



The Doctrine of Saints' Perseverance



Part Five

A. W. Pink



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8. Its Safeguards

There may be some who will at once take exception to the employment of this term in such a connection, affirming that the Truth of God requires no safeguarding at the hands of those called by Him to expound it: that their business is to faithfully preach the same and leave results entirely to its Author. We fully agree that God's eternal Truth stands in no need of any carnal assistance from us, either in the way of dressing it up to render it more attractive or toning down to make it less offensive; yea, we heartily subscribe to the apostle's dictum that "*we can do nothing against the Truth, but for the Truth*" (2 Cor. 13:8)—God overrules the opposition of those who hate it and makes the wrath of His enemies to praise Him. Nevertheless in view of such passages as Mark 4:33; John 16:12; 1 Cor. 3:2; Heb. 5:12 it is clear that our presentation of the Truth needs to be regulated by the condition of those to whom it is ministered. Moreover, this raises the question, What is faithfully presenting the Truth? Are there not other modifying adverbs which are not to be omitted?

The Truth should not only be preached "faithfully" but wisely, proportionately, seasonably as well. There is a zeal which is not according to knowledge nor tempered by wisdom. There is an unbalanced presentation of the Truth which accomplishes more harm than good. We read of "*the present Truth*" (2 Pet. 1:12) and of "*a word in due season*" (Prov. 15:23 and compare with Isa. 50:4), which implies there is such a thing as speaking unseasonably, even though it be the Truth itself which is spoken and that "faithfully." What is a "word in season?" Is it not a timely and pertinent one, a message suited to the condition, circumstances and needs of the persons addressed? In His wisdom and goodness God has provided cordials for the faint

and comfort for those who mourn, as He has also given exhortations to the slothful, admonitions to the careless, solemn warnings to the reckless, and fearful threatenings to those who are defiant. Discrimination needs to be used in our appropriation and application of the Scriptures. As it would be cruel to quote terrifying passages to one who is already mourning over his sins, so it would be wrong to press the promises of Divine preservation upon a professing Christian who is living a carnal and worldly life.

“Watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak” (Matt. 26:41). Those words furnish an illustration of a “word in due season.” The disciples (not Peter only) had boasted *“though I should die with Thee, yet will I not deny Thee.”* They were self-confident and temporarily blind to their own instability. Their Lord therefore bade them guard against self-reliance and seek grace from above, for though they were quite sincere in their avowal, yet were they much too feeble to resist Satan’s attacks in their own strength. They thought themselves immune from such a horrible sin as denying their Master, but instead of bolstering them up in their sense of security He warned them of their danger. Another example of a seasonable word is the apostle’s exhortation to the one who claims that he “standeth by faith,” namely, *“Be not high-minded, but fear. For if God spared not the natural branches take heed lest He also spare not thee. Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on those that fell, severity; but toward thee goodness, if thou continue in His goodness; otherwise thou also shalt be cut off”* (Rom. 11:20, 22).

But it is rather those safeguards by which God Himself has hedged about the subject of the everlasting security of His people that we would now particularly consider, those defences which are designed to shut out unholy trespassers from this garden of delights; or to change the figure, those descriptions of character and conduct which serve to make known the particular persons to whom alone His promises belong. In the preceding section we dwelt at some length on how this blessed doctrine is

misrepresented by Arminians and perverted by Antinomians. To use a term employed by an apostle, it has been grievously “wrested,” torn from its setting, disproportionately contorted, divorced from its qualifying terms, detached from the necessary means by which it is attained, applied unto those to whom it does not belong. Hence our present object is to direct attention unto some of the principal bulwarks by which this precious truth is protected and which must be duly emphasized and continually pressed by the servants of God if it is to be portrayed in its true perspective and if souls are not to be fatally misled. Only thus shall we “faithfully” present this truth.

1. By insisting that it is the preservation of saints and not every one who deems himself a Christian. It is of deep importance to define clearly and sharply the character of those who are Divinely assured of being preserved unto the heavenly kingdom—that God be not dishonoured, His Truth falsified, and souls deceived. “*He preserveth the souls of His saints*” (Psa. 87:10), but of none others. It is so easy to appropriate (or misappropriate) such a promise as “*Thou shalt guide me with Thy counsel and afterward receive me to glory*” (Psa. 73:24), but before so doing honesty requires that I ascertain whether the experiences of the one described in the context are those of mine. Asaph confesses to being envious at the prosperity of the wicked (verses 3, 12) until he felt he had cleansed his own heart and hands “*in vain*” (verse 13). But he checks himself, tender lest by such murmuring he should stumble God’s children (verse 15), recording how his “heart was grieved” and his conscience pricked at giving way to such foolish repinings, until he owned unto God “*I was as a beast before Thee*” (verse 22). The recollection of God’s gracious forbearance (verse 23) moved him to say “*it is good for me to draw near to God*” (verse 28).

