

THE PERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS

THE question as to what is commonly called "the perseverance of the saints," includes in it another and a most serious one. That question is as to the footing upon which the believer, justified by faith, stands before God. Thus it is a point of the greatest moment to ascertain what the Scripture truth is. It is not too much to say, that the nature and character of the peace which as Christians we enjoy, and of our life and walk as such, are all materially affected by the view we entertain with regard to the truth before us.

I would at once then put the question, What is the nature of the salvation we have received, and what the footing upon which we now stand as believers before God?

1. Clearly, we stand as such, before God "in Christ," "accepted in the Beloved." (Eph. i. 6.) Christ in glory, risen from the dead, having finished in our behalf the work of atonement, stands as our representative in the presence of God. So fully, that what He has passed through for us *we* are accredited with. Thus we are said to be "dead," "buried," "quickened," and "raised up" *with Him*; and even "seated together in heavenly places *in Christ Jesus*." (Rom. vi. 8; Eph. ii. 5, 6.) His being in heaven for us is thus as if we had actually gone in there and taken possession already of our final home; and there we are, presented to the eye and heart of God

as identified with Him who, "when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high."

Our former state and condition as sinners has thus found its judgment in the cross. "Our old man was crucified with Christ:"—not *should*, or *shall* be, but "was;" not was crucified *in me*, but "*with Him*." (Rom. vi.) Thus, for God and for faith, the old standing has passed away. "We are not in the flesh" (Rom. viii. 9); "not of the world, even as Christ is not of the world." (John xvii. 14.) To sum up all in a word, the apostle's words as to the Christian's place are, "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, *all* things are become new." (2 Cor. v. 17.)

I know that all these things are read, or sought to be read, in the light of experience, and referred to an inward work in the soul instead of to our place in Christ, and what belongs to it. Yet Scripture says distinctly in this last case, as in others, "if any man be *in Christ*," and then uses expressions which would certainly not be true of "*any* man in Christ," (mark) if applied to the inward work. "*All* things new," who indeed can pretend to, that knows anything of himself? Thus these blessed texts taken from their true application are made instruments of self-torture for souls seeking honestly but blindly to find in themselves evidences that they are accepted of God. While, with the eye on Christ, and the knowledge that we are in Him, and therefore, "as He is, so are we" (1 John iv. 17), they become the sweetest, fullest assurances of where divine love has placed us, and what we are to God as in His Son. Is there any "old thing" in Him? If I am thus accepted of God, are not the "old things passed away"? are not "all things become new"? Yes, indeed, wholly. I can take it in the simplest way,

and believe it to the fullest extent, and find it unutterable joy, and only that.

Well, this is how we are accepted. We have travelled through death in Christ, and come up out of it. We have taken possession, in Him, already of our place above. We are accepted of Him where no whit of the "old things" is found. Look at this, beloved reader, and then answer me, oh answer me—is this *security*? Will Christ fail to satisfy God? Will God, who has accepted Him for me, repent, and again turn to what I am? Alas for me if He does! Alas for me and for you; and that, not at our worst, but at our best!

But no; that is impossible; for with Christ—in Christ's death—we have died. "He that is dead is justified from sin." (Rom. vi. 7, *margin*.) Our life, our history, ended with the cross in complete and utter judgment. We live before God in Christ alone. His own words are now, "Because *I* live, ye shall live also." (John xiv. 19.)

2. And thus have we "peace;" and upon such ground as this is "peace" in the proper sense alone possible. I need scarcely waste words in proving that it is peace that God is preaching by Jesus Christ (Acts x. 36); and that, "being justified by faith, we have *peace* with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." (Rom. x. 1.) Not only "the full assurance of faith" (Heb. x. 22), but "the full assurance of *hope*" also is what God designs for us. (Heb. vi. 11.) This is peace as to the past, the present, *and the future*; and this is alone true peace. However blessed my portion in the present, if there is danger that I lose it, who shall say I ought not to be afraid? It is no comfort to say to me, "It all depends upon yourself," when "myself" is just what I have learned most of all to be afraid of. Ought I to have "perfect peace" in looking onward to the future, if it is to consist in assurance that *I* shall never backslide

and depart, though many have! If I read, "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on Thee," I can understand that, if I may trust Him for the future too. If I may say, in confidence that I have committed my soul into His hands, "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to *keep* what I have committed unto Him against that day" (2 Tim. i. 12), then indeed all is well. If He will not keep it, except I do my part (little or much), then how can it be peace?

