

The **STANDARD BEARER**

A REFORMED SEMI-MONTHLY MAGAZINE

SPECIAL ISSUE

Perseverance of the Saints

The believer is secure, absolutely secure, not in the flesh, but in the power of grace and by the testimony of the Spirit, Who witnesses with our spirit that we are children of God. Doubt is not praiseworthy, but carnal. See "Carnal Security and Doubt"

— page 118

CONTENTS

Meditation —	
Who Shall Separate?	98
Editorials —	
About This Issue	101
The Fifth Point of Calvinism	102
Preservation and Perseverance	103
How Can I Be Sure?	107
Perseverance and the Sins of the Saints	109
Perseverance and the Sin unto Death	111
Perseverance and Hebrews 6:4-8	113
Perseverance in the Face of Temptation	116
Carnal Security and Doubt	118

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MEDITATION

Who Shall Separate?

Rev. H. Hoeksema

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For Thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. 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. 8:35-39

The final question and its answer!

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?...
I am persuaded that no created thing shall be able

to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord!

If this also is true, then, indeed, no one and

nothing can be against us!

Our would-be accusers are silenced. Eagerly they appear in the courtroom of the Judge of heaven and earth, Who surely will do right; gladly they would bring their indictments against the elect to prove their damnable state; but shamefacedly they sneaked away, for they found that it is God that justifieth! Who then, shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?

Gladly they would sit on the judgment-seat themselves in order to bring a verdict of condemnation against the people of God. But they found that the judgment-seat was occupied by Him that was anointed thereunto from before the foundation of the world! Christ, the one that died and was raised again from the dead, Who also is the advocate of all whom the Father gave Him and maketh intercession for them, is sitting on the right hand of God and is become the sole Judge in all the universe. Where, then, is the condemner? . . .

Yet, one question remaineth.

Evident it is that Christ loves us, that God loves us in Christ, that there is no condemnation for us.

But will someone, perhaps, be able to separate us from the power of that love?

Suppose that an infuriated mob took me before the judge in a worldly court, loudly accusing me of murder of which I am innocent, and insisting upon my condemnation; suppose that the accusations against me were found to be without ground so that the accusers dropped off; suppose the judge passed a verdict of not guilty and that I am set at liberty; but suppose that the furious and howling mob of my hostile accusers are congregated before the door of the courtroom, still demanding my death and eager to lay hands on me, themselves to become my executioners; then the question arises immediately: will that mob be able to separate me from the power of the judge that acquitted me?

God loves me and justifies me, the accusers are silenced!

Christ loves me and is the sole Judge, with all power in heaven and on earth; there is no one to condemn me!

But I must still be in the hostile world!

My enemies are waiting!

And the final question must be faced: Shall anyone be able to separate me from the love that justified me?

But the question is a challenge!

And the answer more than a denial!

For, not only shall no created thing be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our

Lord, but we are more than victors!

Even the enemy must work together for our salvation!

I am persuaded! . . .

* * * * *

Separation is impossible!

From what?

From the love of Christ! From the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord!

And these two are one. The love of Christ is the love of God. For, the love of God was manifested in the love of Christ, Who died for us on the accursed tree. And emphatically the love of Christ and the love of God to us are meant, not our love to God in Christ.

Who shall separate us?

The question, then, is not: who shall be able to extinguish the flame of the love of God in Christ in our hearts; even though in the final sense this is also impossible, because our love of God is but a flame kindled by His love of us. Neither does the question refer to the possibility of the fire of the love of Christ being quenched, although it is true, that the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord is eternal and immutable. Still less is it the meaning of the question: who shall deprive us of the blessed feeling, consciousness, assurance that God loves us in Christ; this, indeed, is possible at times, though He never forsakes us and always leads us back into the sweet fellowship of His friendship and favor.

But the question is: who shall separate us from the power of that love?

Who is able to intervene, so to force himself between that love of God in Christ and us that its power can no longer reach us, that we are cut off from its saving help?

The subject of this entire chapter, this triumphant song of faith, is the absolute security of believers in Christ with a view to their eternal salvation and incorruptible glory. And this salvation is accomplished to the end by the love of God in Christ Jesus. On its saving power all depends. Without it believers are lost. By that love they are justified and no one is able to bring any charge against the elect of God. Because of that love they are secure in the hour of judgment and no one can appear as their condemner. Forensically their salvation is established. But will that same love of God be able to save us to the end? Are there, then, in the world no powers that can separate us from its saving strength?

Just as a shipwrecked sailor, who found a place of temporary safety on the rock in the midst of the

tempestuous sea, might ask, whether the raging billows will not separate him from the rock of his salvation, so the question is whether anything is able to separate us from the power of the love of God.

Or, just as a beleaguered city feels itself secure and able to sustain a long siege as long as it is not separated from the source of its food supply, so the Christian is safe as long as he is not cut off from the love of God in Christ Jesus his Lord.

Or, even as the vanguard of an army is in danger of annihilation if, pressing forward too recklessly into hostile territory, it becomes separated from the main army, so God's people would be overwhelmed by hostile powers, powers of death and destruction, if ever they would be found in circumstances where the power of Christ's love could not reach them.

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?

Who shall cut us off from the main and only source of our salvation?

But the question is a challenge.

And the answer is: no one!

I am persuaded! . . .

* * * * *

Audacious challenge!

For, many, indeed, are the powers of darkness that would appear to be able to effect this separation!

And quite consciously, too, the challenge is flung in the face of these hostile and mighty powers!

Who? . . .

The apostle is thinking of these powers as a person. For, though in the enumeration of the evil forces he mentions chiefly conditions, states, circumstances, yet he puts the challenging question in that personal form: Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? And with good reason. Are not the principalities and powers, with Satan as their prince and chief, the agents that cause all these states, conditions, circumstances to come upon the Church for the very purpose of separating her forever from the love of God in Christ Jesus and to destroy her? . . .

The apostle is thinking of the sufferings for Christ's sake, as is evident from the quotation from Psalm 44: For Thy sake we are killed all the day long, we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter; as is evident, too, from the terms: persecution, sword! And it is the hostile world-power that inflicts this suffering, that breathes this destruction against the people of God. It causes tribulation and distress, making the place of the people of God in

the world narrow, socially, economically, politically, so that they can neither buy nor sell, unless they bear the mark of the beast, so that they have no room to breathe. That power would have God's people go in hunger and nakedness, in physical want of every kind. It would leave the church no place of safety, make her position perilous wherever she may turn, persecuting her with the mighty sword.

Do not remark that this picture is overdrawn!

A real picture it is of the position of the Church in the world!

To impress us with the reality of this perilous position we are referred to the song of the Church in the old dispensation, when, after the captivity, it became the victim of the world's furious hatred, so that without exaggeration, inspired, indeed, by the Spirit of Christ, it could exclaim: For Thy sake we are killed all the livelong day; the world regards us as sheep for the slaughter; never a moment are we safe against its fury. Such was the position of the Church then; such is her position in the world principally always, for even as they hated Christ that loves them, so they will hate them that are beloved of Him. Such will be the position of the Church at the time of the end, when Antichrist will pour the last vials of his furious hatred upon the people of Christ. And do we not hear the rumblings of that final thunder even now? . . .

The end of all things is near!

Be ye, therefore, sober and watch unto prayer!

And be not unequally yoked together with the unbeliever!

But even so, be of good cheer! For, who shall separate us, who shall even then, in the midst of tribulation and distress, when hunger and nakedness must be suffered for Christ's sake, when peril and sword would kill us all the livelong day, cut us off from the source of our salvation, the saving power of the love of God in Christ Jesus?

Nothing!

No created thing, in heaven, earth, or hell!

No trouble or distress you may meet in life, no darkness of the shadow of death; no hunger or nakedness, no pain or sorrow, no tribulation or anguish, not even death itself shall be able to separate us from that wondrous love! No angels, no evil spirits, not even all the host of them with the devil as their chief; no principalities and powers, no mighty Caesars or wicked kings, no Nebuchadnezzars or Antiochuses or Neros, no Hitlers or Mussolinis or Stalins, with all their sword-power, are able to prevent that power of Christ's love from reaching us with its saving arm. Nothing there is in time or space, nothing there is in the present,

nothing can ever arise in the future; nothing there is in the heights of heaven and no power there is in the depth of hell, that is strong enough to cut us off from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord . . .

Was anything forgotten in this enumeration? . . .

Well, then, let this set your hearts finally at rest: nor any other creature!

No created thing!

Not they, not the enemies, not the angels or principalities or powers, not tribulation or distress or hunger or nakedness or peril or sword, not any creature in the present or in the future in the heights or in the depths can have the victory! We triumph!

Not they but we conquer!

Already we are conquerors!

Nay, more than conquerors are we!

A worldly victor may glory in his triumph after he has fought the battle; we have the victory while the battle is still raging. We triumph while we fight; we glory in the victory even when apparently we are overwhelmed. The enemy cannot even touch us. The outcome is never uncertain!

More than victors are we!

An earthly battle may be won but not without more or less severe losses on the part of the victor. We lose nothing in the battle!

Yea, even the enemy must help us, in spite of himself, to attain to the final victory and glory!

More than conquerors!

* * * * *

Blessed assurance!

For I am persuaded!

Thus the apostle glorifies, victorious on the heights of faith; and thus this part of the Word of our God would have us glory in the midst of the

sufferings of this present time.

Nothing can separate us!

But how is this glorying, this blessed assurance possible? How can we be sure that nothing can separate us from the love of God?

Emphatically because it is the love of God on which everything, on which all depends, not on our love, neither on the cooperation of His love and ours, but on His love alone! Not, indeed, as if it matters not whether or not we love God; but on our love nothing depends, not even that love itself! We love Him only because He loved us first. And His love is eternal, sovereign, unchangeable. Nothing can quench that love. In that love He made all things. In that love He governs all things, even the powers of darkness, even tribulation and distress and nakedness and hunger and peril and sword, even death itself. And that love is omnipotent. It never fails! . . .

Who, then, can separate us from that love of God!

And that love was manifested!

For it is the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord!

Christ loved us! He loved us in a very definite act of love. He loved us on the accursed tree. On that tree He took our sins upon Himself to bear them away forever. On that cross He fought the battle alone, in our behalf, and was victorious . . .