When I can find such marks in myself as the Psalmist had, such graces operating in my heart as did in, his, then—but not before—am I warranted in comforting myself as he did. If I challenge the utterances of my mouth as to whether or no they are likely to offend God’s little ones, if I make conscience of

envying the prosperity of the wicked and mourn over it, if I am deeply humbled thereby, if I realize “*my steps had well nigh slipped*” (verse 2) and that it was a longsuffering God who had “holden me by my right hand,” alone preserving me from apostasy; if this sense of His sovereign goodness enables me to affirm “*Whom have I in heaven but Thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides Thee*” (verse 25); if all of this produces in me such a sense of my utter insufficiency as to own “*My flesh and my heart faileth, but God is the strength of my heart*” (verse 26), then am I justified in saying “*Thou shalt guide me with Thy counsel and afterward receive me to glory.*” Yes, God “preserveth the souls of His saints,” but what avails that for me unless I be one of them!

Again; how many there are who eagerly grasp at those words of Christ concerning His sheep, who have only the vaguest idea of the ones whom He thus designates: “*And I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall any pluck them out of My hand*” (John 10:27). The very fact that the verse opens with “*and*” requires us to ponder what immediately precedes, and because His flock is but a “*little*” one (Luke 12:32) it behooves each one who values his soul to spare no pains in seeking to ascertain whether he belongs to it. In the context the Saviour says “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.” Observe diligently the three things which are here predicated of them. First, they hear Christ’s voice. Now to hear His voice means far more than to be acquainted with His words as they are recorded in Scripture—more than believing they are His words. When it was said unto Israel “*the Lord will not hear you in that day*” (1 Sam. 8:18) it signified that He would not heed their requests or grant their petitions. When God complained “*When I spake, ye did not hear,*” it was not that they were physically deaf but their hearts were steeled against Him, as the remainder of the verse indicates: “*But did evil before Mine eyes, and did choose that wherein I delighted not*” (Isa. 65:12).

When God says “*This is My beloved Son in whom I am well*

pleased: hear ye Him” (Matt. 17:5) He is requiring something more of us than that we simply listen respectfully and believingly to what He says: He is demanding that we submit ourselves unreservedly to His authority, that we respond promptly to His orders, that we obey Him. In Prov. 8:33 “*hearing*” is contrasted from refusing, and in Heb. 3:15 we read “*If ye will hear His voice harden not your hearts.*” When Christ declares of His flock “*My sheep hear My voice*” He signifies they heed it—they are not intractable but responsive, doing what He bids. Second, He declares “*and I know them,*” that is, with a knowledge of approbation. Third, “*and they follow Me:*” not the bent of the flesh, not the solicitations of Satan, not the ways of the world, but the example which Christ has left them (1 Pet. 2:21). Of this it said “*they follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth*” (Rev. 14:4) But in order to follow Christ, self has to be denied and the cross taken up (Matt. 16:24). Only those who thus “*hear,*” are “*known*” of Christ, and who “*follow*” Him, shall “*never perish.*”

2. By insisting that no person has any warrant to derive comfort from the doctrine of Divine Security until he is sure that he possesses the character and conduct of a saint. This naturally grows out of the first point, though we have somewhat anticipated what should be said here. Not every one who bears the name of Christ will enter Heaven, but only His sheep. It therefore follows that only those bearing the marks of such have any claim upon the promises made to that favoured company. And the burden of proof always rests upon the one who affirms. If one answers some advertisement from an employer of labour for a skilled workman, he is required to give evidence of his qualifications by well-accredited testimonials. If a person puts in a claim to an estate he must produce proof that he is a legitimate heir and satisfy the court of his bona fides. If a captain requires an additional hand for his ship he demands that the applicant show his papers or give demonstration that he is a fully qualified seaman. Before I can procure a passport I must produce my birth certificate. And one who avers himself a saint must authenticate

his profession and evidence his new birth before he is entitled to be regarded as such.

