

## ON THE PERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS.

(Extracted from "The Doctrine of the Church of England at the time of the Reformation, of the Reformation itself, of Scripture, and of the Church of Rome, briefly compared with the Remarks of the Regius Professor of Divinity."—Oxford, 1831.)

"Kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation" (1 Peter i. 5).

THE doctrine of the perseverance of the saints is not of *their* perseverance, but of *God's* faithfulness. Their confidence is not that they would not fail, but God; it is a trust in his promises, as the opposite is unbelief. They have "known and believed," as St. John expresses it, "the love that God hath to them:" and they rest and hang upon this as a child upon a parent, yea, much more. Nor is this present enjoyment, or confidence in the favour and known love of the everlasting God (how better known than in the gift of his only and glorious Son?) merely stayed by the witness in their own hearts, but is given the stable foundation of testimony which they dare not disbelieve, yea, which it is sin not to believe, and a great dishonour to God. They believe that God did not shew them this love in the gift of Christ, and the earnest of the Spirit, to leave them as uncertain as they were before of their estate. They read, "who also shall confirm you unto the end, that ye may be blameless in the day of the Lord Jesus Christ. *God is faithful*, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. i. 8, 9). And they believe it; and bless God that to such poor and mere sinners he could have destined such things, and shewn such love. They believe that if any man sin, they have an advocate with the Father; and that he is the propitiation for their sins; and they do therefore believe that if they should fall, through mercy they will rise again.

They reason with wondering faith, "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:" "if God commended his love to us, so that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us, much more then, being now justified, 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." Observe here the singular and marked contrast between the argument of natural unbelief, and of that holy faith which believes in God. "It is plain," says the author of the Remarks, "from this passage, that salvation and justification are distinct things; and, therefore, though we be justified, we are not made thereby sure of salvation" (I suppose because of our own weakness, and sinfulness, and infirmity). But faith is that which sees the intervention of God's power, and leans on it; it knows that it has been justified, and from its justification concludes infallibly its salvation; one indeed has taken place, says unbelief, which it cannot help ascribing to God, but that is no proof that he shall obtain the other. God reconciled when we were enemies, argues faith: certainly having reconciled us he will now save us from wrath, and again, if we were reconciled by his death surely his life

shall save us. Thus, while unbelief sees nothing but that justification and salvation are distinct things, and they are distinct only because we are in the body, and therefore the latter is matter of faith and not of sight, faith sees yet the certainty of one from the other as proving God's love with an *a fortiori* argument, and the certainty yet again of the same from the power of the instrument now exalted in life, who reconciled us by death. The sinner doubts no more about his falling than his standing; he knows certainly that he would fall instantly if in himself; but he knows that God has promised, and that God will perform, and that *He* cannot fail: and that none, not Satan himself, can pluck him out of his hands; nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor life, nor death, nor any other creature can separate him from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus his Lord. The comparison of the argument of St. Paul, and of the author of the Remarks, gives the key to the whole of the sentiments expressed, be they in whom they may. The saint is persuaded, "that he who hath began a good work in him, will perfect it unto the day of Jesus Christ." Unbelief is not so persuaded. The Scripture hath said, "Faithful is he which hath called you, who also will do it;" and the saint believes it. "Nay, but I cannot be sure of it because of my infirmity;" that is, you do not believe the word of the testimony of God, you are making your weakness a greater evidence of the result than the power of God. Such precisely is unbelief. But the justification without the exercise of a personal faith in Christ the sent of God, the Saviour, cannot possibly be accompanied with any knowledge of salvation, nor can it either be accompanied with any renewal of heart, for the heart is purified by faith, but the love of God, and God who is love, is known by faith; and therefore we can say, "who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began" (2 Tim. i. 9). But, indeed, it were endless to quote passages, for this simple reason, that this is the Gospel; the Jew could be circumcised and brought into the covenant of God, nay, the Jew could, if so given of God, walk uprightly: but the Jew could not know, what in faith he might hope for and trust in, what is the essential distinction of the Christian; the finished work of the atonement, and the earnest of the Spirit, shed abroad till the redemption of the purchased possession. This is Christianity, and it is received into the heart by faith; and this, therefore, unbelief can never know anything about. "Blessed is the man whose unrighteousness is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord imputeth no sin, and in whose spirit there is no guile." There is not a man in the world that is not a hypocrite, that has not guile in his heart, till his conscience is washed in the blood of the Lamb. But what blessedness, what reconciliation, what purging of guile, if the forgiveness of sins be not known?