For, He arose!

He overcame the world. He is victor over sin and death!

Look, then, on that love! It is the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord!

Look on that cross and triumph!

More than conquerors through Him that loved us!

Who shall separate us?

EDITORIALS

Prof. H.C. Hoeksema

About This Issue

This is our first special issue of the current volume-year, and it is the last one devoted to the so-called Five Points of Calvinism. It is devoted in its entirety to the subject of the Perseverance of the Saints.

Again in this instance the popular order of the

Five Points of Calvinism — designated by the mnemonic T-U-L-I-P — and the order which we are following, that of the Canons of Dordrecht, coincide: in both, the doctrine of the Perseverance of the Saints is fifth. That brings up an interesting question. What does the P in T-U-L-I-P stand for?

Does it stand for Perseverance of the Saints? Or does it stand for Preservation of the Saints? The difference is not an essential one, but one of viewpoint. The end is the same in both instances: the saints, i.e., the elect, cannot and do not finally fall away but are saved unto all eternity. If we speak of the perseverance of the saints, we look at the matter from the viewpoint of the activity of the saints: either they persevere unto the end, or they fall from grace. If we speak of the preservation of the saints, then we look at the matter from the viewpoint of the work of God's grace: the grace which effectually drew us out of the darkness of sin and death and made us alive in Christ continues to operate in us to the very end. He Who began a good work in us will perfect it unto the day of Jesus Christ, Philippians 1:6.

Probably the question as to the meaning of the P cannot be settled. Our Canons speak of "Perseverance." This, however, is not determinative: for in the Canons the reference to perseverance has its historical occasion in the Arminians' denial of perseverance. And I have not found it possible to trace the origin and early usage of the mnemonic T-U-L-I-P and to discover whether it refers to Preservation or Perseverance. And while in a sense the question is merely academic, we must nevertheless remember that there is no perseverance of the saints with-

out God's work of preservation: the former is the fruit of the latter. If God did not persevere in His work of grace, we would not persevere to the end. And while our Canons speak of Perseverance in the title of the Fifth Head of Doctrine, they make it abundantly clear in the articles of this chapter that it is sovereign grace alone which preserves us to the end.

In the main we have followed the outline of our Canons for the material of this special issue. There is a reason for this. The Fifth Head of Doctrine — and perhaps this is subjective on my part — is probably the most beautiful, the most thorough, the most comforting, and the most pastoral chapter of the Canons. In my opinion it would be very difficult to improve on it. It is instructive both as to the Doctrine of Perseverance as such and as to the Doctrine of the Assurance of Perseverance, a subject close to the heart of any child of God.

For the meditation in this issue we have chosen an appropriate reprint from the pen of the late Rev. Herman Hoeksema, taken from Volume XIV.

In behalf of the Staff's committee, I hereby express sincere thanks to all who contributed to this special issue.

We hope that you, our readers, will profit.

The Fifth Point of Calvinism

We must not imagine that the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints and of the assurance of that perseverance was a new doctrine established by the Synod of Dordrecht in 1618-'19. It was not. The doctrine of perseverance was not new for the church in general, nor was it new to our Reformed creeds and for our Reformed churches. I need only remind you of the fact that this doctrine finds expression in a most beautiful context in that jewel of our Heidelberg Catechism, Question and Answer 54, concerning the holy, catholic church. The 54th Answer concludes with the well-known words, "...and that I am and forever shall remain, a living member thereof." There, in just a few words, you have both the doctrine of perseverance and the doctrine of the assurance of perseverance. And the fathers of Dordt were well aware of this, and thus aware of the fact that the Arminians militated against the adopted confession, as is plain from their reference to Question and Answer 54 in Article 9 of the Fifth Head of Doctrine:

Of this preservation of the elect to salvation, and of their perseverance in the faith, true believers for themselves may and do obtain assurance according to the measure of their faith, whereby they arrive at the certain persuasion, that they ever will continue true and living members of the church; and that they experience forgiveness of sins, and will at last inherit eternal life.

What happened at Dordrecht was that under the impetus of the Arminian denial of the perseverance of the saints the church came under the necessity of defending that truth and of spelling it out thoroughly and carefully in the light of Scripture. The result, as I have already suggested, is an unexcelled exposition of this doctrine. Never has it been improved upon. Even that later confessional document, the Westminster Confession of Faith, does not improve upon the statement of the Canons, but rather plainly borrows from it.

The Arminians flatly deny the truth of perseverance. We must remember this. Arminianism has no

doctrine of perseverance whatsoever. It is, of course, correct to say that the Arminians make perseverance dependent upon free will — correct as far as it goes. But we must remember that by this limitation they *destroy* the doctrine of perseverance. A perseverance which depends on free will is no perseverance. And that this is correct can be easily documented. It is true that at the conclusion of the Fifth Article of the Remonstrance the Arminians try to leave the impression only that they are in doubt about the doctrine of perseverance. For they say: "But whether they are capable, through negligence, of forsaking again the first beginnings of their life in Christ, of again returning to this present evil world, of turning away from the holy doctrine which was delivered them, of losing a good conscience, of becoming devoid of grace, that must be more particularly determined out of the Holy Scripture, before we ourselves can teach it with the full persuasion of our minds." This leaves the impression of honest doubt and questionings, but no more than that. However, in the rest of their fifth article they already destroy the doctrine of perseverance, though in a very sneaky way. But eight years later, at the time of the Synod of Dordt, the Arminians very bluntly denied the doctrine of perseverance when they were required by the Synod to submit in writing their opinion concerning this doctrine. Let me quote just three of the Arminians' propositions to make this clear:

1. The perseverance of believers in the faith is not the outworking of an absolute decree by which God is said to have chosen particular persons, not circumscribed by any condition of obedience.
3. True believers can fall from true faith and fall into such sins as cannot be consistent with true and justifying faith; and not only can this happen, but it also not infrequently occurs.
4. True believers can through their own fault fall into horrible sins and blasphemies, persevere and die in the same; and accordingly they can finally fall away and go lost.

If there was any honest doubt about the doctrine

of perseverance on the part of the Arminians when they drew up their five articles in Gouda in 1610, therefore, it is certain that by 1618, when the Synod of Dordrecht convened, this doubt had been dispelled; and the Arminians had come down on the wrong side as far as the doctrine of perseverance is concerned. About this there can be no question.

But in the providence of God it was this Arminian heresy which became the occasion for the church to draw up a most beautiful and clear and comforting confession of this precious truth. What a beautifully clear and concise statement of the truth, for example, is found in Article 8 of Canons V! Notice:

Thus, it is not in consequence of their own merits, or strength, but of God's free mercy, that they do not totally fall from faith and grace, nor continue and perish finally in their backslidings; which, with respect to themselves, is not only possible, but would undoubtedly happen; but with respect to God, it is utterly impossible, since His counsel cannot be changed, nor His promise fail, neither can the call according to His purpose be revoked, nor the merit, intercession and preservation of Christ be rendered ineffectual, nor the sealing of the Holy Spirit be frustrated or obliterated.

When you read this article carefully, you will discover that in this brief statement is embodied at the same time a correct statement of the relationship between this Fifth Point of Calvinism and the other four. The perseverance of the saints is rooted in eternal and sovereign election. It has its ground in definite atonement. It has its necessity in our depravity. It has its principle in effectual calling, the calling that cannot be revoked.

This means that there is no such thing as a Four Point Calvinist — one who holds to all the doctrines of grace with the exception of perseverance. If you deny the perseverance of the saints, you necessarily deny the previous four points. From this point of view the doctrine of perseverance might be termed the keystone: all the doctrines of grace stand or fall with this doctrine.

Preservation and Perseverance

Prof. H. Hanko

The carnal mind is unable to comprehend this doctrine of the perseverance of the saints, and the certainty thereof; which God hath most abundantly revealed in His Word, for the glory of His name, and the consolation of pious souls, and which He impresses upon the hearts of the faithful. Satan abhors it; the world ridicules it; the ignorant and hypocrite abuse,

and heretics oppose it; but the spouse of Christ hath always most tenderly loved and constantly defended it, as an inestimable treasure; and God, against Whom neither counsel nor strength can prevail, will dispose her to continue this conduct to the end. Now, to this one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, be honor and glory, forever. AMEN.

It is in this beautiful way that our Canons conclude their treatment of "the fifth point of Calvinism," the perseverance of the saints. The wicked not only do not understand it, but they also oppose it; but the bride of Christ loves it tenderly and defends it as a priceless treasure. God will see to it that this bride of Christ continues such conduct unto the very end, so that all honor and glory may be to Him alone.

Generally speaking, a distinction must be made between the *preservation* of the saints and the *perseverance* of the saints. The former of these two terms looks at this doctrine from the viewpoint of God's work of grace in the hearts of His people; the latter looks at the whole subject from the viewpoint of the life of believers in the world. God preserves His people; they persevere.

This doctrine is no longer widely believed in our day. Although it was the object of bitter attack during the time of the Arminian controversy, our fathers at Dort very emphatically set forth its truth in beautiful words in the fifth chapter of the Canons. But it seems sometimes as if the Arminians, defeated at Dort, nevertheless won the day. It is difficult to find, even in Reformed circles, people who maintain in all its power the truth of the preservation of the saints. I have even met "three-point Calvinists," people who profess to believe the doctrines of Calvinism, with the exception of limited atonement and the perseverance of the saints.

Many objections have been brought against this doctrine by the Arminians over the years. Butler, in his "Theology," sums them up: 1) There are many texts which admonish men to be steadfast and faithful, all of which imply the possibility that they will not; 2) There are texts which explicitly teach a falling away, such as Hebrews 6:4-6; 3) Experience itself shows that people who once profess faith nevertheless fall away; 4) The doctrine makes men careless and profane — makes believers fall into carnal security so that they say: once a believer, always a believer — live though I will.

Nevertheless, all these objections against the doctrine of preservation are based upon the fundamental error of the Arminian that he bases all of salvation upon the free will of man. Not only does man, by his free will, decide to accept Christ as his personal Savior so that only then can salvation be begun in him, but the continual salvation of the one who has accepted Christ depends upon this constant obedience and faithfulness, which is also rooted in his free will. A man may, in fact, fall away and be restored many times before he finally arrives in glory. Or, much worse, a man may be once a Christian, but through his falling, arrive, after all, in hell.