God's saints are distinguished from all other people, not only by what He has done for them but also by what He has wrought in them. He set His heart upon them from all eternity, having loved them "*with an everlasting love*" (Jer. 31:3) and therefore were they "*blessed with all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies in Christ,*" chosen in Him before the foundation of the world, predestinated "*unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself,*" and "*accepted in the Beloved*" (Eph. 1:3-6). It is true that they fell in Adam and became guilty before God, but an all-sufficient Redeemer was provided for them, appointed to assume and discharge all their liabilities and make full reparation to the broken Law on their behalf. It is also true that they are "*by nature the children of wrath even as others,*" being born into this world "*dead in trespasses and sins*" (Eph. 2:1-3); but at the ordained hour a miracle of grace is performed within them so that they become "*new creatures in Christ Jesus*" (2 Cor. 5:17) and their bodies are made "*the temple of the Holy Spirit*" (1 Cor. 6:19). Faith and holiness have been communicated to them, so that though they are still in the world they are not of it (John 17:14).

The saints are endowed with a new life, with a spiritual and supernatural principle or "nature" which affects their whole souls. So radical and transforming is the change wrought in them by this miracle of grace that it is described as a passing from death unto life (John 5:24), from the power of darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son (Col. 1:13), from "*having no hope and without God in the world*" to being "*made nigh by the blood of Christ*" (Eph. 2:12, 13), from a state of alienation to one of reconciliation (Col. 1:21), out of darkness into God's marvellous light (1 Pet. 2:9). Of them God says "*This people have I formed for Myself: they shall show forth My praise*" (Isa. 43:21). Obviously such a tremendous change in their state and standing must effect a real and marked change in their character and conduct. From rebellion against God they are brought unto

subjection to Him, so that they throw down their weapons of opposition and yield to His sceptre. From love of sin they are turned to hate it, and from dread of God they now delight in Him. Formerly they thought only of gratifying self, now their deepest longing is to please Him who has shown them such amazing grace.

The saints are those who enter into a solemn covenant with the Lord, unreservedly dedicating themselves unto Him, making His glory their paramount concern. “Formerly soldiers used to take an oath not to flinch from their colours, but faithfully to cleave to their leaders; this they called *sacramentum militare*, a military oath; such an oath lies upon every Christian. It is so essential to the being of a saint, that they are described by this: “gather My saints together unto Me; those that have made a covenant with Me” (Psa. 50:5). We are not Christians till we have subscribed this covenant, and that without any reservation. When we take upon us the profession of Christ’s name, we enlist ourselves in His muster-roll, and by it do promise that we will live and die with Him in opposition to all His enemies. . . He will not entertain us till we resign up ourselves freely to His disposal, that there may be no disputing with His commands afterwards, but, as one under His authority, go and come at His word” (W. Gurnall, 1660).

3. By insisting that perseverance is an imperative necessity. Adherence to the Truth no matter what opposition is encountered, living a life of faith in and upon God despite all the antagonism of the flesh, steadfastly treading the path of obedience in face of the scoffs of the world, continuing to go forward along the highway of holiness notwithstanding the hindrances of Satan and his emissaries, is not optional but obligatory. It is according to the unalterable decree of God: no one can reach Heaven except by going along the only way that reaches there—Christ “*endured the cross*” before He received the crown. It is according to the irreversible appointment of God: “*For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should*

walk in them” (Eph. 2:10). It is according to the established order of God: “*that ye be not slothful but followers of them who through faith and patience (the Greek word may be rendered, perseverance with equal propriety) inherit the promises*” (Heb. 6:12). It is according to the design of the Atonement, for Christ lived and died that He might “*purify unto Himself a peculiar people zealous of good works*” (Titus 2:14)

Assurance of Divine preservation no more renders less imperative the saints own perseverance than God’s informing Hezekiah he should live a further fifteen years abolished the necessity of his eating and drinking, resting and sleeping, as hitherto. “The elect are as much chosen to intermediate sanctification on their way as they are to that ultimate glorification which crowns their journey’s end, and there is no coming to the one but through the other. So that neither the value, nor the necessity, nor the practical value of good works is superseded by this glorious truth. . .It is impossible that either the Son of God, who came down from heaven to propose and make known His Father’s will; or that the Spirit of God, speaking in the Scriptures and acting on the heart, should administer the least encouragement to negligence and unholiness of life. Therefore that opinion that personal holiness is unnecessary to final glorification is in direct opposition to every dictate of reason, to every declaration of Scripture” (A. Toplady). Alas, the attitude of multitudes of professing Christians is, “*Soul, thou hast much good laid up. . .take thine ease*” (Luke 12:19), and the doom of the fool will be theirs.