To trust Him fully, if He be all in it, is surely well, and what I ought to do; but, on the other hand, I *ought* to distrust myself. "Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall." But if I am not to think I stand, and yet my salvation depends upon my standing, ought I to be at rest?

3. But, blessed be God, it is not so. Perfected as a Saviour through the suffering of the cross, Christ is become "the author of *eternal* salvation unto all them that obey Him." (Heb. v. 9.) What is "eternal" salvation? and when do I receive it? Well, Paul says to us, that God "HATH saved us." (2 Tim. i. 9.) Is not that, then, "eternal salvation"? If I have obeyed Him—for the gospel calls for obedience, most surely (Rom. x. 16)—if I have obeyed His call of grace, and come to Him, is He not the author of eternal salvation to me just then? or must I wait till there is no more danger before I can speak of being saved for ever?

4. But redemption, too, is eternal. "He hath entered in once into the holy place, having obtained *eternal redemption* for us. (Heb. ix. 12.) Well, are we redeemed? Yes, assuredly, "we HAVE *redemption* through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace. (Eph. i. 7.) Is that, then, "for ever"? Alas!

through how many of the plainest testimonies of Scripture the legality and unbelief of the human heart will work their way. Yet there it lies, the only true and perfect rest for the conscience, as we are witness to ourselves; there it lies before us, preaching peace without presumption, because "peace through Jesus Christ." Will He rebuke me, think you, because I cast this burden with all other burdens on Himself? May I not cast this care for the future too upon Him? Will He not justify my trust? Will He not care also for this?

5. But my "life," too, is "eternal." I already *have* "everlasting life." How He has compassed me about with these eternities, as if to build me up an infinite rampart against doubt! For thus saith the Lord Himself, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word and believeth on Him that sent me, HATH everlasting life, and shall *not* come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life." (John v. 24.)

Beloved reader, these are the Lord's own words. Solemnly uttered and affirmed as truth, they link the present and the future of the believer indissolubly together. He says, the one who *has* eternal life (in the present) *shall* not (in the future) come into condemnation. Do you believe that? There is no "guarding" of that statement, such as men suggest; no "if" nor "but" to mar the blessed peace that that assurance gives. Are you going to put it in? Are you going to bring some other Scripture to qualify or modify the simple meaning of this? It is in vain; for "Scripture cannot be broken," and He who gave it cannot so deny Himself. The whole idea of balancing one passage with another, as if, taken simply as they stand, they were opposed to one another, is false, and a fatal denial of the truth of God. What simple soul could lay hold of the truth in a statement which had to be balanced with

an unknown number of other statements, before the precise meaning could be settled? The divine Lover of men's souls could not speak so to them. He could not use words which, taken simply and literally as they stand, would deceive. No, He could not do this. And thus, if I get what really He has said, I may be sure He has said nothing else to contradict or empty it of meaning. I may rest my soul upon it safely. I may build on it as on a rock.

I know few sadder signs of the little authority the word of God has in the present day, than this deplorable habit of ranging Scripture against Scripture. On one side a text is produced; instead of reverent inquiry as to what it means, a text in opposition to it, as men deem, is produced. James' "justification by works" is put in the one scale; Paul's "justification by faith" in the other. Arminian texts are balanced with Calvinistic. Alas! God's word is gone as an authority, and common sense and human reason become supreme judges as to the side on which the scale of truth inclines.