The truth of preservation is firmly grounded in the sovereignty of grace. It is this which brings up two very important questions: 1) What is the relation between preservation and perseverance? 2) How is the perseverance of the saints to be explained in the light of the fact that believers fall into sin?

The latter of these two questions needs to be discussed first of all.

The truth of preservation means, very simply, that God preserves the work of grace in the hearts of His people; that once they are saved, they continue saved into all eternity — no matter what happens to them; that once a Christian, always a Christian; that God will perfect the good work which He has begun in the hearts of His people. It is impossible for a regenerated believer ever to be anything else but that.

Yet this truth does not preclude the very real fact that a believer falls into sin. This is an obvious fact which almost needs no proof. Both Scripture and our own experience testify that this is indeed the case. Scripture records the terrible falls of David and Peter — both of which are specifically mentioned also in the Canons and which are described as lamentable falls. Never does Scripture nor our experience in any way minimize the terrible character of these falls. They are dreadful beyond description and may not, in any way, be minimized.

Nor does the truth of preservation deny that sin, just because it is so serious, takes away from the child of God the *consciousness* of his salvation. The Scriptures make clear that when the child of God walks in sin, he loses the consciousness of being a child of God. He no longer experiences the love and favor of God. The assurance of his salvation is gone. He experiences only God's wrath and displeasure. His way is filled with turmoil and trouble, with grief and spiritual distress — "While I kept guilty silence, my strength was spent with grief. Thy hand was heavy on me; my soul found no relief"; so we sing in Psalter No. 83. In this state of spiritual trouble, he may even lose the ability to pray, the spiritual interest in the things of God and of His Word, concern for the church and the preaching. In fact, he may wander far away, so that he even loses contact with the church and the fellowship of the saints for a time. He walks in the world and seems to have perfect contentment in the paths of sin. All these things can certainly happen. Preservation does not preclude all these possibilities.

Nevertheless, preservation means that God continues His work of grace even when all these things happen.

Here, too, we must be careful. We are not speaking here of an elect child of God who has not been brought to the faith as yet. There are elect, though unregenerated, people of God who through the gospel are brought to faith and conversion in adult life. This is especially true on the mission field, as it was true with, e.g., the Philippian jailor. Prior to their regeneration and conversion, these people surely walk in all the sins of the wicked. The truth of preservation does not, as such, refer to them — until such a time as God begins His work within their hearts.

Nor are we speaking here of those who outwardly confess their faith, seem for a time to be faithful and true members of the church, walk in the company of the people of God; but then, after a time, depart. We cannot, of course, tell the difference between such a person and the child of God who, after walking for a time in sin, returns again — at least, not until he returns. Of these former the apostle John speaks in I John 2:19: "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."

We are speaking of those in whom God has begun His work of grace. These are always preserved by the power of Almighty God, even when they fall into sin.

We may very well ask the question at this point: What precisely is meant by preservation? especially in the light of the lamentable falls of God's people.

There are several elements which ought to be mentioned in this connection.

In the first place, it is evident that they always remain *elect*. Election is an eternal and unchangeable decree of God according to which God sovereignly, out of mere grace, determines who are His and who are not.

Secondly, they always remain those for whom Christ died. And it must be remembered that they are those who objectively have been redeemed by the blood of Christ, for whom satisfaction for sin has been made, and for whom salvation has been graciously merited.

Thirdly, it follows for this, that they are always and unchangeably the objects of God's love and favor. This is true even in their deepest falls. Though they experience God's wrath and displeasure, this does not alter the fact that even God's wrath upon them and His hot displeasure are manifestations of His love. When God sends them trouble and distress, grief and sorrow; when His hand is heavy on them; even then they are loved by God. And the distress He sends them is evidence of His love, for through these means He brings them

to repentance and confession. He restores them again to Himself.

Fourthly, (and here we really come to the very heart of the truth), God maintains His *work of grace* in their hearts. That is, the life of regeneration remains within them. They continue to be united to Christ by the bond of faith. The principle of salvation remains. Even though they have lost the consciousness of this salvation, of faith, and of the life of Christ, God maintains it and continues to perform His work.

This is very clear from Scripture. No one is able, Jesus says, to pluck His sheep out of His hand or out of His Father's hand (John 10:27-30). Triumphant Paul shouts that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom. 8:35-39). John solemnly writes: "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God" (I John 3:9).

Finally, the truth of preservation means that, even though the child of God falls into sin, God will restore him again through the way of repentance and confession. God will bring him back to the full riches of the joy of salvation through the consciousness of the forgiveness of sin. And, doing this, God will preserve His own unto final salvation and glory. This last, too, is important. Preservation means that we are kept by God safely into all eternity. To be in heaven does not mean that we then suddenly become independent of God's grace and are able to stand on our own strength. Forever and ever in glory, though now without the possibility of sinning again, we are kept and preserved by the power of the grace of our God.

We have not the space to enter into all the Scriptural proof for this beautiful doctrine. But we refer the interested reader, in addition to the passages mentioned above, to such texts as John 6:37-40, Philippians 1:6, I Peter 1:4, 5, Ephesians 1:13, 14, II Thessalonians 3:3, II Timothy 1:12.

Scripture also speaks oftentimes of the *ground* of preservation. We cannot go into this in detail, but a few points are worth noting. As we have already indicated, election itself is the most fundamental ground. Jesus alludes to this in John 10:26-30 when He speaks of the fact that His people are His *sheep*—a name reserved for the elect, and He tells His audience that they are given Him of the Father. No one can pluck them out of His hand or out of the Father's hand.

Secondly, the ground for preservation is the perfect work of Christ in which He actually accomplished satisfaction and atonement for the sins of His people. To deny preservation is to deny the efficacy of the cross. Those for whom Christ died

can go lost? Utterly impossible!

Thirdly, Christ's intercessory prayer is part of this ground. Jesus Himself speaks of this when He says to Peter that Satan desired to have Peter to sift him as wheat. "But," says the Lord, "I have prayed for you that your faith fail not." And that prayer is surely heard because it is rooted in the cross of Christ.

Finally, that preservation is grounded in the absolute sovereign rule of God over all. When Jesus, in the classic passage on which this truth is based, assures His people that no one can pluck them out of His hand or out of His Father's hand, he really speaks of what is, from the point of view of our earthly existence, an extremely precarious position in which the people of God stand. They are surrounded by enemies — in this world and from hell — who are bent in pulling God's people out of God's hand. These enemies are much, much stronger than the believer and they come with great power and irresistible might to accomplish their purpose. And the child of God is so weak in himself because he finds that his greatest enemy is his own evil and corrupt flesh which agrees with devils, sides with the world, and is always trying to jump out of the hand of Christ. He has every reason, from the viewpoint of this life, to be terrified. But, Jesus says, My Father is greater than all! God rules. He rules even over all the wicked so that nothing can happen to them without God's will. The Angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear Him. The enemies are in the control of Almighty God. No temptation can come upon us but what we shall be able to bear, and God will provide a way of escape. What great comfort.

There is then one more aspect to this question which we must face: What is the relation between preservation and perseverance? God preserves, we persevere. God keeps us safe, we continue in the way of salvation. What is the relation?

That we are called to persevere cannot be doubted. There are literally dozens of texts which prove this. The apostle John writes: "We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not" (1 John 5:18). Jude admonishes the church: "Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life" (vs. 21). In His letter to the church of Smyrna the Lord writes: "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee the crown of life" (Rev. 2:10). And so we could go on.

In a certain sense of the word, it can surely be said that we do *not* really persevere; that our salvation is due only to God's preservation. That is, perseverance means "steady persistence in a course of

action." And this we do not do. We sin constantly. We sin greatly. We sin in such a way that we deny the Lord, walk in the paths of the world, and depart from the precepts of the Most High. If perseverance is taken in its absolute sense, then the fact is that we do not persevere at all.

But there are a couple of points which must be remembered nevertheless. In the first place, the admonitions which Scripture uses to enjoin us to persevere are not without use and purpose. They call us to persevere, and they are the very means which God uses to continue us in the way of perseverance. Through constant admonition God keeps us faithful to Himself. This is because His work of preservation is never apart from, a violation of, our own rational and moral nature. In the second place, perseverance is, with us, a matter of the *principle* of a holy life. Though we fall into sin and depart from the ways of God in many and lamentable falls, nevertheless we do, in principle, persevere. And that is evident from the fact that we, though often weak and sinful, confess our sins, flee to the cross, cast ourselves upon the mercy of Christ and seek again renewed strength to walk in God's way. There is a principle of perseverance within us that is real and true.

And so we come to the point. Our perseverance is not our work in distinction from God's work, isolated from it, independent of it. It is not as if here at last we come to what we can do. Perseverance and preservation are linked together as effect and cause. Our perseverance is the effect of God's causal work of preservation. We must persevere in working out our own salvation in fear and trembling, but we do this because it is God Who works within us both the willing and the doing of His good pleasure (Phil. 2:12, 13).

It is indeed exactly to teach us this total reliance upon Him that God sometimes allows us to fall into sin. We think, in our pride, as Peter did, that we can stand in our own strength. And sometimes, just to teach us that we cannot, God lets us stand in our own strength — and always we fall. We cannot stand for a moment. We cannot persevere ever without the sovereign grace of God Who works both the willing and the doing of our perseverance.

It is in the doctrine of preservation also that God receives all the glory. In his better days, Berkouwer wrote a book on "Faith and Perseverance." In this book he writes:

Has the Church given a true and reliable answer to anxiety as it reveals itself in our threatened human lives? Whoever gives an affirmative answer to this question will do well to reflect conscientiously on this doctrine and to understand that here it is not the pride and self-esteem of man which have pierced the gloom

of anxiety and uncertainty, but rather, according to the deepest intention of the Church, the doctrine of perseverance of the saints is a song of praise to God's faithfulness and grace. The saying is applicable here, if anywhere, that in doctrine a song of praise sounds forth. Not for a moment may we forget what the faithfulness of God means. Only in terms of that supposition can one speak meaningfully of faith and perseverance (p. 14).