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But sin is a thing which affects the conscience when a man thinks: and it is only the direct exercise of faith in the blood of the atonement, which can give knowledge of actual forgiveness, which purges

the conscience from dead works to serve the living God. And here, consequently, is the association of salvation with it; because the redeeming love of God is personally known, the Spirit witnessing with our spirit that we are the children of God. . . . What is it that is to be got over in man? The enmity of his heart against God; the carnal mind, which is enmity with God; and the friendship of the world, which is enmity with God. But how is the enmity of the natural heart to be got over, but by bringing in love. And how? by knowing that "he loved us." And how shall we know this, but, "hereby know we love, because he laid down his life for us"? For observe, now, the enmity is a real thing, and the love must be a real thing, as Paul expresses it, "by whom we have now received the reconciliation," and to be produced it must be by practically knowing "he first loved us," which is known by the value of Christ's death received by faith, and the Father's love as manifested in it. . . . But if I now exercise faith in Christ's death as an atonement and reconciliation now that I am writing this, I must believe that my sins are everlastingly forgiven, and rejoice in the Father's favour, or else I do not believe in the efficacy of Christ's death, or the Father's manifested love therein.

I say, that not to see it is neither more nor less than unbelief. A man may be brought afterwards to believe, but at present he is not properly a believer in the work of the Lord Jesus Christ. If I can see that he really believes in his person, but Satan is clouding his mind, then I may feel a good assurance that he is a forgiven sinner, though *he* cannot. But I am not to sanction his unbelief, but to minister the sure mercies which I may be given to know myself. But if I am told, True, if it be so with you, you are very happy; but how do you know you will continue to believe? This is still unbelief. I may wait on a person's weakness of faith, but cannot preach it; it is simply getting back into distrust of God, which is the devil's greatest triumph. "I knew thee," said the unprofitable servant, "that thou wast an austere man." "I heard thy voice in the garden," said Adam, when the devil had effected his self-ruining purpose, "and I was afraid, and went and hid myself."

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But the author of the Remarks says, "I bless him, that he has taught me not to trust in my own works, but in the assistance of his Holy Spirit." What will the Holy Spirit assist him to do, according to this view of the case, except to work? So that he trusts in his works after all, and the Holy Spirit is a mere assister or helper of him in this. But *He* never taught him to put his trust here; but they shall be to the praise of the glory of his grace who have trusted in Christ. And they who have so trusted have ever, according to his promise, been sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of their inheritance. There is not such a thing in Scripture as trusting in the assistance of the Spirit, contrasted with trusting in works; nor in common sense either. And Christianity is a fable if it do not enable one who believes in the atonement to pronounce his sins forgiven. I do not say but there may be doubting souls under gracious influences, but I say as to this, it is unbelief. Let us put the case of the

jailer at Philippi: "What must I do to be saved?" . . . . . What was the answer of the blessed and believing apostle? "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." Well then, supposing God gave him to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, would the man be warranted or not in saying in his heart, I believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and shall be saved? People became Christians *because* they believed that it was the salvation of God, and that they had there what they had not elsewhere, namely, salvation. Again, what is the testimony of Peter? "We believe, that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they." So in Peter's account of the message to Cornelius (Acts xi.), "Who shall tell thee words whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved." But there is one idea which runs in the strongest way through the writings of the Reformation, and is one great hinge of this matter—the acceptance of the person. "By the which will we are sanctified," says the apostle, "through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." And what then? why, that "by one offering *he hath perfected for ever* them that are sanctified." . . . . . This part of my subject I feel fully to be most feebly treated; I know that none but believers can feel assurance; but I know that it is the direction of the apostle to "draw near, with full assurance of faith." I know that believers will supply infinitely more than any pen could write, or tongue of men or angels could tell; if it be made the instrument of strengthening any soul, or convincing it that there is such a thing as peace—a peace which, having received forgiveness, is able to rest with undoubting assurance on the promises of the God who gave it, when its possessor was in his sins—I shall be satisfied, yea, abundantly thankful.

The hope of the Christian is not *of forgiveness*, which the hope of one who cannot pronounce his sins forgiven must be, unless he be a madman; but because he can, *of glory*. "Beloved," he says, "now are we the sons of God;" for, "behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us:" "and it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but *we know*, that when he shall appear we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. And he that *hath this hope in him*," not a vague estimate of the portion of somebody or other, "purifieth himself, as he is pure." He who throws down the assurance of salvation, throws down all Christian progress; for I affirm, that there is not one atom of Christian holiness in the person who has it not, nor any purification which is truly of the sanctuary. "He that believeth in the Son of God hath the witness in himself; he that believeth not, hath made God a liar, because he hath not believed the witness which God hath given concerning his Son. And this is the witness: that God *hath given to us eternal life*, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life, and he that hath not the Son of God, hath not life." "Well, but after all, though he have this life he may lose it and perish." "My sheep hear my voice, and I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any one pluck them out of my hand." "He that heareth my words and believeth on him that sent me, shall not come into condemnation, but is passed from death unto life."