Concerning the imperativeness of perseverance C.H. Spurgeon said in the introductory portion of his sermon on “*The righteous shall hold on his way*” (Job 17:9), “The man who is righteous before God has a way of his own. It is not the way of the flesh, nor the way of the world; it is a way marked out for him by the Divine command, in which he walks by faith. It is the king’s highway of holiness, the unclean shall not pass over it: only the ransomed of the Lord shall walk there, and these shall find it a path of separation from the world. Once entered upon the way of

life, the pilgrim must persevere in it or perish, for thus saith the Lord *'If any man draw back, My soul shall have no pleasure in him.'* Perseverance in the path of faith and holiness is a necessity of the Christian, for only *'he that endureth to the end shall be saved.'* It is in vain to spring up quickly like the seed that was sown on the rock, and then by-and-by to wither when the sun is up; that would but prove that such a plant has no root in itself, but *'the trees of the Lord are full of sap'* and they abide and continue and bring forth fruit, even in old age, to show that the Lord is upright.

“There is a great difference between nominal Christianity and real Christianity, and this is generally seen in the failure of the one and the continuance of the other. Now, the declaration of the text is, that the truly righteous man shall hold on his way: he shall not go back, he shall not leap the hedges and wander to the right hand or the left, he shall not lie down in idleness, neither shall he faint and cease to go upon his journey; but he *'shall hold on his way.'* It will frequently be very difficult for him to do so, but he will have such resolution, such power of inward grace given him, that he will *hold on his way'* with stern determination, as though he held on by his teeth, resolving never to let go. Perhaps he may not always travel with equal speed; it is not said that he shall hold on his pace, but he shall hold on his way. There are times when we run and are not weary, and anon when we walk and are thankful that we do not faint; ay, and there are periods when we are glad to go on all fours and creep upwards with pain; but still we prove that *'the righteous shall hold on his way.'* Under all difficulties the face of the man whom God has justified is steadfastly set towards Jerusalem, nor will he turn aside till his eyes shall see the King in his beauty.”

4. By insisting on continuance in well doing. It is not how a person commences but how he ends which is the all-important matter. We certainly do not believe that one who has been born of God can perish, but one of the marks of regeneration is its permanent effects, and therefore I must produce those permanent fruits if my profession is to be credited. Both Scripture and

observation testify to the fact that there are those who appear to run well for a season and then drop out of the race. Not only are there numbers induced to “come forward” and “join the church” under the high-pressure methods used by the professional evangelists, who quickly return to their former manner of life: but there are not a few who enter upon a religious profession more soberly and wear longer. Some seem to be genuinely converted: they separate from ungodly companions, seek fellowship with God’s people, manifest an earnest desire to know more of the Word, become quite intelligent in the Scriptures, and for a number of years give every outward sign of being Christians. But gradually their zeal abates, or they are offended at some wrong done them, and ultimately they go right back again into the world.

We read of a certain class “*who for a while believed, and in time of temptation fall away*” (Luke 8:13). There were those who followed Christ for a season, yet of them we read “*From that time many of His disciples went back and walked no more with Him*” (John 6:66). There have been many such in every age. All is not gold that glitters, and not every one who makes a promising start in the race reaches the goal. It is therefore incumbent upon us to take note of those passages which press upon us the necessity of continuance, for they constitute another of those safeguards which God has placed around the doctrine of the security of His saints. On a certain occasion “*many believed on Him*” (John 8:30), but so far from Christ assuring them that Heaven was now their settled portion, we are told “*Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on Him, IF ye continue in MY word then are ye My disciples indeed*” (verse 31). Unless we abide in subjection to Christ, unless we walk in obedience to Him unto the end of our earthly course, we are but disciples in name and semblance.