Our Heidelberg Catechism puts it very beautiful-

ly in Q. & A. 54:

What believest thou concerning the "holy catholic church" of Christ?

That the Son of God from the beginning to the end of the world, gathers, defends, and preserves to Himself by His Spirit and word, out of the whole human race, a church chosen to everlasting life, agreeing in true faith; and that *I am and for ever shall remain, a living member thereof.*

How Can I Be Sure?

Prof. Robert D. Decker

That is the question. How can I be sure that I am and *forever shall remain* a living member of the church of our Lord Jesus Christ? From what source does this assurance come? This question has troubled not a few of God's people over the years. From one point of view this question ought not have in the past and ought not now trouble the believer. The Bible, God's holy and infallible Word, does answer the question clearly and beautifully. From another point of view, well might we be troubled by this question, for without the assurance of salvation and of the fact that we shall be preserved by God to everlasting life and glory we have nothing! Lacking the conviction that we shall be raised up from the dead in and by the power of Christ's resurrection, the Scripture says, "...your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. Then they which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished...we are of all men most miserable" (I Corinthians 15:17-19). It is crucial for our spiritual health and well-being that we know the answer to the question: "How can I be sure?"

Of the fact that Holy Scripture teaches the preservation and perseverance of the elect in Christ there can be no doubt. In His sermon on the Bread of Life Jesus said, "All that the Father giveth Me shall come to Me; and him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out....No man can come unto Me, except the Father which hath sent Me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day....Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that believeth on Me hath everlasting life" (John 6:39, 44, 47). Plainly our Lord teaches that believers have everlasting life now, and they shall be raised up at the last day. In opposition to the Pharisees Jesus stressed the same truth with these words: "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.

My Father which gave them Me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of My Father's hand" (John 10:27-29). Once again, there can be no mistake about the Lord's meaning. The sheep given Him by His Father (eternal election of grace) for whom Jesus lays down His life and takes it again (limited atonement, John 10:15-18) cannot go lost. They shall never perish because no one is able to pluck them out of the hands of Jesus and His Father. This precious truth is beautifully emphasized in the Epistles as well. We are begotten again into a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, "to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time" (I Peter 1:3-5). This is a very powerful statement. The inheritance, which is salvation in its final manifestation in the glory of the new heaven and earth, is reserved for God's people. And the saints are kept (guarded, R.D.D.) by the power of Almighty God through faith. It is, therefore, abundantly evident from God's Word that God preserves His elect in Christ to everlasting life and glory. By this preserving grace of God the saints persevere to the end. It is utterly impossible that even one of that multitude which no man can number should fail to attain the glory which God has prepared for His people.

But the question remains: "How can I be sure?" How is it possible for *me* to know that *I* am one of the sheep of Christ? By what means can I know that I shall be raised up at the last day? How can I be assured that God has begotten me again to that living hope by Christ's resurrection? How can I be certain that the inheritance is reserved for me and that God will guard me by His almighty and sovereign power? That, indeed, is *the* question.

This assurance does not come "by any peculiar

revelation contrary to, or independent of the Word of God" (Canons, V, 10). There are those who look for their assurance in some kind of religious experience. They believe that God will speak to them in some mysterious way and thus assure them of their salvation. Until they have this conversion-experience they have no assurance at all. They remain quite convinced that they are lost. They may hear the gospel preached Sunday after Sunday, but they say, "It's not true for me." They live in doubt and fear, even terror at the prospect of dying and meeting their Lord. Although Pentecostalism is in many respects very different, its doctrine of "Holy Spirit Baptism" teaches that the Holy Spirit works independently of the Word of God. These and all such mystical notions concerning the source of our assurance are seriously wrong and extremely harmful.

How can I be sure? God Himself must tell us. Our assurance must come from God and never from anything in us. God must tell us that we are His children, elect in Christ, redeemed by His cross and resurrection. God must assure us that we are and forever shall remain living members of His church. The fathers of Dordt stated this truth beautifully when they wrote: "This assurance... springs from faith in God's promises, which He has most abundantly revealed in His Word for our comfort" (Canons V, 10). Those promises are really one promise, viz., the sworn oath of God that He will lead all of His elect in Christ to everlasting life and glory. Those promises are revealed from various points of view in Scripture. But they all are comprehended in the one, unspeakably rich promise of God, His oath that He will surely preserve His beloved in Christ. Out of the promise of God we have "strong consolation" (cf. Hebrews 6:13-20).

How can I be sure? Where do we find the promises of God? In God's Word. God does not speak to us directly any more. We no longer have prophets and apostles who say to us, "Thus saith the Lord." But we do have by His grace God's Word preserved for us in the Holy Scriptures. These Holy Scriptures are the inspired, infallible Word of God. In them God reveals the riches of His promise to His elect in Christ Jesus. God tells us who are the heirs of the promise. God gives in the Scriptures His own divine guarantee that neither the inheritance nor the heirs shall perish (cf. I Peter 1:4, 5). Apart from the Word of God, therefore, we have no knowledge of the promise of God. Without the knowledge of the promise of God we have no assurance of our salvation.

The question remains: how can I know that God's promise is for me? How can I be sure? For that we need faith. By faith we receive the promise of God personally. I must believe that God chose

me in Christ. I must believe that Christ died for my sins and was raised again on account of my justification. I must be assured of the fact that Christ is coming again to receive me unto Himself in Father's House of many mansions. This means the Holy Spirit must witness with our spirits that we are the children of God, "and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with Him, that we may be also glorified together" (Romans 8:16, 17).

At this point many go astray. This faith, they claim, is man's work. Man believes or exercises faith and God then gives him salvation and its assurance. Or it is taught that faith is the condition which we must fulfill in order to receive the promise of God. If that be the case (and it is not!) there can be no assurance for us. Our salvation then would in the last analysis depend on ourselves. This is contrary to all Scripture.

Faith, just as is true of all the blessings of salvation, is the gift of God (Ephesians 2:8-10). Initially God gives us faith when He regenerates us (John 3; I Peter 1:3). This faith is brought to conscious expression by means of the preaching of the Word (Romans 10:13-17). By means of the preaching of the Word by one called of God through His church we hear the voice of Christ, believe on Him, call upon His name, and we are saved. Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God. In this way the Spirit of Christ witnesses with our spirits that we are the children of God. The fruit of this grace of God is that we walk in those good works which God has before ordained that we should walk in them (Ephesians 2:10). When we walk in sin, when we are indifferent to the Word of God, we lose immediately the assurance of salvation. But when by the grace of the Holy Spirit we are sorry for our sins and earnestly fight against them we are assured in our hearts that we are and forever shall remain living members of God's church.

All this has at least two very serious implications. First, we must receive the Word of God as it is. God's Word, Holy Scripture, is inspired and, therefore, infallible, i.e., without error. While it was given through the instrumentality of "holy men of God" it is not the word of man (II Peter 1:20, 21). Nor is Scripture partly the word of men and partly the word of God. Scripture is not the record of the religious experiences of its various authors. From beginning to end it is God's Word (II Timothy 3:16, 17). To deny this truth is to destroy the believer's assurance. To the degree that one corrupts the Word of God with the false doctrines of men he loses his assurance. Still more, the divinely inspired Word of God must be faithfully preached! The Scriptures must be expounded and applied to the lives of God's people in the world. Preachers must

not proclaim their own or some other person's opinion. God's own Word must be preached! And, God's people must faithfully attend the worship services of the church. In this way we hear Christ and are assured in our hearts that He died and arose

again for us and will surely preserve us unto everlasting life and glory. In this way I can be sure. I am sure! Praise be to God for the Wonder which He has performed for us and in us through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Perseverance and the Sins of the Saints

Rev. Ronald Hanko

In I Peter 1:5 the doctrine of perseverance is not only clearly proved, but it is set forth as a great multiplication of God's grace and peace to His saints. In verse 3 the Apostle Peter speaks of our election according to the Father's foreknowledge and shows how this grace of God in election is sealed to us and becomes ours through the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit as He leads us to perfect peace in the way of blood-sprinkled obedience. This revelation of grace and peace, already great, must be and will be multiplied unto us, Peter says, through the abundant mercy of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Peter tells us how it is multiplied in the following verses when he reminds us that this work of grace and peace involves the giving of a new life, the resurrection-life of Jesus Christ, which bears with it the hope of an everlasting and imperishable inheritance. But even this grace is further multiplied in that through grace the inheritance is kept incorruptible and undefiled for us, and also in that we are kept by the power of that grace of God for our inheritance. That preserving power of God which guarantees our perseverance unto the inheritance is, therefore, the crown of God's work of grace in this life and a great multiplication of grace through which we enjoy abundant peace.

This is also the experience of the child of God. God's grace is not only magnified and multiplied, but magnified *unto him* when he experiences that electing, justifying, and sanctifying grace as a power revealed in the midst of all his sins and temptations as they rise against him throughout his life. In perseverance each saint so experiences God's grace and its saving power that he learns to sing even in the darkest hours praises to God:

When in the night I meditate on mercies
multiplied,
My grateful heart inspires my tongue to
bless the Lord, my guide.
Forever in my thought the Lord before my
face shall stand;

Secure, unmoved, I shall remain, with Him
at my right hand.

(Psalter #28, stanzas 1 and 2)

For each saint it is "mercy multiplied" exactly because he finds that it keeps him, a poor, weak, wandering sheep, in the way of eternal salvation.

The two words which we use in teaching this doctrine, the words "perseverance" and "preservation," both imply that the life of the people of God in this world is not easy — that they must walk amid many dangers and great threats to their new life. That too is their experience. On the one side Satan roars against them as a lion to devour and destroy them. On the other side the world beckons with endless pleasures and allurements, and threatens with persecution those that will not heed its call. Through it all each saint must keep to the narrow way of life.

Nevertheless, it is not in these things that the saints find the greatest danger, but in that both Satan and the world have a strong ally in their own flesh. That is the reason why Paul in Romans 7 does not cry to be delivered from Satan or from the wicked, but from the "body of this death," for when he is delivered from the body of death then too there shall no longer be any danger from Satan or from the wicked world and its lusts. The flesh continues to serve the law of sin even after God begins His work in us and remains an outpost for all the attacks of the kingdom of darkness.

