

Perseverance & Assurance

“What We Believe”

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Definitions

Notes excerpted from *The Gospel Institute* – learn more at www.peoriagospelinstitute.org, as well as Dr. Trevor Craigen's Theology III Class at The Master's Seminary.

Because of (1) the warning passages and statements on apostasy in Scripture as well as conditional sentences, and (2) the experience of some who 'believed' and then openly rejected, the question has often been asked, *Can a saved person ever be lost?*

Because of the unbreakable chain the question should be reworded to read, *Can the very work of God in a saved person be undone?*

The Doctrine of Perseverance or Preservation of the Saints: All those who are born again will be kept by God's power and will persevere as Christians until the end of their lives, and that only those who persevere until the end have been truly born again. Grudem, 788

John Samson: The Preservation of the Saints, <http://effectualgrace.com/2012/08/30/the-preservation-of-the-saints/>

A. All who are truly born again will persevere to the end

John 3:36 *Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.*

John 6:38-40 *For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day."*

John 10:27-29 *My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand.*

Romans 8:30 *And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.*

Romans 8:38-39 *For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

1 Corinthians 1:7b-9 ...as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ, ⁸ who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹ God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Ephesians 1:13-14 In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

Philippians 1:6 And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

1 Thessalonians 5:23-24 Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴ He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.

1 Peter 1:3b-5 According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, ⁵ who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

Jude 24 Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy,

B. Only those who persevere to the end have been truly born again

1 Peter 1:3b-5 According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, ⁵ who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

John 8:31 So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples

Matthew 10:22 and you will be hated by all for my name's sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved.

Colossians 1:22-23 he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister.

Hebrews 3:14 *For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end.*

1 John 2:19 *They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us.*

So... in answer to the question *Can the very work of God in a saved person be undone,*

1. It seems impossible, given all the information above, to conceive of affixing negative prefixes to salvation's terminology.
2. It seems impossible to conceive of the opposite of passing from death to life.
3. It seems equally impossible, given the declarations of Scripture on absolutely nothing being able to take the believer out of the hand of the Father's hand (Jhn 10:29) or separate him from God's love (Rom 8:38-39), to conceive of a man's own act so doing.
4. It is impossible to deny the clear declarations on preservation unto blamelessness at the end (1 Cor 1:8-9; 1 Th 5:23-24; Jd 24), of being revealed at the end (Col 3:4; 1 Pet 1:4-5), and being raised up at the end (Jhn 6:35-44).

C. The Biblical formulation of the doctrine of a believer's perseverance incorporates:

- a. The reasons especially related to the **Father**, namely

His purpose -- Rom 8:28; Eph 1:11-12

Rom 8:28 *And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.*

Eph 1:11-12 *also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will, to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ would be to the praise of His glory.*

His power -- Jd 24; 1 Pet 1:5

Jude 24 *Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy,*

1 Pet 1:5 *who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.*

His love -- Rom 8:35-39; Eph 1:4-5

Rom 8:35 *Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?*

Eph 1:4-5 *just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will,*

and His relationship to the Son -- Jhn 17:10,11,20

Jhn 17:10 *and all things that are Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine; and I have been glorified in them.*

Jhn 17:20 *"I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word;*

b. The reasons especially related to the **Son**, namely

His death -- Rom 8:1, 34; Heb 10:14

Rom 8:1 *Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.*

Heb 10:14 *For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.*

His resurrection -- Rom 4:24-25

Rom 4:24-25 *but for our sake also, to whom it will be credited, as those who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, He who was delivered over because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification.*

His intercession -- Heb 7:25; 1 Jhn 2:1

Heb 7:25 *Therefore He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.*

1 Jhn 2:1 *My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous;*

His assurances -- Jhn 5:24

Jhn 5:24 *"Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life.*

- c. The reasons especially related to the **Spirit**, namely

His sealing -- Eph 1:13; Eph 4:30

Eph 1:13 *In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise,*

Eph 4:30 *Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.*

His indwelling -- Jhn 14:16

Jhn 14:16 *“I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever;*

His ministries -- 1 Cor 6:19-20

1 Cor 6:19-20 *Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.*

- d. The reasons especially related to the nature of the change in **the believer**, namely his regeneration, justification, union with Christ, adoption, and sanctification, plus being a joint-heir with Christ (Rom 8:17).

Romans 8:17 *and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.*

D. Those who fall away may give many external signs of conversion

2 Corinthians 11:15 *So it is no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds.*

2 Corinthians 11:26 *on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers*

Matthew 7:21-23 *“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’”*

Illustration: Parable of the Sower in Mark 4

Hebrews 6:4-8 *For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, and*

have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt. For land that has drunk the rain that often falls on it, and produces a crop useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God. But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed, and its end is to be burned.

See Grudem 796-801 for an excellent commentary on this passage.

Thomas Schreiner and Bruce Ware (editors): *Still Sovereign- Contemporary Perspectives on Election, Foreknowledge, and Grace*, see chapter 6 for a case study on the warning passages in Hebrews by Wayne Grudem ([free pdf of ch 6](http://www.waynegrudem.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/perseverance-of-the-saints-hebrews-6.pdf) - <http://www.waynegrudem.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/perseverance-of-the-saints-hebrews-6.pdf>)

John Hendryx: Biblical Reflections on Hebrews 6 - http://www.reformationtheology.com/2006/02/biblical_reflections_on_hebrew.php

E. Thus, eternal security does mean preservation and perseverance:--

- a. On God's side, that He secures the final salvation of all true believers--He preserves the believer, and
- b. On the believer's side, that he perseveres, responding positively to the Truth even as God preserves -- Phil 2:12-13; 1 Jhn 3:9; Jd 21, 24 and 2 Tim 2:19

Phil 2:12-13 *So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.*

1 Jhn 3:9 *No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.*

Jude 21 *keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting anxiously for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to eternal life.*

Jude 24 *Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy,*

2 Tim 2:19 *Nevertheless, the firm foundation of God stands, having this seal, "The Lord knows those who are His," and, "Everyone who names the name of the Lord is to abstain from wickedness."*

F. Discussions related to the doctrine of perseverance

1. The Assurance of the believer

Assurance is the subjective confidence of one's salvation; perseverance is the objective certainty of one's salvation. A person may be assured without being secure and a person may be secure without assurance. God desires that His people pursue assurance.

