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If Ye Continue In My Word Then Are Ye My Disciples

BY THE LATE: C. D. COLE

"Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed" (John 8:31).

Baptists, Presbyterians, and a few of the smaller groups of professing Christians believe in the doctrine of "ONCE SAVED, ALWAYS SAVED." All others, including the Catholics, believe that a man may be saved—born again—and then lose his salvation. Here, as in many other cases, the majority is in error. We need to remember that majorities do not prove a thing to be right. When issues are moral and vital, the majority is seldom right. How was it in the days of Noah? Only eight people were right in their judgment of the coming flood and the way to escape it. How was it when Israel reached the border of Canaan? Only two out of the vast throng wanted to go over and possess the land. The rest said they were not able. How was it in the days of Elijah? The seven thousand who had not bowed the knee in worship of Baal was a proportionately small number. How was it in the days of our Lord Jesus Christ? The vast majority of the Jews rejected Him and clamored for His life and would be satisfied with nothing else. How was it in the days of Paul? He talks about a remnant according to the election of grace. So it need not surprise us that a majority may be wrong in this our day.

The doctrine of "Once in grace, always in grace" is expressed under two terms; namely, "THE PRESERVATION OF THE SAINTS," and "THE PERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS." Preservation is looking at their security from the

Divine side, and perseverance is viewing their security from the human side. The saint is preserved by God, and he also perseveres. The divine and human elements are to be recognized in all things that pertain to the Christian life, and the confounding of these elements or the denial of either of them is harmful to right thinking and acting. The cause of the saint's security is the preserving power of God—"kept by the power of God," and the means of his security is his perseverance or continuance in faith—"kept by the power of God through faith" (I Peter 1:5). This gives all the glory of our security to God and conserves the truth of human responsibility. We are responsible to persevere in faith, but we cannot persevere in our own strength.

It is no part of the doctrine of "ONCE IN GRACE, ALWAYS IN GRACE," that one may be saved and then live like the world, and at the end, enter the home of the blest. The man who lives like the world here and now will be with the world yonder and hereafter. The truth is that a saved man has within him the principle and power of grace by which he overcomes the world. "For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith" (I John 5:4). A man once told Mr. Spurgeon that if he believed he could never be lost, he would take his fill of sin. Mr. Spurgeon replied with the question: "How much sin does it take to fill a Christian?" A little sin fills a real Christian to his sorrow and shame, but a lost man rolls sin as a sweet morsel under his tongue and calls for more.

The professing Christian who says that God will keep him safe and then lives a careless and indifferent life, taking his fill of sin, shows by his very talk that he does not know God. It is like a man saying that if he is one of the elect, God will save him when He gets ready, therefore, he will not go to church or give any thought to his salvation. This is to wrest the truth to his own destruction. He ignores the truth that election is unto a salvation that is to be received through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth; a salvation to which one is called by the gospel, (I Thess. 2:13,14). He is like the man who says that God will give him his daily bread, and therefore, he will not work. He is denying the human element in getting his daily bread.

Let me give you a safe and sound principle by which to reason. In everything give God praise and keep man responsible; recognize both divine sovereignty and human responsibility. For everything good, give God thanks without denying the human agent. For everything evil, recognize the hand of God without charging Him with sin. Give God the glory for the preservation of the saint, but hold to the truth of the saint's responsibility to persevere. In the matter of death, recognize the truth that God takes away, but remember there are secondary causes involving human responsibility. Job had lost his property through marauding bands of Sabeans and Chaldeans, and his children were killed by a storm; but he looks beyond these secondary causes to the great first cause and says: "The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away" (Job 1:21).

PERSEVERANCE IS THE GRAND MARK OF A REAL SAINT

Our confession of faith (New Hampshire) says in part:

"We believe that such only are real believers as endure unto the end; that their persevering attachment to Christ is the grand mark which distinguishes them from superficial professors."

That which proves a man to be saved is his continuance in faith. Saving faith is a permanent grace in the one born from above. To the Jews who had professed faith in Him, Christ said, "If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed." To the Hebrews Paul said, "But Christ as a son over his own house; whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end" (Hebrews 3:6). And again he said, "For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end" (Hebrews 3:14). And John speaks of some who went out from among true believers. "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us" (I John 2:19). The meaning of all these passages is that the one who is truly born from

above and saved will never renounce his faith and lose interest and hope in the blood of Christ. He perseveres unto the end, and Christ becomes increasingly precious. It is not the continuing that saves him, but it is proof of a saved state.