And if any child of God is inclined to underestimate these dangers, he will soon learn that he fights not against flesh and blood but against principalities and powers and spiritual wickedness (Eph. 6:12). These powers are very great, and always it is his experience that these powers are too great for him to face in his own strength. He finds himself like Gideon with 300 men and a few lanterns fighting against all the host of Midian. But even then the greatest danger is the traitor that he finds, as it were, within his own camp.

Our Canons also teach this:

By reason of these remains of indwelling sin, and the temptations of sin and of the world, those who are converted could not persevere in a state of grace, if left to their own strength. Head V, Article 3.

Notice just two things in this connection: (1) that the great enemy is the remnant of indwelling sin, described in the previous articles as "the body of sin" and the "infirmity of the flesh," and (2) that because of this "enemy within" even the redeemed and converted saint cannot stand for a moment if left to himself.

Perseverance, then, does not mean that all the dangers to our Christian life are removed, but that we walk safely through all these dangers and receive the inheritance which the Lord has promised. Even more, it means that we triumph over all these enemies, and finally have the victory even over our own sinful nature when we lay ourselves down upon our last bed. But we taste that blessed victory already in this life when we resist the devil, when we come out from and are separate from the world, and especially when we "keep under" our flesh and bring it into subjection (I Cor. 9:27) while we walk in sanctification of life.

We do this by grace alone, and that grace is always revealed in contrast to our weakness and inability and for God's glory. That contrast is established in the conclusion of the Article from the Canons which we quoted above. Having spoken of our inability to persevere in our own strength, the fathers say:

. . . But God is faithful, who having conferred grace, mercifully confirms, and powerfully preserves them therein, even to the end.

A beautiful illustration of this faithfulness and preserving grace is found in Paul's two Epistles to the Corinthians. That Church was troubled by many evils all arising out of the sins of her members — sects, divisions, fornication, lack of discipline, heresy, profaning of the Lord's Supper — sins which threatened the very existence of the Church and the salvation of her members. If ever there was a troubled Church, it was the Church of Corinth, and yet it was there that God revealed His faithfulness. The theme of the whole first Epistle is found already in chapter 1; "God is faithful . . ." (verse 9). In His faithfulness God preserved His Church and the saints in Corinth so that Paul could confess in his second Epistle, "Our hope of you is steadfast, knowing that as ye are partakers of the sufferings, so shall ye be also of the consolation" (II Cor. 1:7). Nor may we forget that God revealed His faithfulness in that sinful congregation "that no flesh

should glory in His presence" (I Cor. 1:29).

It is at this point that our definition of a "saint" is critical, for it is saints who persevere. The Arminian always says that the saint is one who makes himself to differ by his works, especially by the work of "accepting Jesus." His perseverance as a saint also depends, then, on his continued acceptance of Jesus all through his Christian life. He, depending on himself, has no hope of perseverance and no assurance of an inheritance.

Our Canons, for this reason, begin their discussion of "The perseverance of the Saints" by carefully defining a saint as one "whom God calls, according to His purpose, to the communion of His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, and regenerates by the Holy Spirit, (and) delivers also from the dominion and slavery of sin in this life" (Canons V, Article 1), and, we might add, to whom God gives the gift of faith. Only then does the "saint" have the assurance that He who has begun a good work in him, will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ (Phil. 1:6).

Nevertheless, even though the saints are delivered from the dominion and slavery of sin, they are not delivered "altogether from the body of sin, and from the infirmities of the flesh, so long as they continue in the world" (Head V, Article 1). Even as a saint he still has his old sinful nature, as old as Adam, and therein lies his great need for God's preserving grace. Only by that grace can he persevere.

This preserving grace of God is revealed to us in many different ways. It is revealed already when God first teaches us our sins. This knowledge of sin, as the Canons point out furnishes us

. . . with constant matter for humiliation before God, and flying for refuge to Christ crucified; and for mortifying the flesh more and more by the Spirit of prayer, and by holy exercises of piety; and for pressing forward to the goal of perfection, till at length delivered from this body of death, (we) are brought to reign with the Lamb of God in heaven. Head V, Article 2.

It was a holy horror of sin which caused Jabez to persevere in prayer, and through prayer to obtain from God the grace which was necessary to preserve him in his inheritance for ever (I Chron. 4:10).

That grace of God is also revealed when God gives us the means of grace, the preaching of the Gospel, and teaches us to use them (Cf. Canons V, Article 14). Having these means of grace we have the "whole armour of God" and are able to stand against all the wiles of Satan and all the fiery darts of the wicked (Eph. 6:11-18).

That grace is also revealed when we are in the midst of temptations and not just as we face them. In temptation we have the assurance that God is in sovereign control even of these things and that He in grace determines both the kind and the measure of temptation and always provides a way of escape in temptation as we are taught in I Corinthians 10:13. It is this sovereign determination of all the circumstances of temptation that also makes it impossible for us to blame God for our falls, even though it is He that sends temptation as we confess when we pray, "Lead us not into temptation." How can we blame Him Who always provides a way of escape and Who will not suffer us to be tempted above that we are able?

Nor are the falls of God's people into temptation to be blamed to the failure of God's grace. Perseverance does not mean we are preserved from falls, but from "falling away." Though God's saints feel the chastening hand of God in their falls, they never lose their salvation for God always preserves in them the incorruptible seed of their new life and always restores them again. This is beautifully illustrated in the lives of Abraham, of Lot, of David, of Peter, and of many others of God's saints both in the Old and New Testaments.

But the wonder of it is, that even in their falls God's grace is working to keep them for their inheritance. By their backslidings they suffer grievously for

. . . they highly offend God, incur a deadly guilt, grieve the Holy Spirit, interrupt the exercise of faith, very grievously wound their consciences, and sometimes lose the sense of God's favor for a time (as David confesses of himself in Psalm 32).

Canons V, Article 5.

But even these things God uses in wonderful and mysterious ways to restore them to the way of repentance and to teach them to be faithful and to persevere in a new and holy life. God chastises us with these whips that we may forevermore be partakers of His holiness in the new Jerusalem (Heb. 12:6-11). All things including our sins and falls work together for our good by God's preserving grace and according to His eternal love.

What comfort to know that all our steps are "ordered by the Lord" — even when we wander. Then we have the assurance that though we fall, we shall not be utterly cast down, for the Lord also then upholds us with His hand (Ps. 37:23, 24). Thus we sing:

In doubt and temptation I rest, Lord, in
Thee;
My hand is in Thy hand, Thou carest for me;
My flesh and heart falter, but God is my
stay,
The strength of my spirit, my portion for
aye.

(Psalter #202, stanzas 1 and 2).

Perseverance and the Sin unto Death

Rev. H. Veldman

The expression "sin and death" occurs in our Canons, in the fifth head. In Article 6 of the positive section we read, and we quote:

But God, Who is rich in mercy, according to His unchangeable purpose of election, does not wholly withdraw the Holy Spirit from His own people, even in their melancholy falls; nor suffers them to proceed so far as to lose the grace of adoption, and forfeit the state of justification, or to commit the sin unto death; nor does He permit them to be totally deserted, and to plunge themselves into everlasting destruction.

And in the fourth article of the rejection of errors (V, B, 4) we read, and we quote:

Who teach: That true believers and regenerate can sin the sin unto death or against the Holy Spirit. Since the same Apostle John, after having spoken in the fifth chapter of his first epistle, vss. 16 and 17, of those who

sin unto death and having forbidden to pray for them, immediately adds to this in verse 18: "We know that whosoever is begotten of God sinneth not (meaning a sin of that character), but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and the evil one toucheth him not," I John 5:18.

We will notice that our fathers, in V, B, 4, speaking of this "sin unto death," identify it with the sin against the Holy Spirit. And this is undoubtedly correct. We read in Mark 3:28-29: "Verily I say unto you, All sins shall be forgiven unto the sons of men, and blasphemies wherewith soever they shall blaspheme: But he that shall blaspheme against the Holy Ghost hath never forgiveness, but is in danger of eternal damnation." The same expression we read in Matthew 12:31, 32. In I John 5:16 we read: "If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not

unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death: I do not say that he shall pray for it." And in Hebrews 6:4-6 we read: "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 unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put Him to an open shame."

In the subject assigned to me in this special issue of our *Standard Bearer*, Perseverance and the Sin unto Death, the question is of the utmost importance: what is the relation between this perseverance and the sin unto death? Can this sin unto death ever frustrate or thwart the perseverance of the saints? This is the position of the Arminians. It is true that in the fifth point of the Remonstrance they declare that they are not ready to give a definite answer to this question. This, however, is only camouflage. We understand, of course, that any conception that is rooted in the free will of the sinner cannot believe in the certain perseverance of the saints. Besides, the Arminian surely does not believe in this truth.

The Arminian, we understand, and this is surely understandable, is very fond of quoting Hebrews 6:4-6. In this Scripture, already quoted in this article, the inspired writer speaks of those who have been once enlightened, have been made partakers of the Holy Ghost and have tasted the good Word of God and the powers of the world to come; and he declares of them that, if they shall fall away, they cannot be renewed again unto repentance. Of course, he does not endorse fully this particular Word of God. He does call attention to what we read here, namely, that they fall away. But he surely does not endorse what follows in this text, namely, that they cannot be renewed again unto repentance. He will surely maintain that, even as through his free will he can fall away or out of grace, so he can also through his free will return into the grace of God. He will surely maintain that if it be true that the saint can fall from or out of grace and therefore not persevere even until the end, so it must also be true that he can always return into the grace of God should he will to do so. But does not this Scripture speak of those who were made partakers of the Holy Ghost and that they fall away? Does not this Word of God, therefore, speak of a falling away of saints? We can understand why he is so fond of quoting this particular Scripture.

How terribly wrong he is! In the first place, the holy writer is not referring here to the elect but to the reprobate. This appears from what we read in the verses 7 and 8. In verse 7 he speaks of herbs

which are brought forth and which receive blessing from God. These, we understand, are the people of God. But in verse 8 he speaks of thorns and briers which are rejected, are nigh unto cursing, whose end is to be burned. Mind you, their end is to be burned; they are surely the reprobates. Thorns and briers never become herbs, even as tares are never wheat and wolves never become sheep. Secondly, although we read that they were once enlightened, had tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, this must be understood, not in the spiritual sense of the word, but in the intellectual, natural sense of the word. How true it is that the reprobate will and does speak of the wonders of the heavenly gift! He will concede the wonders and glories of the heavenly Jerusalem, the City that has foundations. Thirdly, when we read that they cannot be renewed again unto repentance, this surely implies that they had once been renewed unto repentance. The word "again" emphasizes this. We read that they cannot be renewed *again* unto repentance. But this does not mean that they had actually and spiritually been renewed unto repentance, had been regenerated by the Lord. Besides, that they cannot be renewed again unto repentance does not mean that this repentance lies beyond the power of God's grace and Spirit, that the heart of this sinner has become so hard and obdurate that even the power of the grace and Spirit of God is unable to break it. This, we understand, cannot possibly be the meaning of this Word of God. Of course, when we read that they cannot be renewed again unto repentance, the meaning is that the Lord cannot renew them again unto repentance, inasmuch as it is only the Lord Who renews unto repentance. However, the Holy Spirit does not operate this way; the elect do not serve the manifestation of sin in the highest, the extreme sense of the word, its greatest manifestation — this is reserved for the reprobate. The elect, we must understand, serve to reveal the power and the glory of the grace of God. Hence, that they had been renewed once unto repentance means that this had been their confession. They had once confessed that the Lord had renewed them, had called them out of darkness into His marvellous light. Having fallen away, having repudiated their confession, means that they cannot be renewed unto repentance again. This is not the Lord's mode of operation.

The sin unto death or against the Holy Spirit occurs, we understand, only in the sphere of God's covenant. It occurs only by those who, according to their confession, had once been renewed unto repentance.

Can the sin unto death ever thwart the perseverance of the saints? Or, can an elect, regenerated

child of God ever commit the sin unto death? Indeed not! We read in I John 3:9: "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for His seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God." This, we understand, does not mean that the child of God never sins. Paul writes in Romans 7:19: "For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do." And in I John 1:8 we read: "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." The meaning of this latter passage is that if at any moment we say that we are not sinning, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us, that is, we are not being led by the truth. Hence, when we read in I John 3:9 that a child of God cannot sin because he is born of God, the meaning is that which is born of God cannot sin. That seed, wrought in us by the Lord, is perfect. And if the child of God, born of God, cannot sin, then, of course, he cannot sin the sin against the Holy Ghost. And this certainly implies that the perseverance of the saints is sure; the child of God cannot fall away or out of grace.

We need not in this article discuss the sin unto death, the sin against the Holy Spirit. Besides, this is a difficult passage. Does this sin unto death refer to the sin whereby one in full consciousness sins against the fullest manifestation of the truth? Of course, every sinner does not commit this sin. Incidentally, this sin is committed only within the sphere of God's covenant. According to Hebrews 10:29, this sinner treads under foot the Son of God and counts the blood of the covenant, which sanctifies, an unholy thing. And this occurs, of course, only in the sphere of the covenant. However, we need not discuss this sin in this article, although we may say that every sin that is not confessed leads to death. Of importance is the truth that the child of God does not commit this sin. And he may certainly know that he does not commit this sin. O, it is true that a child of God may experience

melancholy falls into sin. Our fathers speak of this in Canons, in V, A, 6. It is certainly true that a child of God may at times even wonder whether he is guilty of this sin. Children of God can sin very grievously. The Word of God speaks of these incidents. This merely establishes the truthfulness of the Word of God. The world may cover up the sins and shortcomings of its heroes in their history books. This is not true of Scripture. Of this, David is a glaring example. He committed premeditated murder when, having committed adultery with Bathsheba, he murdered her husband, Uriah the Hittite. Nevertheless, a child of God cannot commit the sin unto death. Are we sorry for the sins we commit, confess them before the face of our God? Do we seek and implore His mercy? Then we have not committed this sin. A sinner cannot experience sorrow for a sin unto death. Confessing our sins, we will surely experience forgiveness. However, there is no forgiveness of the sin against the Holy Spirit. And this means that there is no true sorrow for this sin. Hence, we may surely know whether we have committed the sin unto death.

The perseverance of the saints is sure. We may commit sin and we often do. There is never a moment when we are not sinning, according to I John 1:8. We do proceed stumblingly to Zion's top, to the city that has foundations. Sin will plague and torment us throughout our earthly pilgrimage. But we shall persevere. And we shall persevere because we shall be preserved. Believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, by God's almighty grace, we are assured that the work which God has once begun by His grace will surely be finished. That work is rooted in God's unchangeable election, rests upon the perfect sacrifice of Christ upon the cross of Calvary, and is being completed in us by the Spirit of God and of our Lord Jesus Christ. His work knows of no repentance; it will be finished in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Perseverance and Hebrews 6:4-8

Rev. C. Hanko

In defence of the error of the falling away of the saints reference is made to the Scripture passage in Hebrews 6:4-8, which reads as follows:

"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 unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put Him to an open shame. For the earth which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from God; But that which beareth thorns and briers is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing; whose end is to be burned."

It is not hard to see that those who are seeking proof from Scripture for maintaining that a saint can fall from grace would appeal to this passage. The text actually speaks of falling away. Besides that, from the description of those who fall away one might draw the conclusion that they were once a part of the church of Jesus Christ, children of God and heirs of salvation. We read that they "were once enlightened," which would then refer to regeneration. They "tasted of the heavenly gift," which would apply to such benefits as conversion, faith, justification, and sanctification. They "were made partakers of the Holy Ghost." What else could that refer to, one might ask, but the presence of the Holy Spirit in their hearts? They "have tasted of the good Word of God," which would mean that they enjoyed the preaching of the Word, were edified and enriched with the blessings of salvation. And, finally, it is mentioned that they were partakers of the "powers of the world to come," that is, they would rejoice in the hope of everlasting life with Christ in glory. And, if this is still not convincing, these defenders of the falling away of saints will refer you to the fact that the text speaks of "renewing again," which, they say, would be quite impossible if there had not been a first renewing.

One basic error of these opponents of the truth of the perseverance of the saints is that they ignore the fact that all Scripture speaks of their preservation. This would not be difficult to prove, but it is hardly necessary in this article. A fundamental rule is that Scripture must be interpreted in the light of all the Scriptures, so that it is a serious error to isolate this passage from the rest of the Word of God. Moreover, although this particular text obviously refers to a complete break with the church and rejection of all that is holy, the word that is used in the original for "falling away" can well be translated as "to depart from the right path," "to wander." No one would dare to say that anyone who falls into sin, becomes delinquent for a time, can never be restored. Especially those who quote this passage to defend the conditional promise of salvation to every baptized child certainly would not want to conclude that the child who does not "accept the proffered promise" by the time that he is 18 or 20 years old is, therefore, hopelessly lost forever.

The text plainly teaches that there are individuals who either are born in the church or enter it later in life, who for a time show a highly emotional excitement or enthusiasm about salvation, who profess to be children of God and heirs of eternal life, but whose enthusiasm soon lags, possibly because they are confronted with persecution for the faith, possibly because they must make sacrifices

for the faith they profess. Or they may even be disillusioned by the imperfections of the saints, or have had trouble with one or more of the members of the church. In any case, they make an about-face, leave the church, and heap reproaches on the church, upon Christ, and upon God.

Those were "once enlightened." They knew sound doctrine and even had a thorough understanding of the truth, so that they could ardently defend it. This knowledge, however, was purely intellectual and might be called an "historical faith." The word for "enlightened" in the original does not always refer to regeneration, as some would maintain. See for example such passages as John 1:9, Ephesians 3:9.

They "have tasted of the heavenly gift." They professed repentance for sin, faith in Christ Jesus as their Savior, the assurance of forgiveness of sin, and the grace to walk a godly life. In one word, they professed to be partakers of Christ and all His benefits, and did so with great enthusiasm. They were like the stony hearts in Jesus' parable of the Sower, "where they had not much depth of earth." Of whom Jesus says, "he heareth the word, and soon receiveth it. Yet hath he no root in himself, but dureth for a while; for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended" (Matthew 13:5, 20, 21). This is commonly referred to as "temporary faith."

Of these individuals it is also said that they "were partakers of the Holy Ghost." This cannot possibly refer to the indwelling Spirit of Christ, the Comforter, Whom Christ sends into the hearts of His people, for this Spirit never departs, but abides with us forever (John 14:16; I John 3:24). If this did refer to the Comforter, we would surely expect that this would appear at the beginning of this series, as the very first work of grace in the heart of the sinner. Reference is made here to the gift of the Holy Spirit which came upon the church by the laying on of the hands of the apostles, whereby the members of the church prophesied, performed miracles, and spoke in tongues. Unbelievers among the saints also received these gifts, just as Judas had special powers given to him when he went out with the other disciples to preach and to teach. Scripture says of them that, "They went out from us, because they were not of us."

Of these individuals it is added that they "have tasted the good Word of God." They listened attentively when the Word was preached, talked about it afterward, even enthusiastically. One is reminded of the parable of the Wedding Feast of the King's Son, at which a man appears not wearing a wedding garment, and is cast out. It must be that he was attracted to the idea of being guest at a

wedding feast with all its luxuries and pleasures, especially when that wedding is given by the king in honor of his son. But he felt that he was worthy to come as he was. His clothing was sufficiently neat and attractive to qualify him to be a guest in the royal palace. He was enthusiastic about sitting at the feast and enjoying its bounties, but purely for his own satisfaction. In other words, he did not come with a broken and a contrite heart to seek his salvation only in Christ and His righteousness. The Word of God is *glad tidings* that proclaim to him who receives it blessedness, peace, and joy unspeakable and full of glory. God's promises are rich and glorious, beyond our comprehension. Even the unbeliever must admit that. At death even he likes to have eulogies spoken over his casket and hopes to have a joy hereafter.

These same individuals could taste of "the power of the world to come." This tasting is again purely external, intellectual, or emotional. What a number of songs are sung with strong feeling about the beauties and glories of heaven, even by unbelievers. When the oratorio "Messiah" is sung by an unbelieving opera singer, the singer can make a strong impression by his or her beautiful voice, perfect enunciation, and proper expression of the music. A person can enthusiastically speak of the coming of the Lord, the blessedness of the saints in the life to come, and the glory of the new creation, without having any desire to join the saints in singing everlasting praises to God and His Christ.