How unlike our Lord's "Verily, verily!" What a relief to come back to that out of the fog of human uncertainty! "He spake as One that had authority, and not as the scribes." Do you fear to trust Him, beloved reader, apart from all His commentators? Certainly, then, what He says of the believer is, that he *has* everlasting life, and *shall* not come into condemnation, but—here is the confirmation of it—*is* passed from death unto life. His future condition is settled by his present one; for already he *has* "EVERLASTING life." He is alive to God for ever.

6. The Lord repeats this in another well-known passage: "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 one pluck them out of my hand." (John x. 27, 28.)

Now, if anything could add strength to the former statement, it would be precisely what we find here. For it is not only now, "I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish;" but if people suggest, "It is only if they hear Christ's word," "it is only while they follow Him," this is met by the assertion, My sheep *do* hear my voice;" "they *do* follow me." You may say, if you will, "not always," "not continually;" but our Lord says nothing one way or other about that. He takes for granted, so to speak, that they do hear and follow. You have no right to suppose anything else. It is not said that they hear always, or follow without any straying; still on the whole they hear and follow, and He gives them eternal life, and they *never* perish, nor shall any pluck them out of His hand. If you say (with some) they may pluck themselves out, *then* they would perish; but, He says, they never shall.

7. One more text on this side of the question, and as to this point more decisive perhaps for many. The apostle John, with the case of certain apostates before him, tells us in words that apply to very many since: "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." (1 John ii. 19.)

The decisiveness of this passage in connection with those just quoted, is in its taking up so simply and decidedly just the point which many think to be uncovered by the others. It asserts without any qualification the exact doctrine of the "perseverance of the saints:"—"if they had been of us, they *would* have continued with

us;" their going out made it manifest that they were not of us.*

Surely than this nothing can be plainer or more complete. With this, then, we may end the direct proofs of the doctrine. We have found the foundation of it to be a standing in Christ before God, which cannot change because He cannot. We have found that as sinners we had our death and judgment in the cross of Christ, and are now in Him, the old things passed away entirely. We have found that God has saved us, and that salvation is eternal; that we have also "eternal redemption" and "everlasting life;" that the Lord's own assertion as to His own is, that they shall not come into condemnation, nor ever perish; that His sheep do hear His voice, and follow Him; and that the apostle tells us that *real* Christians *will* "continue" such.

I beseech, again, my reader's earnest attention to the point, that thus, too, alone is perfect peace with God possible—peace as to the past, the present, and the future—"full assurance of hope" without presumption.

The way is now open to look at the passages, which are supposed to teach the possibility of salvation being lost.

A large number—I might say, the largest number by far—of the texts which seem to imply the possibility of the soul being lost that has once believed unto salvation, belong to a class of which 1 Cor. ix. 27 furnishes the most striking example. It is thus the passage most frequently of all upon the lips of objectors. They ask commonly,

* The force of the original is, "that none were of us," which the whole passage proves to be the only possible sense. "All are not" is a Greek idiom for "none are," as in Matt. xxiv. 22: "*no* flesh should be saved," which is literally, "all flesh should not be saved;" or in Luke i. 37: "with God everything shall not be impossible," i.e. "nothing shall be impossible."

the moment you speak of being safe for ever, "Was not Paul himself afraid of being a castaway?" But the text says nothing about any *fear* he had. It does say this, "I keep 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."

It would be poor work to seek in anywise to blunt or evade the force of such Scriptures. They have their use most surely in the divine wisdom which inspired them. But just precisely because they have, we must enquire the more carefully what exactly they *do* mean. The word of God will bear the strictest and most thorough examination. Precise accuracy will only be shunned by those who either on the one hand have little faith in the perfect inspiration of every word of it, or else fear to face honestly the full light of truth.

