

THE DOCTRINES OF THE BIBLE: SOTERIOLOGY 12: PERSEVERANCE



According to Thiessen (Thiessen, 1949), perseverance is the Biblical doctrine of remaining faithful to the faith in Jesus Christ you have accepted. Are there examples of believers who have fallen away despite the promise of Jesus that He will never let go of us? Can we backslide and then get back to the faith?

DEFINITION

The only time the word “perseverance” occurs in the Bible this this exact form, is here:

¹⁸Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all **perseverance** and supplication for all saints; – **Ephesians 6:18**

Paul explains that while the believer has to clothe himself with the full armour of God (Ephesians 6:11-17), they also have to pray constantly for protection using the same armour they are told to put on. In short, perseverance is to remain in the faith, irrespective of the circumstances.

DOCTRINE

Before we continue, let us ponder for a moment what doctrine is, since the past 11 lessons all dealt with the various doctrines of man’s salvation and the role of Jesus Christ in each.

There are no less than 23 occurrences of the word doctrine where it is attributed to Paul. Thus, it is clear that doctrine is vitally important. If it were not, he would not have wasted time preaching about it. Paul and Peter were the two most important exponents on the importance of doctrine.

The same word occurs 12 times in the gospels (there may be a number of instances where the same situation is referred to by the various gospel writers). It occurs another four times in Acts, where Paul was not the speaker, but Luke realises the importance of doctrine as the foundation of the newly-founded church and specifically mentions it. Jesus mentions the word three times in Revelation although in each case it refers to incorrect or false doctrine and He warns us against it. The word also occurs numerous times in the Old Testament.

The Cambridge dictionary describes the word doctrine as a belief or a set of beliefs, especially political or religious ones, that are taught and accepted by a particular group.

HOW DO WE KNOW THIS IS TRUE DOCTRINE?

That perseverance is an important doctrine for us is shown in how it is revealed to us. Since the Word teaches it, it applies to us in every way.

IT IS IN GOD’S PLAN FOR US

When God says something is going to happen, it does, exactly as He said it would:

²⁴The LORD of hosts hath sworn, saying, Surely as I have thought, so shall it come to pass; and as I have purposed, so shall it stand; – **Isaiah 14:24**

Many years ago, the pastor in our church once made the comment that “God said it, I believe it, and that settles it”. The worship leader was quick to react, but in a brotherly way: “God said it and that settles it. Whether you or I believe it or not is totally irrelevant.”

When we think that we may lose our salvation, Paul is quick to correct this:

³⁵Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ³⁶As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. ³⁷Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. ³⁸For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, ³⁹Nor 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. – **Romans 8:35-39**

Our perseverance is tested, for some more than others, and none of those aspects Paul mentions can separate us from the love of God. However, we need perseverance to continue despite the obstacles.

JESUS CHRIST PRAYS AND MEDIATES FOR US

The best example is that Jesus prayed for us, that we be strengthened:

¹¹And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to thee. Holy Father, **keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me**, that they may be one, as we are. ¹⁵I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, **but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil.** – **John 17:11 and 15**

Years later, at this very moment, Jesus Christ is still interceding for us, but now in heaven, at the right hand of God the Father:

³⁴Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, **who also maketh intercession for us.** – **Romans 8:34**

IT SHOWS GOD IS ABLE TO DO WHAT HE HAS PROMISED

Paul says that God does not just start a good work in us, but that He will see it through:

⁶Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will **perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.** – **Philippians 1:6**

“Until the day of Jesus Christ” refers to the imminent rapture of the church, after which we will see Jesus in all his glory, and our perseverance will be rewarded. God will deliver on his promises.

IT REPRESENTS THE PROGRESSIVE CHANGE IN THE BELIEVER

As a new creature in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17), we are elevated from the “old things” to what “has become new”. We are now seen by God as having been crucified with Christ (Galatians 2:20). Jesus said that He gives eternal life:

²⁸And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. – **John 10:28**

The progressive change is that we were sinners, then were saved (regenerated), we made new creatures and now are being sanctified (see the previous lesson for more on sanctification) and are being prepared for the final revelation. The regeneration is an incredible event what does not always receive the emphasis it deserves since it is not necessarily physically visible. It is supernatural and the work of the Holy Spirit in this regard is what produces the new life. This takes place in the innermost parts of the person, while the body may be unaffected. Regeneration guarantees a changed spirit now, and a changed body in the future:

⁵⁰Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption. ⁵¹Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, **but we shall all be changed**, ⁵²In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. ⁵³For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. – **1 Corinthians 15:50-53**

Without delving into the method of the rapture here, one needs to just consider the immense scope of this verse. Paul says that this is a mystery, which God Himself revealed to Paul and which he now shares with the church in Corinth, and with all believers. Just imagine the following:

We have to be changed because flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God (verse 30), and this is where we are heading – heaven. In order to effect this, bodily changes are necessary:

1. There are some of us who may never experience physical death (verse 51, we shall not all “sleep” where sleep means to die physically).
2. We will all be changed (verse 51). Whether we are dead or alive at the time, the change is instant, in a moment (verse 52).
3. Those who have already died at the coming of Jesus Christ and whose bodies have decayed, will be raised from the grave (verse 52). Whether the body is available in any form or shape to be raised is not relevant. God knows better.
4. We will all be changed (verse 52) to receive immortal and incorruptible bodies (verse 53).

To reach heaven we have to transcend the boundaries and limitations of time and space. Paul says this will take place in an instant, in a moment or as quickly as you can blink your eyes. If you ever wondered if time travel is possible, this event will be out of this world, literally! Your rebirth was an inner, supernatural change. The rapture completes this process when the body is incorruptibly changed, and you are in the presence of God in all His glory, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

CONCLUSION

There are a number of objections to this doctrine, among which is that we are constantly being warned not to stray. It is a loving Father that warns us of the dangers of life. He will ultimately reward us for our perseverance. Forget the new (and false) motto the world wants you to adopt, to “stay safe”. No government on Earth can guarantee your safety, and they could not care less about it. Their “safety” is nothing but deception:

³For when they shall say, **Peace and safety**; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape. – **1 Thessalonians 5:3**

Who are the “they” who talk about peace and safety? They are the false leaders. Who are the “them” following this? They are those who have not placed their trust in Jesus Christ as their Saviour. They will not escape the destruction.

Stay in Jesus and nothing the world throws at you will cause you to stumble – 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.

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