The text is speaking, therefore, of people who profess to have been enlightened by the Holy Spirit and incorporated into the Body of Christ. To all outward appearances they are saints in Christ Jesus. They are accepted as such by the members of the church. They may hold some prominent position in the congregation, even as deacon, or elder, or minister of the Word. Yet they fall away. They break completely with the church, become blasphemers of God and of His Christ, mock with sound doctrine, and speak evil of the people of God, even to the extent that they heap reproach and shame upon the church. Their former exuberance now turns to vehement opposition to all that is holy. They join, as it were, the angry mob that crucified the Lord of glory, putting Him to open shame. They do this to themselves, judging and declaring themselves unworthy of eternal life, worthy only of God's righteous condemnation in hell, where they are eternally beaten with double stripes (Acts 10:39; Heb. 10:29).

The result is that it is impossible to renew them unto repentance. This does not mean that God cannot renew them, as if they were beyond the reach of Almighty God. Nothing is impossible with God. Nor does it mean that it is now impossible for them

to come to repentance, for no man can come to the Father ever, unless the Father draw him. But it does mean that any effort on the part of the church or of any individual member will prove absolutely useless in trying to make them see the error of their ways. They have become so completely hardened, that any attempt to change them meets with bitter opposition.

The prophet Isaiah refers to individuals of this kind in his 6th chapter, which is quoted by Jesus in connection with the teaching of parables: "And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive: For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their hearts, and I should heal them" (Matthew 13:14, 15).

That this is the meaning of this passage is evident from the verses 7 and 8, which follow. There the figure is used of two fields, which receive the same rains that fall upon them. As a result, the field that is sown with good seed produces a good crop, pleasing to the husbandman. But the field that is sown with bad seed produces nothing but thorns and briers, fit only to be burned. The good field is the heart that is regenerated by the Holy Spirit and has the life of Christ implanted in it. When the Word is preached, that heart brings forth fruits of repentance, conscious faith, righteousness and holiness. The bad field is the unregenerate heart that is filled with evil. The plants that sprout forth are only evil continuously. They may appear for a time to be the same as the products of the good soil, but as they ripen they prove to be only thorns and briers, evil works that bring God's righteous judgment upon them unto everlasting condemnation in hell.

This only confirms the truth of the eternal security of the saints. For God Who begins a good work in His people will surely finish it even unto everlasting life with Him in glory.

*Take time to
read and study the
Standard Bearer*

Perseverance in the Face of Temptation

Rev. James Slopsema

As Reformed believers we confess the truth of God's preservation and our perseverance. By God's preservation we mean that God will certainly preserve us in the salvation we have in Jesus Christ. He will not allow any power, whether in heaven or on earth or even in hell, to rob us of that which we have in Christ. By perseverance we mean that, in the power of God's preserving grace, we will indeed persevere in the way of our salvation. In other words, we will remain faithful to God, if needs be even unto death, and thus receive the crown of life.

In this present article we wish to discuss this truth in the context of temptation. According to Ephesians 5:16, the days in which we live are evil. That is, they are dangerous, perilous. They are this because of the great temptation we face. Every day of our life we are surrounded by temptation, all of which is designed to lead us into sin and destruction. Every child of God knows what these temptations are. He knows their power and how irresistible they can sometimes be. He also knows his own weakness in the face of these temptations. And he often wonders whether he will be able to persevere in the future.

Temptation is a tool in the hand of the Devil designed to lead God's people to their destruction. Satan is the archenemy of God and His people. His one purpose is to frustrate the purpose of God by leading the elect of God to their eternal ruin in hell. And the Devil knows full well how this may be accomplished. It is the way of sin. The Devil knows the Word of God better than we do. The wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). And so to lead us to our eternal ruin the Devil tempts us to sin.

The Devil uses especially the wicked world to tempt us. The world are those who have with us fallen into sin and depravity but who have not been redeemed and sanctified with us in Christ. They are those who are still under the spiritual dominion and control of Satan. It is especially through this world that Satan tempts us.

The Devil tempts us to sin in especially three different ways.

First, there are the vain philosophies and false doctrines of men. By this we mean the doctrines and attitudes of man that stand in direct opposition to the teaching of the Bible. What the world today has to say about God, marriage, sex, the role of the woman, family life, and a host of other subjects stands diametrically opposed to the teachings of the Bible. You are confronted with these views over

the radio and TV, in books and magazines as well as in the daily newspaper. These views are even proclaimed from many a pulpit. These teachings lead to a complete denial of God and the way of salvation. In other words, they lead straight to hell. And that's where many are being led today. This is because these doctrines of man are so appealing to the flesh.

The Devil also tempts the child of God through the treasures and pleasures of the world. The world today has much pleasure to offer. Some of this pleasure is the pleasure of sin. Society is characterized today by immorality and debauchery. In fact these are openly and proudly flaunted. We are confronted with them daily. And this sinful pleasure is very appealing to our flesh. They present us with great temptation. How difficult it often is to deny our flesh which is excited to lust by these carnal pleasures!

However, not all pleasures of the world are of themselves sinful. Think of all the conveniences that man has today because of recent inventions and advancements in technology. And consider all the exciting things the world has made it possible to do. It is possible today to live very comfortably and easy. Nor is this in itself wrong. And that kind of life is very appealing to us. It certainly appeals to the flesh. And we can have these things too. The world gladly offers these things to us. The only thing it will cost us is our salvation. That's the price the world sets for its treasures and pleasures. Remain faithful to God and His Word and the world will deny you access to its pleasures. It will not allow you a job or the profession needed to attain these things. Quite a different story it is, however, if you are willing to sacrifice your principles and your God. How tempting this can sometimes be.

Then there is persecution. The world may at times hide behind a facade of toleration and co-existence. But ultimately the world has no room for the church. The world hates the way of God and actively opposes it. We can see this in a number of ways today. This is evident from the attitude of the world toward those in the church that still cling to the traditional and biblical mores. How stupid and narrow-minded! Evident this is too from the move to ban any semblance of the Christian religion from the public school system or from any institution somehow affiliated with or supported by the government. This is also evident from the fact that the child of God is ostracized by the world when he refuses to conform to the world. Walk with the world

and the world will embrace you. Walk the way of God and the world ultimately has no room for you. This is not pleasant. What a temptation to conform to the world that we may be accepted and embraced by the world!

As history rushes towards the end of time, these temptations will not lessen but increase. This will simply follow the natural course of the development of the world. As time marches on, the world will continue to develop in technology. This in turn will give impetus to further growth in sin and wickedness. And this will mean greater temptation for the saints of God. Immorality and debauchery will increase. There will be development in the vain philosophies of man. And the world will become less and less tolerant of the church.

This will all culminate in the Antichrist. In the days of the Antichrist temptation will abound for the child of God, the likes of which we have never seen. That temptation will center in the great tribulation that the Antichrist will instigate against the church. In those days the faithful child of God will not be able to buy or sell. He will see his children starve before his eyes. He will be hunted down as an animal. And there will be no place to hide. Hideous will be the torments laid upon the faithful in those days. However, if the child of God is willing to forsake his God and his Savior, all this persecution will cease. In turn he will be given all the treasures and pleasures of the world, which in those days shall be great indeed. Certainly the time of the Antichrist will be evil. So dangerous will they be that our Lord warned us in Matthew 24:22, "Except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened."

Those days of the Antichrist are not all that far off. It is not our purpose in this article to speculate on how near we are to the end of time. However, every discerning child of God who takes seriously the admonition of Scripture to watch knows that the end is near. The signs of the times all point to the fact that all things are ready for the Antichrist, yea, will soon demand the Antichrist. It is very well possible that we and our children will live to see the Antichrist.

And every child of God who has contemplated these things has asked whether he will be able to stand in that evil day. Many will fall away, we are told. Will we be able to stand? How can we be so sure in light of the fact that we can scarcely stand now in the face of temptation? If we can scarcely stand the wiles of the devil now, how will we be able to do so in the great day of temptation? And what of our children? What assurances do we have that we and our children will be able to persevere

and be faithful even unto death so as to receive the crown of life?

We have this assurance: "God is faithful, Who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it" (I Cor. 10:13).

Notice, God is faithful. We are often unfaithful; but God is faithful. That means that God always keeps His promises. The promises in this instance are the promises of God to preserve us in the face of temptation. To those promises God is faithful.

In His faithfulness God will not allow us to be tempted above what we are able to bear. He will always make us a way to escape. This of course does not mean that God will never allow us to fall to temptation. God certainly allows and even wills this. However, God will never allow us to be led away completely by temptation so that we lose our salvation and fall from grace. It may be that we fall into temptation and are led astray for a time. But God will always bring us back in the way of repentance.

God preserves us in the face of temptation in especially two ways.

First, God limits and controls the temptations that beset us. It is true of course that God does not tempt us. According to James 1:13, "God can not be tempted with evil, neither tempteth He any man." Nevertheless, temptation is under God's sovereign control. This is because the devil and the powers of darkness are under His control. The devil and the wicked world can do no more than what God wills them to do. Without the will of God they can not present before the child of God so much as one temptation. And God so controls the temptations of the world and the devil that we are never tempted above what we are able to endure. It may be that the temptations we face are very severe. It may even be that they sweep us away for a time. But God will never allow the powers of darkness to sweep us completely away. This is true not only now. This will also be true in the great day of tribulation.

But in the second place, God does not allow us to be tempted above what we are able, by supporting us in His grace. In and of ourselves we are totally helpless to withstand temptation. Facing temptation in our own strength we would be led astray by the smallest temptation. To persevere in the face of temptation we need the grace of God and the strength of Jesus Christ. And God in His faithfulness will provide us grace sufficient to overcome all temptation. This grace will come to us as we need it. The greater the temptation we face, the greater will be God's grace to uphold us to overcome and

be victorious. This will also be true in the great day of tribulation.

And so we have the promise of God to preserve us even in the face of the worst temptation. This is certainly to comfort us and give us confidence for the future.

