

and yielded a hundredfold.” As he said these things, he called out, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”

Later in Luke 8 when Jesus explains this parable He seems to describe three groups of people who had salvation within their reach but ended up not receiving it. Jesus even uses the term “fall away” (v. 13) to describe one group. What is happening here? Have they lost salvation? 1 John 2:19 provides more insight into this matter, where John says:

“They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us.”

John explains for us that there will be some who make a profession of faith and participate in the life of a local church, but where “not of us.” They never experienced the new birth. They were never regenerated. Their faith was based on something other than the saving work of Spirit of God in their hearts and lives. This is why the Belgic Confession when discussing the marks of a true church in Article 29 describes the marks of true believers.

Belgic Confession-Article 29

“...As for those who can belong to

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the church, we can recognize them by the distinguishing marks of Christians: namely by faith, and by their fleeing from sin and pursuing righteousness, once they have received the one and only Savior, Jesus Christ. They love the true God and their neighbors, without turning to the right or left, and they crucify the flesh and its works.

Though great weakness remains in them, they fight against it by the Spirit all the days of their lives, appealing constantly to the blood, suffering, death, and obedience of the Lord Jesus, in whom they have forgiveness of their sins, through faith in him.”

True, saving faith gives evidence. Where evidence of true faith is lacking, true faith maybe, and often is, lacking. The false believer loses their temporary faith, but not salvation because he never had it to begin with. The next chapter will explore the relations between God’s saving work and the working of true faith.

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(Endnotes)

¹ P. 116.

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THE DOCTRINE of PERSEVERANCE PROPERLY UNDERSTOOD

Rev. Howard Sloan

In the last issue we looked at the caricature of our doctrine that is OSAS, it is time to look at the real thing – the preservation and perseverance of the saints. This is a much more full and rich doctrine that what is passed off as what we believe. The doctrine of perseverance and preservation of the saints takes into account both the scriptures that declare that the saint is eternally secure and those that speak of the need of the saint to continue in obedience and warn against abandoning the faith. Simply stated the doctrine is as follows:

They, whom God has 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. (WCOF 17.1.)

Joel Beeke in his book Living for God’s Glory: An Introduction to Calvinism puts it this way.

“The doctrine of the perseverance of the saints teaches that all who partake of the grace and power of saving union with Christ by faith continue in that union with its benefits and fruits. By the preserving work of the triune (1

Cor.1:8-9), they persevere in true faith and in the works that proceed from faith so long as they continue in the world (John 6:37-40; 2 Timothy 4:7).”¹

We will look at this doctrine from both sides starting with preservation.

FIRMLY ROOTED – PRESERVATION

The Canons of Dort in the fifth head of doctrine state it this way.

ARTICLE 3. By reason of these remains of indwelling sin, and also because the temptations of the world and of Satan, those who are converted could not persevere in that grace if left to their own strength. But God is faithful, who, having conferred grace, mercifully confirms and powerfully preserves them therein, even to the end.

The truth of the matter is that the OSAS people have it partially right. We are eternally secure because of the work of God on our behalf. As the Canons put it God "powerfully preserves" the saints. The most familiar scripture related to this is John 10:27-30.

“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand. I and the Father are one.”

If you are in Christ Jesus by grace through faith, who can remove you from the Father’s hand? NO ONE! Let me repeat: NO ONE. This means that you can not even remove yourself from the Father’s hand. I have talked with some people who look at this verse and say that no one can snatch us but we can jump. But to say that gives us more power than God. This is why we will examine in the next chapter the connections between preservation and the rest of the five points of Reformed doctrine. There is however one other passage I think speaks to God’s preservation of His saints: Romans 8: 33-35, 38-39

Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? ... For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth,

nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Whenever I read this passage, I picture Paul feverishly stating all of the things that can not separate us from the love of God until he finally says “nor anything else in all creation.” It is Paul’s cosmic catch-all. “All creation” covers all heaven, hell and earth. If nothing in heaven, hell or earth can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus, then we can not do it to ourselves. The scripture often uses the analogy of a tree to speak of the people of God. The saint is one who is firmly rooted in the grace and power of God, so firmly rooted that they shall never be moved. But this only presents one side of the doctrine. Perseverance is the other side of this wonderful doctrine.

FINISHING THE RACE – PERSEVERANCE

If preservation can be likened to a tree firmly rooted in God’s eternal decree and unending love, then perseverance can be understood in terms of a race. This is the analogy the author of Hebrews presents to us in Hebrews 12:1-2.

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith,

who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

Perseverance of the Saints is about finishing the race. The Reformed doctrine of Perseverance is what is missing in contemporary OSAS theologies. We, as saints of God, are those who will persevere to the end. We are those who will finish the race. This, of course, does not mean that we will be without sin, without obstacle, or even without fall in this life. The author of Hebrews clearly conceives of the race in this fashion when he calls upon us to “*lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely.*” The writers of the Canons of Dort also had this in mind when they wrote:

FIFTH HEAD: ARTICLE 1.

Those whom God, according to His purpose, calls to the communion of His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, and regenerates by the Holy Spirit, He also delivers from the dominion and slavery of sin, though in this life He does not deliver them altogether from the body of sin and from the infirmities of the flesh.

FIFTH HEAD: ARTICLE 2.

Hence spring forth the daily sins of infirmity, and blemishes cleave even to the best works of the saints. These are to them a perpetual reason to humiliate themselves before God and to flee for refuge to Christ crucified; to mortify the flesh more and

more by the spirit of prayer and by holy exercises of piety; and to press forward to the goal of perfection, until at length, delivered from this body of death, they shall reign with the Lamb of God in heaven.

The saint begins by confessing Christ (Romans 10:9) but continues on in the faith. They will display fruit in keeping with repentance (John 15: 16). They will use the God given means (the Word of God, prayer, the sacraments, etc.) of growth in grace and putting to death the flesh. They will be those who “make their calling and election sure” (2 Peter 1:10). Ultimate they obtain the outcome of their faith, the salvation of their souls (1 Peter 1:9). But what of those who start the race but do not finish?

FALSE PROFESSORS

The truth is that the Scriptures do speak of those who seem to have possessed faith but who loose it. In the parable of the soils in Luke 8 and Mark 4, Jesus teaches about such people.

Luke 8:5-8 (ESV)

“A sower went out to sow his seed. And as he sowed, some fell along the path and was trampled underfoot, and the birds of the air devoured it. [6] And some fell on the rock, and as it grew up, it withered away, because it had no moisture. [7] And some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up with it and choked it. [8] And some fell into good soil and grew