True Faith Perseveres
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It is crucial to understand what the biblical doctrine of perseverance does *not* mean. It does not mean that people who “accept Christ” can then live any way they please without fear of hell. The expression “eternal security” issometimes used in this sense, as is “once saved, always saved.” R. T. Kendall, arguing for the latter phrase, defines its meaning thus:

Whoever once truly believes that Jesus was raised from the dead, and confesses that Jesus is Lord, will go to heaven when he dies. But I will not stop there. Such a person will go to heaven when he dies no matter what work (or lack of work) may accompany such faith. (*Once Saved, Always Saved*, p. 19)

Kendall also writes, “I hope no one will take this as an attack on the Westminster Confession. It is not that” (p. 22).

But it is *precisely* that! Kendall expressly argues against Westminster’s assertion that faith cannot fail. He believes faith is best characterized as a single look: “one need only see the Sin Bearer once to be saved” (p. 23).This is a full-scale assault against the doctrine of perseverance affirmed in the Westminster Confession. Worse, it subverts Scripture itself. Unfortunately, it is a view that has come to be widely believed by Christians today.

John Murray, noting this trend a half-centuryago, defended the expression “perseverance of the saints”:

It is not in the best interests of the doctrine involved to substitute the designation, “The Security of the Believer,” not because the latter is wrong in itself but because the other formula is much more carefully and inclusively framed. . . . It is not true that the believer is secure however much he may fall into sin and unfaithfulness. Why is this not true? It is not true because it sets up an impossible combination. It is true that a believer sins; he may fall into grievous sin and backslide for lengthy periods. But it is also true that a believer cannot abandon himself to sin; he cannot come under the dominion of sin; he cannot be guilty of certain kinds of unfaithfulness. The truth is that the faith of Jesus Christ is *always respective* of the life of holiness and fidelity. And so it is never proper to think of a believer irrespective of the fruits in faith and holiness. To say that a believer is secure whatever may be the extent of his addiction to sin in his subsequent life is to abstract faith in Christ from its very

definition and it ministers to that abuse which turns the grace of God into lasciviousness. The doctrine of perseverance is the doctrine that believers persevere. . . . It is not at all that they will be saved irrespective of the their perseverance or their continuance, but that they will assuredly persevere. Consequently the security that is theirs is inseparable from their perseverance. Is this not what Jesus said? “He than endureth to the end, the same shall be saved.”

Let us not then take refuge in our sloth or encouragement in our lust from the abused doctrine of the security of the believer. But let us appreciate the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints and recognize that we may entertain the faith of our security in Christ only as we persevere in faith and holiness to the end. (*Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, 154-55)

Any doctrine of eternal security that leaves out perseverance distorts the doctrine of salvation itself. Heaven without holiness ignores the whole purpose for which God chose and redeemed His people:

God elected us for this very purpose. “He chose us in him [Christ] before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight” (Eph. 1:4). We were predestinated to be conformed to the image of Christ in all His spotless purity (Rom. 8:29). This divine choice makes it certain that we shall be like Him when He appears (1 John 3:2). From this fact, John deduces that everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself just as Christ is pure (1 John 3:3). His use of the word “everyone” makes it quite certain that those who do not purify themselves will not see Christ, nor be like Him. By their lack of holiness they prove that they were not so predestinated. The apostle thus deals a crushing blow to Antinomianism. (Richard Alderson, *No Holiness, No Heaven!*, p. 88)

God’s own holiness thus *requires* perseverance. “God’s grace insures our persevering`but this does not make it any less our persevering.” Believers cannot acquire “the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” unless they “press on toward the goal” (Phil 3:14). But as they “work out [their] salvation with fear and trembling” (Phil 2:12), they find that “it is God who is at work in [them], both to will and work for His good pleasure” (Phil. 2:13).

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