Assurance is the humble and joyful confidence a believer has that he is irrevocably a child of God and has eternal life.

Rom 8:15-17 *For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!" The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him.*

2 Tim 1:12 *For this reason I also suffer these things, but I am not ashamed; for I know whom I have believed and I am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until that day.*

1 Jhn 5:13 *These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.*

1 Pet 1:8 *and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory,*

2 Peter 1:10 *Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall.*

"In considering the basis of the Christian's assurance we must distinguish sharply between the ground of his acceptance before God, and his own knowledge that he is accepted by Him. Nothing but the righteousness of Christ—wrought out by Him in His virtuous life and vicarious death—can give any sinner a perfect legal standing before the thrice holy God. And nothing but the communication of a new nature, a supernatural work of grace within, can furnish proof that the righteousness of Christ has been placed to my account." – A.W. Pink, [The Nature and Basis of Assurance](#)

Assurance is attested to by the Word, the Spirit, and the new life of the believer

- The Word of God -- what does it say about the one who believes?
- The Spirit of God -- what does He say to the one who believes?
- The new life of the believer -- what does it tell him?

Lack of assurance arises whenever teaching and/or life are out of balance!

So, it must also be remembered that security and assurance, while related, do have different perspectives:

- a. from the Divine perspective the issue is black and white--genuine believers are eternally secure
- b. from the human perspective the issue may be somewhat gray--assurance is subjective dimension in reference to the personal human evaluation

The passages directly teaching security, and the implications from the reality of the work of God, constitute an important basis for assurance; however, arrogance or presumption are quite uncharacteristic of the persevering saint.

Never does the saint proudly affirm his elect status, for it would immediately deny that humility and gratitude which befit the believer

Never does the saint presumptuously assert his salvation--saved so doesn't matter what is now done!--for such would immediately deny his understanding of salvation and its ethical consequences for him.

2. The use of the term “eternal security.” The danger lies in resting our confidence in a past prayer or past action for our assurance. Also, this can cause an unhealthy emphasis placed on assurance immediately following one’s verbal commitment to Jesus.

“I don’t really like the phrase ‘eternal security’ or its popular counterpart ‘once saved always saved’ because both tend to come with a huge amount of unscriptural theological baggage. For many people, ‘eternal security’ means that if a person makes some sort of profession of faith and then lives a lifestyle totally at odds with that profession, even renouncing Christianity altogether, they are still ‘saved’ because ‘once saved, always saved.’ I don’t believe that to be a Scriptural concept in any way at all.” – John Samson, [Eternal Security](#)

3. Agreement between Arminians and Calvinists. Both view the professing Christian who is rebellious or apostate in danger of hell.

Question: How is one assured of their salvation?

For non-reformed theologies — “[A]t the end of the day, the security of the believer finally rests with the believer. For those in the opposite camp [Reformed], the security of the believer finally rests with God — and that, I suggest, rightly taught, draws the believer back to God himself, to trust in God, to a renewed faith that is of a piece with trusting him in the first place.” – D.A. Carson

4. But what about the warning passages?

A theological tension admittedly does exist between the teaching on eternal security and the presence of warnings about apostatizing (especially warning passages in Hebrews)

- a. Usually, one of two extremes surface:
 1. Either an overemphasis on the warning passages to the neglect or secondary treatment of the didactic passages,
 2. Or ignoring or manipulating the warning passages in the light of the didactic passages.
- b. Theologically, eternal security cannot be made to mean that the person who believes is saved no matter what he does and how he lives
 1. Because this would contradict all the moral requirements and imperatives of the Word of God, and
 2. Because this would contradict the warnings that all who continue in the practice of sin and apostasy are doomed.

Eph 5:5-6 *For this you know with certainty, that no immoral or impure person or covetous man, who is an idolater, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.*

Phil 3:18-19 *For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction, whose god is their appetite, and whose glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things.*

Heb 10:26-29 *For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a terrifying expectation of judgment and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries. Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace?*

True believers will respond to these warnings, and the warnings will be part of God's effectual keeping and preservation of them in their lives.

c. Constructively, then, the teaching on security and the apostatizing warnings combine

- To provide the believer with assurance, and
- To motivate the believer to strive after godliness

The practical implication of our understanding of the doctrine of perseverance is that believers can rest secure in the assurance that their salvation is permanent; nothing can separate them from the love of God....On the other hand, however, our understanding of the doctrine of perseverance allows no room for indolence or laxity [Erickson, 1007].

Assurance of Salvation

- Biblical Assurance is the most valuable possession anyone can have
- Biblical Assurance is certainty concerning your eternal destiny.
- Popular Assurance is uncertainty concerning your eternal destiny.
- Assurance of Salvation has a potentially powerful impact on one's service for Christ.
- Assurance is the foundation for the Christian life.

From Wilkin, *Grace in Focus*, (May/June 1997): 2-8.

Other Recommended Resources:

On perseverance – <https://www.monergism.com/topics/perseverance-saints>

On assurance - <https://www.monergism.com/topics/assurance>