

# DAILY DOSE OF DOCTRINE

May 19-23, 2008



May 19, 2008

## Perseverance

*"I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand."<sup>1</sup>*

The Christian life has its ups and downs. Sometimes, when in a spiritual 'wilderness' or having gone through a season of 'backsliding' in one's commitment to God, people may wonder if they have 'lost' their salvation. At such times, the Bible's teaching on the 'perseverance of the saints' would direct our attention to God's faithfulness rather than our own frailty.

Succinctly, 'perseverance' is *"that continuous operation of the Holy Spirit in the believer, by which the work of divine grace that is begun in the heart, is continued and brought to completion"*.<sup>2</sup> In addition to the above, the Bible gives us many assurances:

*"being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."*<sup>3</sup>

*"But the Lord is faithful, and he will strengthen you and protect you from the evil one."*<sup>4</sup>

*"That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet this is no cause for shame, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him until that day."*<sup>5</sup>

God would not have us troubled in this matter. The Good Shepherd looks after his flock!

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<sup>1</sup> John 10:28-29 (TNIV)

<sup>2</sup> L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, p. 546.

<sup>3</sup> Philippians 1:6 (TNIV)

<sup>4</sup> 2 Thessalonians 3:3 (TNIV)

<sup>5</sup> 2 Timothy 1:12 (TNIV)

May 20, 2008

## Apostasy?

*“It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age and who have fallen away, to be brought back to repentance. To their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace.”<sup>1</sup>*

While we may have assurance that nothing can steal away a believer from God’s hands, what about our own free will? Can’t we fall away from grace by our own rejection of God?

Christians differ on this issue. Some argue that Christians, with saving faith, can lose their salvation by drifting away and rejecting God.<sup>2</sup> Scriptures like that above clearly state the danger of apostasy.<sup>3</sup>

Others assert that God knows his own elect before the foundation of the world. Those who are truly his cannot fall away, but will either persevere faithfully to the end or will repent before the end of this life.<sup>4</sup> A lasting rejection of God is an indicator that the person was never really born again in the first place: *“They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us.”<sup>5</sup>*

Whichever position is correct, the Bible’s warnings are meant to be like a guardrail: keeping us safe by warning us of the need to remain faithful or to turn back to God if we have drifted away.

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<sup>1</sup> Hebrews 6:4-6 (TNIV)

<sup>2</sup> The ‘Arminian’ position

<sup>3</sup> See also Matthew 24:12; Colossians 1:23; Hebrews 2:1; 3:14

<sup>4</sup> The ‘Calvinist’ or Reformed perspective

<sup>5</sup> 1 John 2:19 (TNIV)

May 21, 2008

## The Unforgivable Sin?

*"Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters. And so I tell you, people will be forgiven every sin and blasphemy. But blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven."<sup>1</sup>*

The question of 'falling away' can lead some to be concerned about having committed the 'unforgivable' sin. What does it mean to 'blaspheme' the Holy Spirit? Could one commit this sin without realizing it?

The principal work of the Holy Spirit is to glorify God by bringing us to faith in Jesus Christ. When we respond to the Spirit's work by repentance and conversion, we honour and bless him. When we reject Christ with hostility or indifference, we dishonour the person and work of the Spirit. If we persist in this rejection of the gospel to the end of our days, we are dishonouring or 'blaspheming' the Holy Spirit. It is 'unforgiveable' only if the person persists in that attitude of rejection right to the end and never takes advantage of the grace offered by the sacrificial death of Christ.

If you are afraid you may be in this position, do not despair. The very fact that you are concerned about where you stand with God is a very good indication that the Holy Spirit is working in your life. Instead of worrying, affirm your trust in the saving death of Christ for ALL your sins. Give thanks for that grace-based salvation and seek to follow God faithfully on a daily basis. The Holy Spirit will continue his work and give you assurance that you are a child of God.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 12:30-31 (TNIV)

<sup>2</sup> Romans 8:15-16

May 22, 2008

## God Alone is Judge

*“Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of people's hearts. At that time each will receive their praise from God.”<sup>1</sup>*

Sometimes Christians can be guilty of making assumptions about whether others are in a right condition with God, based on our observations of their lives. We may believe that one person is a genuine Christian because they attend Church and make the right noises about God. We may conjecture that another person will never make it to heaven because they are so indifferent or hostile to the gospel. Yet another person may be deemed to have ‘lost their salvation’ because they have drifted from the strong piety they once espoused.

We need to remember that our assessments are based only on outward appearances and are highly subjective. God alone knows and judges human hearts. Those who appear most hostile or indifferent are very often the ones who are powerfully transformed into dynamic disciples of Jesus. The person who appears to have fallen away may yet come back to that ‘first love’ and experience a renewal of faith, even in the last days of his or her life. And that person who appears to be godly may in fact be a hypocrite or a wolf in sheep’s clothing!

Rather than making idle or discouraging judgements, God would have us respond to one another with loving concern and ardent prayer. If something seems amiss in the life of another, pray that the Holy Spirit would work powerfully in their life. Be available to be used by God to bless them. And leave the judging with the Judge!

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Corinthians 4:5 (TNIV)

May 23, 2008

## From 'I' to 'We'

*“All the believers were together and had everything in common....Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together...the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.”<sup>1</sup>*

Up to this point, our consideration of the work of the Holy Spirit has tended to focus on what he does in the life of the individual. This is appropriate, up to a point. As personal beings we are accountable to God, individually, for the lives we lead. So the Holy Spirit works in us individually to lead us to repentance and faith and he continues to transform the inner person in the process of sanctification.

However, to reflect the Biblical emphasis, particularly in light of our Western cultural tendency toward self-centered individualism, it would be wise to put further consideration of the Spirit's work in a more 'corporate' framework.

The Biblical emphasis is not that God came to save and relate to individuals. Jesus' message was that the *kingdom* of God was at hand. On Pentecost, they were saved as each responded to the gospel, but the Spirit immediately began to knit them together into a new community of believers – the Church. The sacraments, the gifts of the Spirit and other 'means of grace' are all meaningful only if received and exercised in the company of our sisters and brothers in Christ.

In an era of 'God has told me' and isolated, internet spirituality, the Holy Spirit would have us learn to declare, "it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us."<sup>2</sup> We must move from 'I' to 'We'.

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<sup>1</sup> Acts 2:44-47 (TNIV – edited)

<sup>2</sup> Act 15:28