

THE PERSEVERANCE & SANCTIFICATION OF THE SAINTS

THE PERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS

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. ~ Westminster Confession of Faith 17.1

The last step in the order of God's salvation of His people is their glorification:

²⁸ And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. ²⁹ For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. ³⁰ And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.

~ Romans 8:28-30

And God has promised that He will see that process through to the end:

For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. ~ Romans 11:29

And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. ~ Philippians 1:6

No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day.

~ John 6:44

²⁷ My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. ²⁹ 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.

~ John 10:27-28

The believer can rest in those promises:

The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen. ~ 2 Timothy 4:18

And yet it is better to think of this as "perseverance" rather than being "eternally secure":

But God's firm foundation stands, bearing this seal: "The Lord knows those who are his," and, "Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity." ~ 2 Timothy 2:19

¹² Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, ¹³ for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. ~ Philippians 2:12-13

We need to take seriously the encouragement to hold steadfast:

²¹ And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, ²² he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, ²³ if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister. ~ Colossians 1:21-23

¹¹ And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end, ¹² so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.
~ Hebrews 6:11-12

¹² Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. ¹³ But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. ¹⁴ For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end.
~ Hebrews 3:12-14

It is possible for genuine believers to sin grievously:

Nevertheless, [saints] may, through the temptations of Satan and of the world, the prevalency of corruption remaining in them, and the neglect of the means of their preservation, fall into grievous sins; and, for a time, continue therein: whereby they incur God's displeasure, and grieve His Holy Spirit, come to be deprived of some measure of their graces and comforts, have their hearts hardened, and their consciences wounded; hurt and scandalize others, and bring temporal judgments upon themselves. ~ Westminster Confession of Faith 17.3

¹ Paul, an apostle—not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead—² and all the brothers who are with me, to the churches of Galatia:
~ Galatians 1:1-2

We should also take seriously the warning that some can look like believers but are in reality not:

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. ~ 1 John 2:19

²¹ "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. ²² On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' ²³ And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'" ~ Matthew 7:21-23

The true believer is fundamentally different in regards to sin:

¹ What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? ² By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? ³ Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴ We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

⁵ For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. ⁶ We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. ⁷ For one who has died has been set free from sin. ⁸ Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. ⁹ We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. ¹⁰ For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. ¹¹ So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

¹² Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. ¹³ Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. ¹⁴ For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace. ~ Romans 6:1-14

THE SANCTIFICATION OF THE SAINTS

Sanctification may be defined as that gracious and continuous operation of the Holy Spirit by which He purifies the sinner from the pollution of sin, renews his whole nature in the image of God, and enables him to perform good works.

~ Louis Berkhof

We are called to put off sin and put on righteousness:

[You have been taught]²² to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires,²³ and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds,²⁴ and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. ~ Ephesians 4:22-24

⁵ Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. ⁶ On account of these the wrath of God is coming. ⁷ In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. ⁸ But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. ⁹ Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices
~ Colossians 3:5-9

¹² Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, ¹³ bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. ¹⁴ And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. ¹⁵ And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. ¹⁶ Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. ¹⁷ And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. ~ Colossians 3:12-17

¹ I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. ² Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. ~ Romans 12:1-2

There are numerous means available to us to help accomplish this putting off and putting on:

- **The Word of God:** John 17:17; Psalms 119:9; 2 Tim 3:16-17
- **Prayer:** Ephesians 6:18-19; 1 Thessalonians 5:17;
- **Public worship:** Hebrews 10:24-25
- **The sacraments of the Lord's supper and baptism:** 1 Corinthians 11:23-26; 12:13
- **Accountability from fellow believers:** Romans 15:14; James 5:16

And yet this is not an instantaneous. This is a *daily* struggle that *all* Christians face.

¹¹ Give us this day our daily bread,
¹² and forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our
debtors.
¹³ And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
~ Matthew 6:11-13

¹⁵ For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want,
but I do the very thing I hate. ¹⁶ Now if I do what I do not want, I agree
with the law, that it is good. ¹⁷ So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin
that dwells within me. ¹⁸ For I know that nothing good dwells in me,
that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the
ability to carry it out. ¹⁹ For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I
do not want is what I keep on doing. ²⁰ Now if I do what I do not want,
it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.
~ Romans 7:15-20

But that struggle is evidence of our salvation! We should stop worrying when we stop struggling. God has promised to work with us in our struggle against sin until the very end:

Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. ~ 1 Thessalonians 5:23

²⁴ Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, ²⁵ to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen. ~ Jude 24-25

I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

~ Philippians 1:6

Practical considerations:

- Recognize that we're all at different stages of our sanctification. We also all have set backs.
- Struggling against sin is not merely coming up with physical solutions (i.e. if I punish my body enough, I'll be righteous)
- Struggling against sin is not a matter of will power. It is a spiritual battle. Use spiritual means to fight sin: prayer, Scripture, fellow believers.
- Remember that Jesus is our greatest example and ally in this fight:

¹⁴ Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. ¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. ¹⁶ Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. ~ Hebrews 4:14-16

Others: