

THE
DOCTRINE
OF THE
PERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS,

ILLUSTRATED, PROVED AND APPLIED

BY

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PERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS.

IN every age the Church has been pained by beholding persons whose professions were high and specious, declining from the truth, returning to the world, and again indulging in the lusts of the flesh. Such examples tend to afflict humble believers, and to fill them with apprehensions that their own state is unsafe, and may terminate in destruction. To prevent such an inference, the Scriptures, whenever they predict, or relate, the apostacy of those who had once "the form of godliness," immediately subjoin, as a source of consolation, an assurance that the *real* children of God shall be preserved from defection. Thus the Saviour (Matt. xxiv.) foretelling the appearance of those who should come in his name, and "deceive many," intimates that the elect shall not be deceived. Thus Paul (2 Tim. ii. 19.) mentioning the apostacy of Hymeneus and Philetus, probably eminent teachers in the Church, adds, lest believers should suppose that their own condition was uncertain, and their own faith liable to be destroyed: "nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, the Lord knoweth them that are his"—"they that are built upon the foundation of his unchangeable love and purpose shall never be overthrown." Thus also the apostle John (1 John ii. 19.) having mentioned that many antichrists were in the world who were generally apostates, adds: "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;"—as if he had said, "Whatever plausible appearances they make, they prove, by becoming apostates, that they were hypocrites; for if they had been true believers, renewed by grace and vitally united to Christ, they would have persevered in communion with us; but they went out that they might appear to the world in the real characters of false-hearted professors."

Such is the spirit of the language of Scripture, and in these, and other similar passages, is plainly taught the doctrine of
THE PERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS.

It is a doctrine which lies at the foundation of all the hope which the believer enjoys; it inspires confidence in danger, comfort in sorrow, succour in temptation, and is an "anchor to his soul," amidst tempests the most violent.

Let us inquire what reason we have to receive this doctrine as the truth of God.

In making this investigation we shall arrange our reflections in the following order :

I. We shall definitely state the question at issue, and show what we mean when we maintain the final perseverance of the saints.

II. We shall establish the doctrine by arguments.

III. We shall answer the principal objections against it.

First. It is necessary to begin by clearly stating the doctrine under discussion.

When we say that the saints shall finally persevere, we mean not by the word *saints* those who, having made a profession, and possessing a semblance of religion, are regarded by others as pious ; or those who are confidently esteemed by themselves as godly : or those who are only federally holy—by external consecration to God, as were the people of Israel. We grant that all these may finally and entirely apostatize. But by *saints* we mean those, and those only, who have really been born again ; who have been brought from a state of enmity against God into a state of reconciliation and love ; who have been justified, accepted and adopted ; who are animated by the Holy Spirit, that dwelling both in Christ and them, forms an intimate union between him the head, and them the members.

When we say that such persons shall not finally and entirely fall away from grace, we do not mean that their graces may not languish and decline. The question is not concerning the *decay*, but the *loss* of grace ; not concerning sickness and debility, but total death. A person may faint away, showing no signs of animation, while a principle of life remains ; and spiritual life may undergo so violent a shock as to be brought apparently to the very verge of death, and yet not be extinguished.

Neither do we mean that the *acts* of grace shall never be interrupted ; but only that the *spirit* and *habit* of it shall never be lost. We grant that the saints may fall into many and great sins ; but we maintain that, through the presence of God cherishing the principles of spiritual life once implanted, they shall never so sin, as to fall into that state in which they were before conversion, and of the children of the Holy One, become the children of the devil. They may fall into transgressions that deserve perdition, but God will excite their repentance, animate their faith, enliven their hope, and thus keep them in his covenant and love.

When we say that the saints shall persevere, we mean not, that considered *in themselves*, and with no strength but their own, they will be able to stand. We rest the certainty of their perseverance on the assistance of the Spirit, and the support of God. In themselves, they are weak, unable to begin, to continue, or to finish the life of holiness; but according to the divine covenant and promises, they “are kept by his power through faith unto salvation.”

Neither do we assert that grace, considered *in itself*, is absolutely *incapable of being lost*. It is one thing to affirm that it shall not be lost, and another thing to affirm that it is in its nature absolutely incapable of being lost. We know that the world shall no more be overwhelmed by a flood, but we at the same time admit that it is susceptible of being drowned. We therefore ground the perseverance of the saints, not upon the firmness and unchangeableness of grace, as it subsists in the creature, but upon the love, the power, the wisdom, the faithfulness, and the covenant of Almighty God.

Attending to these distinctions and limitations, we have a proper view of the doctrine before us. It may be conveyed in the following proposition :

All who are truly regenerated and vitally united to Christ, though weak and frail in themselves, shall be so protected and kept by the power of God that the habits of grace shall never be entirely lost, nor the principle of spiritual life totally extinguished; and although they may fall into sins, yet they shall never fall from their interest in the covenant, but shall be renewed to repentance, and be at last brought, by a steady perseverance, to eternal salvation.

This is the sum of the doctrine before us. We proceed

II. To establish its truth.

1. The first argument which we adduce for the perseverance of the saints is derived from *the purposes of God*. By the purposes of God we mean those eternal acts of his will concerning all things that come to pass, which are (if we may so speak) the rule of his operations. Without entering upon any disputes unconnected with the point in question, we shall merely by presenting several texts of Scripture prove that God has purposed the perseverance of his saints in love and holiness, and that his purpose is immutable. The apostle Paul tells us (Rom. viii. 29, 30.) “Whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the first-born among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them

he also called, and whom he called, them he also justified, and whom he justified, them he also glorified." These words which connect a past and future eternity, show the inseparable connexion between the decree of God, and the salvation of his people, and point out the intermediate links which join together the two objects. On the last clause we shall fix our attention: "whom he called them he also justified, and whom he justified, them he also glorified." If language can prove any thing, these words evince beyond all doubt the indissoluble connexion between effectual calling, justification, and glorification.

But there could be no such connexion if it were possible for the saints not to persevere; if they could finally and entirely fall away, it would not be true that whom God justifies he also glorifies. No conditions are here spoken of that man can perform; and to impose them upon the purposes of God, when he himself has given us no such intimation, and then to suspend their execution on conditions thus invented, is to arraign in no small degree his infinite wisdom, and to take an unwarrantable liberty with his holy word.

Another passage which we adduce under this head is John vi. 37—40. "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me: and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out. For I came down from heaven not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me. And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day." Christ had been charged by the Jews with endeavouring to promote his own private purposes and ambitious designs: he tells them in these words, that on the contrary he came to do the will of his Father. This *will* can signify nothing but the eternal purpose of God. Christ describes the persons to whom this purpose related—those who were "given to him by the Father" in the covenant of redemption; and who, as the necessary consequence, believingly "come to him." He informs us that the will of God with respect to them is, that he should "confer on them eternal life;" that he "should lose none of them," and that he should "raise them up at the last day." Hence we conclude that God having purposed to bestow these blessings upon believers, and having committed the accomplishment of this purpose to Christ, who is faithful in all things and endued with power, believers shall certainly be preserved to the end designed: none of them shall be lost through any assaults of Satan; through any deceitfulness of sin; through any destruction of their graces;

out all shall have a glorious resurrection, and a blissful immortality.

I pass by many texts which might be introduced under this head, and proceed to the second argument, which is founded on the *promises of God*.

2. From the great variety of these promises, I select but a few. As recorded by John in his gospel, (x. 27—29.) the Saviour says: “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me; and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.” In the preceding verse the Saviour gives the reason why the Pharisees continued incredulous, notwithstanding his preaching and miracles; “they were not his sheep.” In these verses he declares the condition of his sheep, and promises, in the most explicit manner, their continuance in that state. I know not what terms can possibly be employed to convince a man of the perseverance of the saints, if he remain unconvinced by this passage. The Saviour promises that he “will give them eternal life;” that “they shall never perish” through their own weakness, or remaining corruptions; that none (the word *man* is not in the original) “shall pluck them out of his hand;” and that the omnipotence of the Father and the faithfulness of the Son, guarantee their preservation.