All is not gold that glitters, and all are not Christians who seem to be so for a while. What seems to be a good beginning may be a fatal ending. A bright profession may soon lose its luster. "Ye did run well", is the sad story of many who started in the Christian race. Not every one who starts in a race finishes it. Not every ship that leaves port reaches its destination in safety. If we are genuine disciples of Christ, we will persevere unto the end. The man who has to look back to some kind of feeling he had years ago, for evidence of salvation, is in a bad way. If Christ is not precious to you now, He was never precious to you. If you are not trusting Him now, you have never trusted Him. If you do not love Him now, you have never loved Him. If you are not saved now, you have never been saved. You can lose a good feeling, but you cannot lose salvation. You can lose the joy of salvation, but you cannot lose salvation itself.

The saint is born a mere babe in Christ, but he has everlasting life. He can grow but he cannot die. Physical babies die, but there are no deaths among the spiritual. There is the vitality of the Christ life in them. "Because I live, ye shall live also," are His own words to His people. The saint may fall, but he shall not be utterly cast down. He may be brought on his knees, but not on his face. No saint shall fall finally and fatally.

PERSEVERANCE IMPLIES OPPOSITION AND TESTING

To persevere is to continue in the Christian faith in the face of discouragement, opposition, and trial. The saint does not have a smooth path in this world. He meets with opposition from the devil, the world, and the flesh. He is tried and tested by God. And this testing shows the metal he is made of. It also reveals whose workmanship he is; whether of God or man. Christ said, "Every plant which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up" (Matt. 15:13).

In every realm of physical life we see the principle of testing in operation. We have tests in the school room to determine scholarship. There are tests of manufactured articles to determine their practical usefulness. There are tests to determine physical condition. Insurance companies avoid poor risks by requiring physical examination of applicants. Governments avoid having sickly soldiers on their hands by having rigid physical tests to see whether a man can stand the hardships of marching and fighting. Now, in the spiritual realm, there are tests which reveal the true state of the

individual professor. And these tests show whether one is in the faith or not. One is not saved by these tests, but they reveal whether he is saved or not.

1. The doctrinal test. John 8:47: "He that is of God heareth God's words: ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God." Christ said that His sheep will not follow a stranger (John 10:5). No born again man will be led away by Christian Science or any other fatal heresy that discounts the blood of Christ and salvation by grace. No false teacher can fatally deceive the elect of God.

2. The practical test. Matt. 13:21,22: "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."

(1) Persecution because of the unpopularity of the word of God. Those who believe and practice the truth of God will be opposed. The natural man does not love the doctrines of the Bible and will persecute those who do. A false professor will give up the truth in face of persecution. If your system of theology finds ready acceptance from men of the world, you had better be suspicious that it is not the once delivered faith.

(2) The care of business. Many men are so absorbed with business that they do not take time to consider the interests of their souls. It is sad to see men labor for meat that perisheth and show no concern for the meat that endureth unto everlasting life. In the parable of the great supper (Luke 14:16), one man went to his farm, another went to prove his oxen, and another was absorbed with home ties, and all of them despised the Gospel feast.

3. The experiential test. This test involves our hope. The saint's experiences in this world, however painful and disappointing, never drive him to despair. The saint will persevere in his hope. He may have his seasons of distress, but he never loses his hope for heaven.

"Hope on, hope on, O troubled heart,
If doubts and fears o'ertake thee,
Remember this—the Lord hath said,
He never will forsake thee;
Then murmur not, still bear thy lot,
Nor yield to care or sorrow;
Be sure the clouds that frown today
Will break in smiles tomorrow.

Hope on, hope on, though dark and deep
The shadows gather o'er thee;
Be not dismayed; thy Saviour holds
The lamp of life before thee;
And if He will that thou today
Shouldst tread the vale of sorrow;
Be not afraid, but trust and wait;
The sun will shine tomorrow.

Hope on, hope on, go bravely forth
Through trial and temptation,
Directed by the worth of truth,
So full of consolation;
There is a calm for every storm,
A joy for every sorrow,
A night from which the soul shall wake
To hail an endless morrow."

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