We read of certain men who “*came to Antioch and spake unto the Grecians there, preaching the Lord Jesus.*” The power of God accompanied them and richly blessed their efforts, for “*The hand of the Lord was with them and a great multitude believed*

and turned unto the Lord” (Acts 11:20, 21). Tidings of this reached the church at Jerusalem, and mark well their response: they sent Barnabas to them, *“who, when he came and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord”* (verse 22). Barnabas was not one of those fatalistic hyper-Calvinists who argued that since God has begun a good work in them all would be well, that the Holy Spirit will care for, instruct, and guard them, whether or no they be furnished with ministerial nurses and teachers. Instead, he recognized and discharged his own Christian responsibility, dealt with them as accountable agents, addressed to them suitable exhortations, pressed upon them the indispensable duty of their cleaving to the Lord. Alas that there are so few like Barnabas today.

At a later date we find that Barnabas returned to Antioch accompanied by Paul, and while there they were engaged in *“confirming the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith”* and warning them that *“we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God”* (Acts 14:22). How far were they from believing in a mechanical salvation, reasoning that if these people had been genuinely converted they would necessarily *“continue in the faith!”* Writing to the Corinthians, the apostle reminded them of the Gospel he had preached unto them and which they had received, yet failing not to add *“By which also ye are saved IF ye hold fast that which I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain”* (1 Cor. 15:2). In like manner he reminded the Colossians that they were reconciled to God and would be preserved unblameable and unproveable *“IF ye continue in the faith, grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the Gospel”* (1:23). There are those who dare to say there is no “if” about it, but such people are taking direct issue with Holy Writ.

Even when writing to a minister of the Gospel, his own “son in the faith,” Paul hesitated not to exhort him, *“Take heed unto thyself and unto the doctrine; continue in them,”* adding *“for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself (from apostasy) and them*

that hear thee” (1 Tim. 4:6). To the Hebrews he said “*But Christ as a Son over His own house, whose house are we IF we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end*” (3:6). And again, “*For we are made partakers of Christ IF we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end*” (3:15). How dishonestly has the Word of God been handled by many! Such passages as these are never heard from many pulpits from one year’s end to another. It is much to be feared that many pastors of “Calvinistic” churches are afraid to quote such verses lest their people should charge them with Arminianism. Such will yet have to face the Divine indictment “*Ye have not kept My ways, but have been partial in the Law*” or Word (Mal. 2:9).

We find precisely the same thing in the writings of another apostle. James though addressing those whom he terms “*my beloved brethren,*” calls upon his readers “*But be ye doers of the Word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any one be a hearer of the Word and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: for he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was* (that is, nothing but a superficial and fleeting effect is produced upon him). *But whoso looketh into the perfect Law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed*” (1:22-25). The word for “*beholdeth*” is a metaphor taken from those who not only glance at a thing but bend their bodies towards it that they may carefully scrutinize it—used in Luke 24:12, and 1 Peter 1:12; denoting earnestness of desire, and diligent enquiry. To “*continue therein*” signifies a persevering study of the Truth, and abiding in the belief of and obedience to the same, thereby evidencing our love for it. Many have a brief taste for it, but their appetite is quickly quenched again by the things of this world.

It is perfectly true, blessedly true, that there is no “if,” no uncertainty, from the Divine side in connection with the Christian’s reaching Heaven: everyone who has been justified by

God shall without fail be glorified. Those who have been Divinely quickened will most assuredly continue in the faith and persevere in holiness unto the end of their earthly course. This is clear from 1 John 2:19, where the apostle alludes to some in his day who had apostatized: *“They went out from us, but they were not of us”*—they belonged not to the family of God, though for a while they had fraternized with some of its members. *“For”* adds the apostle, *“if they had been of us (had they really been one in a personal experience of the regenerating power of the Spirit) they would have continued with us”*—nothing could have induced them to heed the siren voice of their seducers. *“But they went Out from us that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us”*—but merely temporary professors, stony-ground hearers, nominal Christians, members of a totally different family. Previously they had every appearance of being the genuine article, but by their defection they were exposed as counterfeits. No, there is no “if” from the Divine side.

Nevertheless, there is an “if” from the human side of things, from the standpoint of our responsibility, in connection with my making sure that I am one of those whom God has promised to preserve unto His heavenly kingdom. Continuance in the faith in the path of obedience, in denying self and following Christ, is not simply desirable but indispensable. No matter how excellent a beginning I have made, if I do not continue to press forward I shall be lost. Yes, lost, and not merely miss some particular crown or millennial honours as the deluded dispensationalists teach. It is persevere or perish: it is final perseverance or perish eternally—there is no other alternative. Romans 11:22 makes that unmistakably clear; *“Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them that fell (the unbelieving Jews) severity: but toward thee (saved Gentiles, verse 11) goodness, IF thou continue in His goodness; otherwise thou also shalt be cut off”* To continue in God’s goodness is the opposite of returning to our badness. The evidence that we are the recipients of God’s goodness is that we continue in the faith and obedience of the Gospel. The end cannot be reached apart from the appointed

means.