But this also implies a calling. The calling is that day by day we fight against temptation in our life in the power of grace. And let us remember that the grace of God is not automatic. We receive the

power of grace only in connection with the means of grace: the preaching of the Word, the sacraments, prayer, Bible study, the fellowship of the saints. When these are properly used by us, we are strengthened in Christ to overcome all temptation. Let us therefore make good use of these God-given means day by day that we may have grace to persevere. And by making this a daily practice now, we are preparing ourselves to meet the onslaughts of the Devil in the darker days that are sure to come.

Carnal Security and Doubt

Rev. Thomas Miersma

The truth that God in His sovereign grace keeps His people and causes them to persevere in grace and salvation, makes the salvation of the people of God absolutely certain. Jesus Himself rejoices in this, declaring in John 10:27, 28, "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 Father's hand." The power of that preserving grace and the certainty of perseverance bears fruit in the life of the child of God. The sheep of Christ follow Him, and He leads and guides them in paths of righteousness and holiness. Therefore the Apostle John in his First Epistle writes of the power of that grace of God in us, that we, being assured that we are the sons of God, and having the certainty of eternal life, manifest that hope in a life of sanctification and a godly walk. "And every man that hath this hope in Him purifieth himself, even as He is pure" (I John 3:3).

It is not surprising therefore that the Arminians, who deny the sovereign grace of God, should deny the truth of God's preserving grace and of the saints' perseverance. Nor is it surprising that they should make the believer's assurance and certainty an object of their attack upon God's grace. The challenge which they brought against this truth is subtle in its evil. For they charged that the certainty that one would persevere in grace, the doctrine of God's sovereign preservation of His elect and the believer's assurance of salvation, must invariably lead to a profane walk of life. Would not the believer who had no doubts become careless, complacent about his life and walk, since he was certain to persevere and since God would preserve him, no matter what? How much better to doubt one's salvation. Such doubt would serve to spur the believer on to walk in obedience, to maintain good

works carefully, and to live in holiness. But certainty and assurance would lead only to carnal security and licentiousness.

In doing this, the Arminians obscured their true charge with words which sounded fair and sensible, even reasonable. But their charge speaks with the wisdom of men, for at its root it is an attack upon the grace and holiness of God, for it charges the preserving and assuring grace of God with producing in the life of the child of God, not the fruit of righteousness, but of sin and indifference. It is nothing more than the charge against salvation by grace alone, the charge, "Let us sin that grace may abound," brought in a new guise. The Scriptures are quick to answer that charge. We read in Romans 6:1, 2, "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?" The grace of preservation and assurance cannot work carnal security or licentiousness. God's grace is the grace of a holy God, and the Scriptures teach that assurance and hope in the life of the believer are the spiritual means by which God works sanctification in us. Nor does the Lord ever allow His people to sit in spiritual complacency or to rest securely in the flesh, but He even humbles our pride and renews us to repentance. One need only read the account of David's sin with Bathsheba to see that this is indeed the case. It is when the believer walks in sin and pride that he loses the conscious assurance of God's favor and grace.

Our Reformed fathers at the Synod of Dordt were not slow to respond to this heinous charge of the Arminians. Nor did they concede one ounce of truth to it. In Canons V, Rejection of Errors VI, they emphatically reject the error of those who teach that the doctrine of the certainty of per-

severance and of salvation from its own character and nature is a cause of indolence and is injurious to godliness, good morals, prayers and other holy exercises, but that on the contrary it is praiseworthy to doubt.

They point to Scripture and the lives of the saints to show the falsehood of this charge.

Over against this falsehood they take the position that doubt in the life of the child of God is "carnal" (Canons V, A.11). While they recognize that believers "...in due time, though in various degrees and in different measures, attain the assurance of this their eternal and unchangeable election,..." (Canons I, A.12) yet they deny absolutely the conclusion that the Arminians draw (cf. Canons I, A.13; V, A.12, 13). It is assurance and hope, the certainty of perseverance which are the spiritual incentive to the child of God in his life and walk, the means by which God quickens faith into activity in thankfulness and gratitude.

Indeed it is the Arminian error which leads to dead works, for doubt leaves the child of God in misery and without thankfulness. Moreover, it produces not godliness but phariseism, an outward keeping of God's commandments out of a desire to persevere by one's own efforts and works, out of a fear, not of God, but of punishment. It is the unbelieving pharisee who stands carnally secure, secure in his own works and self-righteousness. The child of God is secure in grace, not in the flesh.

It is therefore to be deplored that this Arminian error crept back into the Reformed churches not long after the Synod of Dordt and continues today. It entered the Reformed church during a time of spiritual decline and dead orthodoxy. The Reformed Church in the Netherlands was a state church. Moreover it was socially acceptable and profitable to be a member of that church. The result was that there were many in the church who were there for carnal reasons. Nor could discipline be properly exercised in the church because of state interference. Believers in the church were justly frustrated with the spiritual deadness of the church and in the preaching, often by heretics who could not be removed. Rationalism, the exaltation of human reason over revelation, also entered the church. The result, by way of reaction, was that Spener's German pietism, which emphasized inward experiential religion, swept over the churches of the Netherlands.

In addition to this a similar situation had prevailed in the state church in England, and the writings of the Puritans who struggled with the same problems there, found ready acceptance in the Netherlands. These too taught an inward experientialism. There is much that is good and profitable in

these writings. Nor is a healthy experientialism wrong, for indeed the whole of the Heidelberg Catechism is written from that perspective. Yet there were certain errors which came with these influences. The Puritans were weak in their doctrine of the covenant. They had been greatly influenced by Anabaptist ideas of a pure church on earth, a church of believers only. The Puritans began to teach a conditional covenant, sometimes called the half-way covenant, that while one was outwardly and formally a member of the church by baptism, true participation in the covenant of grace required an inward revelation and experience of assurance, rather than a growth in assurance as our Canons teach. The result was that one was called over to look within himself for signs of grace, to examine himself, to doubt his salvation. Conversion, regeneration, and assurance of faith became a hard-fought spiritual struggle with definite steps, eventually fixed in a certain order, culminating in a moment of revelation and conversion. This experience became the condition unto salvation which a man was to seek, through prayer and hearing of the Word, and by the power of a preparatory or common grace. One can very easily see the Anabaptist influence in such thought, for the Anabaptist needs such an experience in order to practice "believer's only baptism." The effect among the Puritans was that baptism was seen as bringing one only half-way into the covenant, and in order that those who had not had the experience of assurance or conversion might yet have their children baptized, profession of faith became only formal, a mere intellectual assent to the truth. This same doctrine entered the Dutch churches through the writings of the Puritans and it became pious and praiseworthy to doubt one's salvation and assurance. Thus assurance came to be sought not outside oneself in Christ and His Word, but inwardly, by seeking to discern the marks of Christian experience, rather than the marks of a Christian. The necessary consequence of this was that many could not go to the Lord's Supper, lest they eat and drink judgment to themselves. That which God had ordained for the comfort and quickening of the assurance of His people (Canons V, A.14) became an impossibility for many. The preaching of a well-meant offer also developed in this connection, in which the people of God were called to struggle to lay hold of God's grace. Sinners were earnestly invited to seek the experience of conversion and assurance, to plead with the Lord for more grace.

This basically Heynsian conception of the covenant still survives in many Reformed churches today, particularly those that in practice follow the Arminian teaching that it is praiseworthy to doubt, and which are suspicious of assurance, deeming it

carnal security. It is noteworthy that Canons V, Rejection of Errors V regard assurance based on special revelation or experience as also being Arminian and Papist.

The believer is secure, absolutely secure, not in the flesh, but in the power of grace and by the testimony of the Spirit, Who witnesses with our spirit that we are children of God. Doubt is not praise-

worthy, but carnal. There are indeed marks of a child of God, and we can know them, but we do so in the way of clinging to the promises of God and by looking, not within ourselves, but to the Word of God and the cross of Christ, fighting the battle of faith and walking in daily conversion with a child-like faith. For He is faithful Who promised, and His Word can never be broken.

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Council of Faith Protestant Reformed Church expresses its sincere sympathy to its fellow office bearer, Elder David Dykstra and family in the passing of his mother.

"Thou shalt guide me with Thy counsel and afterward receive me to glory." (Psalm 73:24)

Rev. Wilbur G. Bruinsma, Pres.
Harvey Holstege, Vice Clerk

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Martha Ladies Aid Society of the Hull Protestant Reformed Church expresses their Christian sympathy to their fellow member, Mrs. Egbert Gritters in the recent death of her father, MR. BERT BRANDS.

We commend her and her family to the care of our Heavenly Father for the comfort and sustaining grace that only He can provide.

Rev. Ron Cammenga, Pres.
Mrs. Nellie Brummel, Sec'y.

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Adult Bible Society of the Faith Protestant Reformed Church of Jenison, Michigan, expresses its sincere Christian sympathy to Mr. and Mrs. David Dykstra and family in the death of his mother, MRS. CORNELIUS DYKSTRA.

May our God comfort the bereaved family through His Word.

"Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on Thee: because he trusteth in Thee." (Isaiah 26:3)

Rev. W. Bruinsma, Pres.
Mrs. June Van Den Top, Sec'y.

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Adult Bible Society of the Faith Protestant Reformed Church (Jenison, MI) wishes to express their Christian sympathy to Mr. and Mrs. Robert Noorman and family in the death of her father, MR. MELVIN WIERSMA.

"Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints." (Psalm 116:5)

Rev. W. Bruinsma, Pres.
Mrs. June Van Den Top, Sec'y.

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Men's Society of Southwest Protestant Reformed Church takes this opportunity to express its sincere sympathy to our president, Mr. Phillip Lotterman, in the loss of his father-in-law, MR. MELVIN WIERSMA.

"The Lord knoweth the days of the upright; and their inheritance shall be forever." (Psalm 37:18)

NOTICE!

Classis East will meet in regular session on January 11, 1984 at the First Protestant Reformed Church, Grand Rapids. Material to be treated at this meeting must be in the hands of the Stated Clerk at least three weeks prior to the convening of the meeting.

Jon Huisken, Stated Clerk

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Council of Faith Protestant Reformed Church expresses its sincere sympathy to its brother office bearer, Elder Robert Noorman and family in the passing of his father-in-law, MELVIN WIERSMA.

"My flesh and heart faileth but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever." (Psalm 83:26)

Rev. Wilbur G. Bruinsma, Pres.
Harvey Holstege, Vice Clerk

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