Now it is remarkable, upon looking at such passages as that before us, that they none of them put things in the way which would be simplest and easiest to put them, supposing eternal life or salvation were things that might be lost. They do *not* say, "lest, after I have been saved, I myself should be a castaway," or "lest, after being born again," or "lest, after having had eternal life, I myself should be a castaway." Such passages are not to be found anywhere in Scripture, and surely that is to be marked. How easy for divine wisdom to have settled the whole question for any honest believer by a single sentence of that sort! But there is nothing of the kind. The supposition in the text is, that one who had "*preached to others*" might *himself* "be a castaway." But who doubts that? And who doubts, or ought to doubt, that, as there is a way of holiness, which leads to everlasting life, on the one hand, so there is on the other a way of sin, of

elsewhere (ch. i. 2), he tells them for himself that he was one who was upon this way of life. He kept under his body, and brought it into subjection, not tolerating its lusts, nor walking in fleshly indulgence, in order not to be a "castaway;" *i. e.* one rejected or reprobate. He had no fear of being such. He took the way which led him heavenward joyfully and confidently, "not uncertainly." He knew the grace which had called him with a holy calling would not fail to carry him through. He knew that God had saved him already, and given him, *not* the spirit of fear, but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind. (2 Tim. i. 7-9.) And he yielded himself up intelligently and joyfully, to be led along the way of holiness unto "the end, everlasting life." If any, professing faith in Christ, were doing otherwise, he meant to warn them by his example what faith did for the soul who had it; because only "as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God."

This in nowise implies that those who are sons of God may cease to be so by refusing to be led of the Spirit. That is mere human argument, and of the poorest kind; for not only do plain Scriptures, as we have seen, forbid the supposition, but it is in real opposition to the passage itself; for (it tells us) the sons of God are those who *are* led. And there is nothing said in the whole context to show that continuance is at all in question. Those who are sons are simply marked out from those that are not.

It is quite true, too, that true children of God may, alas! be dull and careless, and poor followers of such a leader. They may fall and get bemired with the slough of sin. I dare not say what a believer might not do, if not cleaving closely to his Guide and Strength. What David did, what Peter did, are solemn warnings for all time. Still one easily discerns that these were things the

result of sloth and self-confidence, fallen into, not sought out, and from which He who had them in His care recovered them. *Characteristically*, even of a David or a Peter, surely we could say, they were led of the Spirit of God, and manifested to be His sons. At a particular moment, they might not manifest what they were. But it is only of what is characteristic this text in Romans speaks. It is the determining for us where the line is to be drawn between those born of God in reality and those only assuming to be so; a rule we may not in many instances be able to apply, but which has none the less immense value, because it frees the gospel (as I have already said) from that charge of giving license to sin, which men are always ready and eager to bring against it.

How many would object to us in that way, their own supposition (which they have no title to make) of believers falling into open sin, and going on, and dying in it; and then turn round on us with the question, Would such an one be saved? To all that the one sufficient answer is, "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God." You have no right therefore to make the supposition; the latter part of what you suppose would (for me) make entirely untrustworthy the claim to *be* a believer.

These passages, then, are guards against the "turning the grace of God into lasciviousness," a thing which Jude notices as done in his day (*v.* 4), and which certainly there is no less danger of in the present. On the other hand, legality is never a real guard of holiness, but the destruction of it. "The strength of sin is the law;" and to put the fear of falling away before a soul, in order to keep him right, is only to pervert the whole character of his life and service. Just so far as he takes up the motive we present to him, he becomes really one living to

himself, in a religious way no doubt; but none the less really, and none the less offensively to God. The love of Christ, it is assumed, will not keep me straight, except a large measure of self-love works along with it! What a dishonor to Him, and what a lowering of the whole character of God's work in the soul of a saint! Except I am in danger of eternal damnation, I shall be sure to go wrong. But the Lord says, "If ye love Me, keep my commandments;" and the apostle, "Though I give my body to be burned, and have not love" ("charity" in the common version), "it profiteth me nothing" (1 Cor. xiii. 3); the apostle John again, "There is *no fear* in love." (1 John iv. 18.) How does all this agree with the advocacy of a principle essentially and necessarily a principle of fear? for if there is danger of being lost, I ought certainly to be afraid of it.

There are some other texts, nearly akin to the standard passage in Corinthians, which we may now take up. I believe we shall find, if we have got hold of what has now been before us, that we have already the key to the understanding of these also. In Col. i. 22, 23, for example: "To present you holy and unblameable and unreprouvable in His sight: *if* ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel;" or again, in Heb. iii. 6: "Whose house are we, *if* we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end;" and verse 14: "For we are made partakers of Christ, *if* we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end." Addressing a number of professed Christians, these "ifs" had their right and necessary place. Men *were* giving up faith in Christ, as this epistle to the Hebrews conclusively shows. The warning was perfectly in place. Nor could men be saved

while giving up this faith; drawing back from Christ would be drawing back unto perdition. Yet this same apostle could in the selfsame epistle put those who had believed unto salvation in a different class altogether from those who could so apostatize: "*We* are not of them who draw back unto perdition"—not simply, "who *have* drawn back," which there could be no need to say, but "who draw back;" we are not the sort of people who do that—"but of them that believe to the saving of the soul;" that is the class to which we belong, and it is a different one to the other.

Most clearly, then, the apostle did not mean that *such* believers, positively saved ones, could draw back unto perdition. It was needful, on the other hand, to warn professors about it for two reasons at least. First, because the giving up of Christ put outside the possibility of salvation altogether, for none else could save. Secondly, because it was and is important, that men should not rest in a faith they had, or thought they had, in times past, which was not true for the present moment. Faith that I had faith once is not faith in Christ, and may be a dream of my own. Just so, the vain argument that "*I was* converted once, and therefore"—which is vain because it is a mere belief in what my heart may have deceived me. If I am trusting my conversion or my faith, the result may prove I had neither. If I trust *Christ*, *He* cannot deceive, and so I am safe. "Blessed are *all* they that put their trust in *Him*." (Ps. ii. 12.)

There was need to guard a point like that, to prevent men putting "I trusted" for "I trust." "I trusted," is my own thought of what I did. "I trust," makes Christ indeed the object of that trust. Therefore it was needful to say your confidence must be a thing held fast, if you are to be presented blameless in His sight at last.

Belief there might have been, of a certain sort, in Christ, without its being to salvation. Such faith, never having been of divine workmanship, had a natural tendency to wear out and come to nothing. We see many instances in every one of the (so-called) "revival" movements. Nor are they a proof necessarily of anything wrong in the preaching which produces them. The Lord gives us in Matthew xiii. plain assurance that where the true seed of the gospel is sown, and He the Sower of it, such things will occur. There will be cases such as his who "heareth the word, and anon (immediately) with joy receiveth it; 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." Such a man believes: he is not insincere, not a hypocrite; simply, the Word, like seed in stony ground, has no *root* in him; his heart, never ploughed up by conviction of sin, remains in unchanged hardness. The joy in him was too "immediate;" there was no finding out of self, no taking the place of lost, that Christ might save. He believed a doctrine; never came to Jesus. He had joy, not peace. There was no change in the man himself, and no root. Mark, it was not what had root that withered, but because it had *no* root it withered away. It would not have withered had it had root.

Scripture then, which teaches that there is such a thing as "believing for a while," teaches too its character. And while we see the need of the admonition as to the necessity of continuance in the faith, we see also abundantly that those who believe to the saving of the soul belong at all times to a different class from those who draw back unto perdition.

There are yet some passages, however, which require special notice. Thus undoubtedly Heb. vi. 4-8 furnishes

us with the example of hopeless apostacy; and the previous condition of these apostates is described in terms which appear to many altogether too strong to apply to unconverted professors merely. They "were once enlightened," had "tasted of the heavenly gift," and been "made partakers of the Holy Ghost," had "tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come." It is just this which makes their case so hopeless, that all the goodness of God, as displayed in Christianity, has been, so to speak, spent in vain upon them. Or rather, it has been as rain from heaven nurturing only thorns and briers in the unfruitful soil. Yet, the apostle adds, as to those in whom he *had* seen fruit (v. 10), "beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things which accompany salvation, though we thus speak." (v. 9.) Thus, again he carefully guards himself from being misunderstood to mean that those whose faith had works, and had thus proved itself a living faith, could so fall away.

This alone, for really simple souls, might suffice as to the whole passage. It surely ought to be enough to hear the apostle say that, although he is speaking thus, he is persuaded better things of those who have shown "work and labor of love toward His name." Yet it is well to enquire, in its place, from what the men before us here apostatize. But observe again, then, there is no mention of their having been born again, or converted, or justified, or saved, or having had forgiveness of sins, or eternal life. Of none who are declared to be in that condition is there ever any doubt of their security, or any hint that after all they might be lost. On the contrary, the thought is carefully guarded against, as we have seen.

But as to these—

They were "enlightened." And "the true light *lighteth* every man which cometh into the world" (John i. 9); but

that this is not necessarily saving knowledge is plain. There may be conviction where there is no conversion, as every day shows. Yet how perilous to turn from the light which has thus borne witness to our souls!

They had, "tasted of the heavenly gift," and "of the good word of God." But so had he who received seed upon the stony ground; he "immediately *with joy* received it." We see that too, often. The word is welcomed; it is not *understood*. Only "he who received seed into the *good* ground is he that heareth the Word, and *understandeth it*." (Matt. xiii. 23.) It is possible thus to have a false peace patched up, and to find joy in a gospel, which after all has never been apprehended by the soul, and has never brought forth fruit in it at all.

Besides this, they "were made partakers of the Holy Ghost," and had tasted of "the powers of the world to come." This last expression refers to miraculous powers,* and the "world to come" is literally the "coming age." Here, as elsewhere, it refers to the millennium, when the signs and wonders which signalized the early days of Christianity will be repeated. The prophet Joel (ii. 28, 29) witnesses of this; and his prophecy the apostle Peter could take up at Pentecost, and apply to what God did by His Spirit at that time. Yet the prophesy itself, however much it might take in Pentecost, goes on to the restoration of Israel in the last days. Miracles could therefore fitly be called "powers of the coming age." But we have the Lord's assurance that men might *thus* be "partakers of the Holy Ghost"—prophesy and do mir-

* The word (*dunameis*) in the plural is only used either for "miracles" (as chap. ii. 4, for instance), or for angelic orders, "principalities and *powers*," or once in the expression (Matt. xxiv. 29; Mark xiii. 25; Luke xxi. 26): "the *powers* of the heavens shall be shaken."

acles (which could be done only through the Holy Ghost)—and yet after all He might say to them, “I *never* knew you.” (Matt. vii. 22, 23.) It is clear therefore that in this sense they might be “partakers of the Holy Ghost” and yet be lost. The Spirit crying “Abba, Father,” in us is another thing. Those who are thus “sealed by that Holy Spirit of promise” are “sealed unto the day of redemption.” (Eph. i. 13; iv. 30.) In this case therefore there is no possibility of being lost.

We see, then, that what we are assured by the constant tenor of the word of God, and by the very context of the passage itself, *must* have been the condition of those who are spoken of as drawing back unto perdition, is confirmed by the very terms by which they are described. For none of these imply that they were either born again or justified. They had now openly given up Christ, and by going back to the ranks of those who had crucified Him, “crucified to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put Him to an open shame.” It is open apostacy that is in question, going back to the Judaism out of which they had come, and what hope could there be for such?

The “wilful sin” of chap. x. 26 is plainly of the same nature. People were forsaking the Christian assembly (v. 25), taking the place of “adversaries” to Christ (v. 27), treading under foot the Son of God, counting the blood of the covenant by which they had been “sanctified” (or set apart as Christians) an unholy thing. They might say perhaps, “Well, after all, we have God’s own appointed sacrifices still.” But the apostle answers, that upon that ground “there remaineth *no more* sacrifice for sins,” nothing that has virtue to cleanse a sinner; but, on the contrary, “a certain fearful looking-for of judgment and of fiery indignation which shall devour the adversaries.”

There may be those who read this who may be other-

wise troubled at these verses, and I cannot refrain from adding a word for such. Many do not see that the hopelessness of the state of those described consists in this, that they have given up the only ground upon which salvation is possible. It is not mere failure, getting into the world or into sin, that these verses speak of. It is the wilful rejection of Christ as Saviour. They crucify Him afresh, trample Him under foot, count the blood of the covenant an unholy thing. In a word, it is not any mere ordinary backsliding, as I have said, but apostacy from Christianity itself, and that is hopeless.