Attend also to that promise of God that is found in Isaiah (liv. 7—10.) “For a small moment have I forsaken thee, but with great mercies will I gather thee. In a little wrath I hid my face from thee in a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord, thy Redeemer. For this is as the waters of Noah unto me: for as I have sworn that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth, so have I sworn that I would not be wroth with thee, nor rebuke thee. For the mountains shall depart and the hills be removed, but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee.” Who that is free from prejudice will not acknowledge that in this language God directly promises his children that he will always continue his loving kindness, and will never remove his affection from them. He has further promised that “the righteous shall hold on their way, and become stronger and stronger,” (Job xvii. 9.) that “the Lord will not forsake his people, for his great name’s sake, because it hath pleased him to make them his people;” (Sam. xii. 22.) that “he loveth judgment, and forsaketh not his saints, for they are preserved forever;” (P’s. xxxvii. 28.)

that he "will never leave nor forsake them." (Heb. xiii. 5.)

Attend to some other plain and explicit declarations: "They shall go from strength to strength, every one of them in Zion appeareth before God." (Ps. lxxxiv. 7.) "The way of the Lord is strength to the upright; the righteous shall never be removed." (Prov. x. 29-30.) "The path of the just is as the shining light that shineth more and more unto the perfect day." (Prov. iv. 18.) "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, they may forget, but I will not forget thee." (Isa. xlix. 15.) "He that heareth my words, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation." (John v. 24.) "I am the living bread that came down from heaven, if any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever." (John vi. 51.) "Whoso eateth my flesh; and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day." (John vi. 54.) "Mary hath chosen that good part which shall not be taken away from her." (Luke x. 42.)

These promises, with many others of a similar kind, "are yea and amen in Christ Jesus;" made by him who "cannot lie," to which he has annexed his solemn oath, for the performance of which he has pledged his faithfulness. They must insure the final happiness of all believers.

3. We pass to a third argument—it is founded on the *covenant of grace*. In the covenant of works we were left to stand in our own strength; but in "the new and better covenant," Christ undertakes for his people, and God has pledged his faithfulness that they shall not be separated from him. The nature of this covenant is explained in various parts of the Old Testament and the New.—I shall invite attention but to a single passage, Jer. xxxii. 40. "I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them to do them good, but I will put my fear in their hearts that they shall not depart from me." Are not these words sufficiently plain and emphatic? Let us consider the force of these expressions; "an everlasting covenant will I make;" a covenant founded on everlasting purposes, and of everlasting duration. But may we not frustrate this covenant, and make it void? No, replies the Lord, "I will not turn away from them to do them good." But may not *we* turn away from him, and thus nullify the covenant with respect to ourselves? No, saith the Lord, "I will put my fear into their hearts, that they shall not depart from me."

Such is the nature, and such are the terms of the "new

covenant." In it the perseverance of man is suspended, not on his own strength, but on the immutability of God's grace and promises. If then God be true; if on the one hand, he will not turn away from his people, and on the other, will so influence their hearts that they shall not depart from him, they must persevere to the end, and be saved.

4. A fourth argument for this doctrine is derived from *the relations which subsist between Christ and believers*.

Let us open the Scriptures, and learn in what terms they speak of this relation. They tell us that believers are the care and charge of Christ, committed to him by the Father; and will he not preserve and keep them? They tell us that they are his "peculiar people," (Titus ii. 14.) his purchased people," (1 Peter ii. 9.) bought by his own precious blood; and will he neglect his own property, and suffer it to be taken from him by craft or power? They tell us that believers are members of his body; and can the head suffer any of the members to perish? They tell us that they are his spiritual seed, to whom he is related as a parent; and can he be so careless of his sons and daughters as to present them at the last day incomplete in number, and say, "Behold me, O Lord! and that portion of the children whom thou hast given me that have not become the children of satan." They tell us that believers are his spouse to whom he has betrothed himself in loving kindness and forever; his bride in whom he delights; his beloved, "over whom he rejoices;" and can he suffer these objects of his affection finally to perish? No! it is impossible. Their spiritual union with Christ infallibly secures their perseverance. By faith they become "one with him;" their life and interest are identified with his; and as long as there is life in him there can be no eternal death in them. It is as natural for him to diffuse his virtues constantly into them, as for a vine to send its sap into its own branches, or the sun to cherish the plants of its own production. He will administer whatever tends to their sustenance and growth, and remove whatever would weaken their Christian graces. "Having once loved them, he will love them unto the end;" having "begun a good work, he will perform it." He has expressly declared, (John xiv. 19.) "Because I live, ye shall live also;" words which represent the salvation of believers as absolutely certain as the eternal happiness of Christ. Who can sever that bond of union which fastens together the Saviour and his friends? "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Nay, in all these

things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Rom. viii. 35—39.) Here is enumerated every thing that can be conceived of; and if "neither height nor depth; if the celestial height of God's holiness, and the infernal depth of man's sin cannot separate believers from the Lord, then the saints are infallibly secured against final apostacy.

Believers are interested in the *intercession of Christ*, and therefore must persevere. We learn from what the Saviour himself tells us that he prays for all whom "the Father hath given to him;" not only for those who were his disciples in the days of his flesh, but for all who shall believe on him to the end of the world. And for what does he pray? That God "would keep them through his own name;" that he would "keep them from evil;" that he would "sanctify them through his truth;" and that they all hereafter may be with him, and "behold his glory"—he therefore evidently prays that God would keep them from *apostatizing*. But is he ever denied in his suit? Is his plea always valid; his intercession continually effectual? Hear his own testimony, (John xi. 41, 42.) "Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me, and *I know that thou hearest me always.*" Since then Christ prays for his people that God would keep them, and since God always hears his prayers, the conclusion is inevitable, that they shall all be saved—that not one shall be lost.

5. The next argument that we urge is derived from "the operations of the Holy Spirit, and his perpetual residence in the hearts of believers."

The Saviour assures his disciples, (John xiv. 16.) "I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may ABIDE WITH YOU FOREVER." That this promise is applicable to *all* true believers, and not exclusively to the apostles, is evident from the following considerations:

The Saviour, in his sacerdotal petition, gives a rule for the interpretation of his prayers, which is equally applicable to his promises: "neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which believe on me, through their word"—words which authorize believers now to draw the same consolation from this promise, as they did whom the Saviour originally addressed.

The blessing promised, the indwelling of the Spirit, is the

fruit of the Saviour's ascension and intercession; and therefore enjoyed by all for whom Jesus Christ is an advocate.

Again.—Those to whom the promise is made, are distinguished not from *other believers*, but from a *wicked world*; as the additional words teach, “even the Spirit of Truth whom the world cannot receive.” For these reasons it is evident that the promise is made to all in every age who are united to Jesus Christ by faith. Thus we have the testimony of the true and faithful witness, that the Spirit, as a guide and comforter, “shall abide with believers *forever*,” and shall be “in them a well of water springing up unto *everlasting life*.” What is his design in regeneration, but their complete holiness? what is his purpose in taking up his residence in their souls, but to fit them for immortal glory? By him they “are sealed,” distinguished and marked, “unto the day of redemption;” (Eph. iv. 30.) the day when they shall be redeemed from the power of the grave, and delivered from all the effects of sin: he surely then cannot leave them. He is “the earnest of their inheritance.” (Eph. i. 14.) Now as an earnest is part of the whole, and is given in assurance of its full enjoyment, the words must import the absolute certainty of the final performance and future bliss of all true believers.

But this doctrine, which we regard as so inestimably precious, which is inseparably interwoven with the mercy and grace of the new covenant, has been strenuously opposed: it is represented as no doctrine of the gospel, no part of the purchase of Christ, a mere invention of man, and a strong temptation to sin. Let us

III. Examine these objections; and we shall find that instead of invalidating, they tend more strongly to confirm this truth.

1. One of the most plausible objections that has been brought against the doctrine, is derived from the eighteenth chapter of Ezekiel, and 24th verse: “But when the righteous turneth away from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, and doeth according to all the abominations that the wicked man doeth, shall he live? All his righteousness that he hath done shall not be mentioned; in his trespass that he hath trespassed, and in his sin that he hath sinned, in them shall he die.”

“Here,” it is said, “we are taught, that a man may be truly righteous and good, and yet become wicked, and die in his sins, and perish forever.”

This conclusion is not authorized by the text for the following reasons:

(1.) If we look at the context, we shall find that this whole chapter does not, in the smallest degree, relate to the mode of God's dealing with his saints in reference to their spiritual and eternal state, but to the manner of his dealing with the house of Israel, in reference to the land of Canaan. We find from the second verse, that the object of God, through the whole of this chapter, is to show the falsity of a proverb then in use among the Israelites—"the fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge;" that is, we are suffering for the sins of our forefathers—it is because *they* have transgressed, that the greater part of our nation were slain in the land of Israel, and the rest carried into captivity. To vindicate the equity of his proceedings, God by his prophet, recounts many of their sins, and by making several suppositions of their risings and fallings, proves that for *their own* transgressions, and not for the transgressions of their fathers, they were afflicted. This being evidently the aim, scope, and object of this chapter, it is plain that this twenty-fourth verse, wrested from the midst of the prophet's discourse, has no relation at all to the question concerning the saint's perseverance. A text intended only to evince the righteousness of the divine dealings to the Jewish people at a peculiar time, cannot, with any show of reason, be given as testimony that they who have been taken into covenant with God, and brought nigh to him by the blood of his Son, can totally and finally fall away. I add,

(2.) That the whole of this chapter not only relates to a matter entirely different from the question which we are discussing, but to a matter in which the principle and rule of God's proceedings are totally different from the rule of his proceedings in that covenant of grace in which believers are interested. In the fourth verse he declares, "the soul that sinneth, it shall die"—*that same* soul, and not another: while in the covenant of grace, he causes "the just to die for the unjust"—the soul that never sinned, for souls that had sinned. Can we then with any shadow of propriety, bring a text from this chapter to decide the doctrine of the saints' perseverance.

(3.) But supposing that these things are not so, still the words would only show, (what we are willing to grant,) the infallible connexion between total apostacy and eternal perdition; but they by no means prove that a really pious man can finally fall away without recovery. In Leviticus xviii.

5 we have these words: "Ye shall keep my statutes and my judgments, which, *if* a man do, he shall live in them;" words which the apostle (Rom. x. 5. Gal. iii. 12.) refers to "the righteousness which is of the law," and which he interprets—"if a man perfectly obey the law of God, he is justified by his works." But are we hence to infer that any man in his present fallen state will perfectly obey the whole law? Paul (Gal. i. 8.) declares, "Though we or an angel from heaven preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached, let him be accursed." But are we thence to infer that an angel from heaven ever will preach another gospel? So, when the prophet says, "*When* the righteous turneth away from his righteousness," is it asserted (supposing that by the term *righteous*, a true saint is denoted,) that he will finally fall away from his righteousness? Is any thing more than a supposition expressed, and a consequence stated?

We might add other reflections; but these are sufficient to show that notwithstanding this passage, our doctrine stands firm and immovable.

2. Another text that is frequently opposed to the doctrine which we are maintaining, is 1 Cor. ix. 27. "I bring under my body, and bring it into subjection, lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway." The denier of the saints' perseverance relying upon this passage, says, "since the apostle Paul was in a possibility of being cast away, other believers may totally fall away from grace." We deny the propriety of this deduction from the text before us; we deny that it was possible for Paul, or that he thought it was possible for him, to be finally destroyed. He every where expresses the most confident assurance of his salvation, and in the very verse preceding the text declares that he "runs not *uncertainly*. In this passage he merely teaches that his salvation is inseparably connected with certain means, and that *if* these means be neglected, then he might be a castaway. But does this prove that it was uncertain whether he would be saved?

Let us compare the language of the apostle here with his sentiments and conduct on another occasion. We learn from the twenty-seventh chapter of Acts, that on his passage to Rome he was overtaken by a dangerous storm, and that he received an express promise from God that not one of those who were in the ship with him should perish. The preservation of all their lives was an event absolutely fixed and certain. But when the sailors let down their boat to escape,

Paul said to the centurion, "except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved." Thus though the preservation of the crew was as certain as the promise of God could make it, still the apostle declared that this preservation was so connected with the use of proper means, that if these means were neglected, the crew would perish. In like manner, though his perseverance in holiness was most certain, he yet declares that proper means were so connected with the attainment of this end, that if these means were neglected, the end would fail. And will not the most strenuous advocates of the saint's perseverance maintain the same principle?

3. Another scripture on which great reliance is placed, is Heb. vi. 4—6. "For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again to repentance, seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame."

But this passage proves nothing against the doctrine for which we are pleading, for these two reasons :

(1.) Admitting that the apostle is speaking of true saints, still the proposition is only *hypothetical*—"if they fall away"—and does by no means assert that they can totally apostatize. It is certain that *if* Gabriel should apostatize he would be cast down to hell; but are we thence to infer that he ever will, or can, apostatize?

(2.) But nothing is said of these persons which is *peculiar to believers*. Not a word of their faith in Christ, nor of their regeneration, nor of the sanctification by the Spirit, nor of their justification through the righteousness of the Saviour. Look at the characteristics here presented, and you find them all capable of being possessed by those who in the apostolic age were destitute of the saving grace of God.

They were "*enlightened*;" but many may be instructed in the nature and design of the Christian religion, and have a speculative knowledge of the doctrines of the gospel, without partaking of that grace which accompanies salvation.

They have "*tasted of the heavenly gift*," have had some faint relish of divine things.

They have been "*made partakers of the Holy Ghost*;" not of his sanctifying influences, but of his ordinary, or of his miraculous gifts—gifts which in the apostolic age, were sometimes bestowed upon those who had no saving grace.

They "*tasted of the good word of God*;" had a superfi

cial knowledge of it, without its powers; were pleased with it for a season, as was Herod with the ministry of John the Baptist; as were the stony-ground hearers who “endured only for a time, because there was no root in them.”

They have “tasted of the powers of the world to come.” The expression in the original is ambiguous: it may mean either that they *performed miracles under the gospel dispensation*, which were sometimes wrought by those who were not the true disciples of Christ, or that, like Balaam, they had some *faint desires for the joys of the heavenly world*.

The apostle in the seventh and eighth verses, appears to decide that these persons are not real Christians—for their character seems to be expressed under the image of “the earth which beareth thorns and briars;” while that of real believers is expressed under the figure of “the earth which bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed.”

4. Another objection against the doctrine which we are maintaining, is derived from Heb. x. 29. “Of how much sorer punishment suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing.” The force of the objection lies in the words “the blood of the covenant wherewith *he* was sanctified.” But the pronoun *he* may refer to the Saviour, who is spoken of immediately before, and not to the person who hath trodden him under foot. Jesus Christ was sanctified or set apart by the Father for the mediatorial office, for he was fore-ordained and appointed for this purpose: and his undertaking to redeem men is called his sanctifying, or devoting himself to the work, as he says; “For their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth.” (John xvii. 19.) The meaning then is—“the blood of the covenant whereby Christ was sanctified, and dedicated to God as the High Priest of his Church—this was esteemed an unholy thing.”

5. Another objection is derived from the *sins of the scriptural saints*. But their greatest falls can only prove that grace in the believer can languish and decline, and that the principle exists, while for a time, it is inactive. So that the lapses of God’s children which are recorded in his word, instead of operating against this truth, have a favourable aspect upon the doctrine of perseverance: and probably one design of the Spirit in penning these narratives might be to confirm the doctrine by giving us so particular an account of their repentance and recovery. If the principle of grace could ever be extin-

guished, and languish into eternal death, we should think it would be under such sinful acts as David, Solomon, and Peter committed. But they arose from their falls, "brought forth fruits meet for repentance," and thus showed that "the incorruptible seed remained in them, which liveth and abideth forever." (1 Pet. i. 23.)

Whatever is said concerning the apostacy of any Christian professors is decisively explained by the apostle; "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." 1 John ii. 19.

REMARKS.

1. This subject should excite *the highest and most devout admiration*. "Stand still, and behold the salvation of the Lord!" View his deliberate determination to save all his saints, and the means which he is employing for this end, and with holy astonishment exclaim, "what hath God wrought." Let your souls, believers, be filled with high and eternal admiration of that sovereign grace which has so certainly secured your salvation, that nothing within or without you, shall ever be able to defeat it, not even "the gates of hell." Shaken you may be, and tossed with tempest," but not utterly overthrown, because you have a foundation that is everlasting. He who commenced the salvation of his children in the eternal purposes of his love; who carried it on by "delivering up his Son" to the agonies of the cross, and exalting him "as Head over all things to the Church;" who sent the Spirit of grace to enlighten, quicken, and purify the soul, will not, after all this amazing labour, leave that work unfinished a work which he has so much at heart. Why should his design be frustrated? Why should he ever abandon his work? If those who enjoy his favour were worthless sinners when by his Spirit he quickened them, will he now when they are 'raised to spiritual life,' utterly forsake them? If a regenerate soul, one that has been rescued out of Satan's hand, were finally to fall, and perish forever; it would argue, if not the want of power to maintain the conquest, yet a change of resolution; and so would bring discredit upon the wisdom of his first design. But shall it ever be said; "God began to build and was not able to finish?" No! believers; all ordinances, providences, temptations, and afflictions; life, death, things present and things to come, are all made subservient to

