet (1 Kgs. 13); Judas Iscariot, Demas who forsook Paul, Simon the Sorcerer, Ananias and Sapphira, Hymenaeus and Alexander, etc. The Bible also shows the Israelites

believed (Psa. 106:12) and were delivered, but later believed not and were destroyed (Psa. 106:24; Cf. Isa. 59:1-2; Rom. 15:4; I Cor. 10:1-14).

Third, why would the Bible urge faithfulness upon the children of God in order to enter Heaven, if a child of God cannot so sin as to be lost eternally? (Cf. I Cor. 15:58; 16:13; Matt. 24:45-51; 25:14-30, 31-46). Notice the promise of the Lord when He said, "Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life" (Rev 2:10 NAS). You will notice that Jesus attached a condition to receive this promise. One must be faithful! The word stresses the ideas of loyalty and fidelity to the Lord and His word.

Fourth, the passages which assert the possession of eternal life now are to be understood as referring to it in prospect, and not a complete reality. For example John wrote, "And this is the promise which He Himself made to us: eternal life" (I Jn 2:25 NAS). So if a person loses his faith then he cannot have eternal life in any sense—present or future. Note the following passages:

- **Faith may fail:** "but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers" (Luke 22:32).
- **Faith may shipwreck:** "keeping faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith" (1 Tim 1:19).
- **One may depart from the faith:** "But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons" (1 Tim 4:1).
- **One may deny the faith:** "But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith, and is worse than an unbeliever" (1 Tim 5:8).
- **One may have his faith overthrown:** "But shun profane and vain babblings: for they will increase unto more ungodliness. And their word will eat as doth a canker: of whom is Hymenaeus and Philetus; Who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already; and overthrow the faith of some" (2 Tim 2:16-18).

The Scriptures clearly teach the possibility of apostasy. However, the possibility of apostasy should not be viewed as the probability of apostasy. The former position allows one to live in hope; the latter view dims that hope completely.

God will help His people to be saved (Phil. 2:13). However, God's people must comply with God's conditions of eternal salvation (Titus 2:11, 12). God's people can comply with conditions God has set forth in His word to keep us saved and to insure our eternal salvation. God did not design Christianity for angels in heaven, but for people on earth so they could one day share the joy of heaven with the Lord and the angels.

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