Beside this, there is another thing. The "impossibility" spoken of in Heb. vi. is impossibility to renew them again unto *repentance*. There was no impossibility in their being saved, if they *did* repent. The word remains ever true for all, while this day of gospel grace lasts—"Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." If any one *will*, therefore, he may. No sin is unpardonable to such, or can shut him out from the salvation that is in Christ Jesus.

But I pass on to the consideration of another example of apostacy which is given in 2 Peter ii. 20, 22: "For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. . . . But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed, to her wallowing in the mire."

Now here again there is said to have been "the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" in those who, without doubt, "draw back unto perdition." And not only so, but this knowledge had had effect upon them, for it had drawn them out of "the pollutions of the world."

Yet it does not require any very close attention to the apostle's words, to discern here also how little he conceived these apostates to have ever been true Christians. Why had it passed into a proverb that the dog would return to his vomit again, and the washed sow to her wallowing in the mire? What did such a proverb mean, but that a washed sow *remained all the while* a sow, and that, inasmuch as the washing had not changed her nature, she would go back as a matter of course to her old habits? It was simple enough to know she would. And so one who had in the same way been merely washed from the *pollutions* of the world—from defilements from without—but whose nature was never changed, might be expected to fulfil that proverb.

But now mark the difference, as pointed out in this same epistle, where there was true faith. Speaking of those to whom that knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord was indeed eternal life, he describes them as “having escaped,” not the pollutions merely, but “the *corruption* that is in the world through lust.” (Chap. i. 4.) Here the need of the soul had indeed been divinely met. It is not in this case external pollution merely, but the “lust,” the internal corruption of the heart, that is dealt with. Christ is known as the rest and satisfaction of the soul. The heart is changed; with a *new* nature, new desires, new affections have come in; and there is no proverb, that if a sow be turned into a sheep it will go back into the mire.

Thus, then, we have looked at the most prominent of the texts, which might seem to imply the possibility of the soul being finally lost that has once believed unto salvation. It is not likely that other passages will present much difficulty, if the truth as to these is once distinctly seen. There is but one other text which I would briefly,

in closing, remark upon; first, because it furnishes the very expression, "falling from grace," which is the technical one with many for their whole doctrine; and secondly, because there is not a passage which more distinctly marks the deeply important principle which is in question. The words in full are these:

"Christ is become of none effect unto you, whosoever of you *are justified by the LAW*; YE are fallen from *grace*." (Gal. v. 4.)

The mere quotation of the passage ought to be enough, one would think, to expose the common misapplication of it. It is he who goes back from the grace of the Gospel to justify himself by the deeds of the law—it is this man, the legalist, and not the one fallen into immorality, or gone back into the world, who is "fallen from grace." And the meaning is not that even to such God ceases to be gracious, but that the *man* has left that ground himself,

Now it is just the principle contained in this that is so important. What is it to be "justified by the law"? Does he who maintains that "man must do his part and God will do His" approach or not that ground of being justified by the law? Law works are not bad works. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God" is its first and great commandment; and the second is like unto it—"Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." Thus the law is holy; and the commandment holy, and just, and good. Yet "as many as are *of* the works of the law"—standing upon that ground before God—"are under the curse." Where then are they who suppose that *their* love to God or man, their maintenance of good works, will have something at least to do with their final salvation? Doubtless with many the language of their heart is beyond that of their creed. And there we must leave it.

Let us close with the confident assurance of the apostle's words—the words of the Holy Ghost by him :

“God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were *yet* sinners, Christ died for us. MUCH MORE THEN, being *now* justified by His blood, we *shall* be saved from wrath through Him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, MUCH MORE, *being* reconciled, we *shall* be saved by His life.” (Rom. v. 8–10.)

Christian reader, is that *your* assurance?

F. W. G.

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