the purposes of God, and work together to bring about the glorious consummation. When all the parts shall be brought together and set in order, how beautiful will the work appear! Angels and men shall shout for the glory of it; shall acknowledge that God hath done nothing in vain; shall see no deficiency of power, no want of wisdom, no change of resolution. Now begin to magnify the riches of his grace, his love never to abate, his purpose never to alter, his plan of operation never to be frustrated.

2. The doctrine of the saints' perseverance, though often reproached as tending to licentiousness, is a *most powerful incentive to holiness*. It promotes obedience the most cheerful, because it removes all those hard thoughts of God, the tendency of which is to impair our love to him. If we could be persuaded that the Father of Mercies is so careless of some of the children of his family as to permit Satan to enter in and take them away; that Jesus, "the Good Shepherd," is so regardless of his flock as to allow lions and wolves to make havoc of it at their pleasure; that God is so unmindful of his covenant as to suffer the regenerated soul, on whom his heart is fixed, finally to perish; what impression would be produced upon our heart? Are not thoughts like these calculated to quench the flames of love to God, and insensibly to weaken the delight which his children have in the contemplation of his character? But, on the contrary, is there any thing more endearing to the heart of the believer, or more calculated to fix their souls upon God than the assurance that his love to them is unchangeable and eternal? that though the manifestations of it may vary, yet its existence shall never cease.

The doctrine of perseverance displays the love of God to his saints as infinitely free and totally undeserved. It teaches us that he loved them, and gave them to Christ not because of their worthiness, but because of the sovereignty of his grace; that the same grace sanctified and kept them from falling: and that the same grace will exert its power in bringing them all safely into the kingdom of heaven. Can an ingenuous new-born soul resist the power of love so rich, and free, and sovereign? Must it not constrain to gratitude and obedience? Must it not lead the pardoned rebel to strive continually to make some suitable returns of affection and thankfulness.

Surely the value of God's love is inconceivably diminished if we take away its constancy and unchangeableness; if we say that it is of such a nature that he may love his children one day, and the next be alienated from them; that he may

one hour embrace them, and the next cast them into hell; that he may at one time "rejoice over them with joy," and at another be willing to destroy them. The doctrine of perseverance on the contrary teaches us that the love of God, like himself, is immutable; that it may be eclipsed and obscured in its influences for a season, but that it cannot be changed, or entirely turned away. Must not such a consideration render it unspeakably precious to the saints, and lead them to make God the supreme object of their faith, confidence and hope? It is a great mistake to suppose that the fear of hell is the greatest preventive of sin, the most cogent incentive to holiness, and the most powerful stimulant to obedience. It does at times influence the unregenerate, and act as a curb upon their passions, though Saul and Judas, with this restraint, rushed headlong to perdition. But it lays not the axe at the root of sin, and therefore cannot effectually destroy it: it is a spirit contrary to the spirit of "love, of faith, and of a sound mind:" it is a principle from which flows only that servile obedience which is unacceptable to God; that service which is weak and wavering; that reluctant duty which enervates the soul, and takes away all its strength. But love that "casteth out fear" produces obedience which is heart-felt, affectionate, and joyful. And what will tend so much to excite this strong and operative principle, as the persuasion that our covenant-God will never leave nor forsake us, but by his grace "keep us through faith unto salvation!"

What different views of the Divine Being does this doctrine present from that which is exhibited by the opposite sentiment! Shall we call her a loving and affectionate mother who could behold a ravenous beast, which she might easily drive away, tearing her child from her arms, and devouring it before her face, and not put forth her strength for its assistance and deliverance? And shall we suppose that the love of God to his children, which infinitely exceeds the love of the tenderest mother to her offspring, is of a nature like this? Can we suppose that he will carelessly behold them languishing, falling, and sinking into endless misery; that he will see the "roaring lion" coming to snatch them from his arms, and devouring them in his presence, without putting forth his power and the efficacy of his grace for their preservation? No! no! we cannot—dare not, ascribe such a disposition to God. Our doctrine assures us that the divine love is a fountain whence streams of mercy, grace, and refreshment constantly flow; that from this source proceed pardon, peace, purity of heart and life; and that in consequence of it, we "shall not want."

When we consider that from this covenant love our wasted portion has been so often renewed, our dying graces so often quickened, our dreadful backslidings so often healed, the pardon of our sins so often sealed, we must be constrained to cheerful, active, holy obedience.

Let us then hear no more that unfounded objection that a persuasion of the certain continuance of the divine love to believers is the means of making them careless, negligent, and unfruitful. What! are the saints such monsters as to reason thus: "because God loves us with an everlasting love, therefore we will hate him with a perpetual hatred; because he will assuredly give us grace to serve him unto death, therefore we will despise him and trample on his goodness; because he will never leave nor forsake us, therefore we will abandon him, and disobey his commands." Can they be true believers, animated by the Spirit and renewed by grace, who make such deductions from this doctrine? No! they are dead in sin, and in the broad way to final ruin.

Let us show by our *conduct* how unfounded is this objection. Though we may be assured of our perseverance, yet we should live continually pleading for the aid of divine grace, for support in times of trial, and for protection against all our enemies. Our Saviour was absolutely sure of enjoying the reward which was promised to him as Mediator; yet he supplicated for it with as much fervour as any saint can possibly do for holiness and heaven—a noble example to us amidst our confident persuasion of the covenant faithfulness of our God. Let us live near to him, and be ever at the throne of grace, let us "adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things," lest by our careless conduct, the Redeemer be dishonoured, the Holy Spirit grieved, the glorious gospel reproached, weak believers offended, and the hands of the wicked strengthened. Let us "watch and pray lest we enter into temptation." A sense of our own weakness and insufficiency should ever abide on our souls, ever appear in our conduct, ever influence us to "keep the heart with all diligence." The enemies of our peace and salvation are active in seeking to compass our fall and disgrace, and to impair our usefulness and comfort. Let us "fight the good fight of faith;" never relaxing our exertions until we are beyond the reach of danger; never laying down our armour until we are called to wear our crown; never mistaking the field of battle for the bed of repose—"Be sober, be vigilant."

3. This doctrine is the *only solid and sufficient foundation for peace and joy to the believer.*

How can he who supposes that the love and faithfulness of God were not engaged for his preservation, secure for himself solid peace? How can he free himself from perplexing apprehensions and fears? He may say, "For the present I am in a good condition; but so were the rebellious angels who are now groaning in hell. Were they not in a far better state than I am? and yet they are now bound in chains of everlasting darkness. Adam in Paradise had no corrupt nature to tempt him, and no sinful charms of the world to entice him; and yet being in honour he abode not. What hope is there then that I should stand? I, in whom by nature dwelleth no good thing; I who am assaulted continually by a deceitful world and a tempting devil? There is no eternal purpose of God that I shall be preserved; no absolute promise that I shall not depart from him; no constant and effectual intercession of Christ that my faith may not fail: I am left to myself, and what may be the issue I know not." If a person have such thoughts, (and surely every one who rejects the perseverance of the saints should have them) what solid consolation can he enjoy?

But on the contrary, when we embrace this interesting doctrine, and have satisfactory evidence of the renovation of our hearts, of our union to Christ, and of our interest in the covenant, then we have a sanctuary to which we may flee in our fears and dangers. Though there is nothing within, or around us to sustain, yet there is something above in which we can confidently trust. "The Lord is faithful who shall establish and keep you from evil." Rejoice then, ye feeble followers of the Lord; ye shall be kept safely, even unto the end. If there be any immutability in the purpose of God, any fidelity in his promises, any stability in his covenant; if there be any efficacy in the intercession of Jesus, any power in the operations of the Spirit, ye shall persevere. When the powers of earth and the gates of hell assail you, menacing destruction, then "the name" the promises, the oath, and the attributes, "of the Lord," are "a strong tower;" you "can run into it, and be safe." When you are afflicted by the apprehension that you shall finally fall into perdition, then think of your Redeemer; of his compassion on the cross, and his power on the throne. While there is love in his heart, and omnipotence in his hand; while his name is Jesus, and his work salvation, he must "see of the travail of his soul and be satisfied." "Rejoice then in the Lord alway; and again I say, rejoice."