But I cannot see the consistency between what has been set forth in the last two paragraphs, some will exclaim. What of it: who are you? who am I? Merely short-sighted creatures of yesterday, upon whom God has written “folly and vanity.” Shall human ignorance set itself against Divine wisdom! Does any reader dare call into question the practice of Christ and His apostles: they pressed the “if” and insisted upon the needs-be for this “continuing;” and those ministers who fail to do so—no matter what their standing or reputation—are no servants of God. Can you see the consistency between the apostle affirming so positively of those who have received the Holy Spirit from Christ “*ye shall abide* (“continue” - the same Greek word as in all the above passages) *in Him,*” and then in the very next breath exhorting them “*And now, little children, abide* (“continue”) *in Him*” (1 John 2:27,28)—if you cannot it must be because of theological blinders. Can you see the consistency of David asserting so confidently “*The Lord will perfect that which concerneth me: Thy mercy O Lord, endureth forever*” and then immediately after praying, “*forsake not the works of Thine own hands*” (Psa. 138:8)—if you cannot then this writer places a big question-mark against your religious profession.

5. By insisting that there are dangers to guard against. Here again there will be those who object against the use of this term in such a connection. What sort of dangers, they will ask: dangers of the Christian’s severing his fellowship with God, losing his peace, spoiling his usefulness, rendering himself unfruitful?—granted, but not of missing Heaven itself. They will point Out that safety and danger are opposites and that one who is secure in Christ cannot be in any peril of perishing. However plausible, logical, and apparently Christ-honouring that may sound, we would ask, Is that how Scripture represents the case? Do the Epistles picture the saints as being in no danger of apostasy? Or, to state it less baldly: are there no sins warned against, no evils denounced, no paths of unrighteousness described, which if persisted in do not certainly terminate in

destruction? And is there no responsibility resting on me in connection therewith? Apostasy is not reached at a single bound, but is the final culmination of an evil process, and it is against those things which have a tendency unto apostasy against which the saints are repeatedly and most solemnly warned.

One who is now experiencing good health is in no immediate danger of dying from tuberculosis, nevertheless if he recklessly exposes himself to the wet and cold, if he refrains from taking sufficient nourishing food which supplies strength to resist disease, or if he incurs a heavy cough on his chest and makes no effort to break it up, he is most likely to fall a victim to consumption. So, while the Christian remains spiritually healthy he is in no danger of apostatizing, but if he starts to keep company with the wicked and recklessly exposes himself to temptation, if he fails to use the means of grace, if he experiences a sad fall, and repents not of it and returns to his first works, he is deliberately heading for disaster. The seed of eternal death is still in the Christian: that seed is sin, and it is only as Divine grace is diligently and constantly sought, for the thwarting of its inclinations and suppressing of its activities, that it is hindered from developing to a fatal end. A small leak which is neglected will sink a ship just as effectually as the most boisterous sea. And as Spurgeon said on Psalm 19:13, "Secret sin is a steppingstone to presumptuous sin, and that is the vestibule of 'the sin which is unto death'" (Treasury of David).

Did no dangers menace Israel after Jehovah brought them Out of Egypt with a high hand and by His mighty arm conducted them safely through the Red Sea? Did all who entered upon the journey to Canaan actually arrive at the promised land? Perhaps some one replies, They were under the old covenant and therefore supply no analogy to the case of Christians today. What says the Word? This, they "*were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and did all eat the same spiritual meat, and did all drink the same spiritual drink, for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ.*" What analogy could be closer than that? Yet the passage

goes on to say, *“But with many of them God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown in the wilderness”* (1 Cor. 10:2-5). And what is the use which the apostle makes of this solemn history? Does he say that it has no application unto us? The very reverse: *“Now these things were our examples, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted. . .neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted and were destroyed of serpents”* (verses 6-9). Here is a most deadly danger for us to guard against.

Nor did the apostle leave it at that. He was still more definite, saying *“Neither murmur ye as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer. Now all these things happened unto them for examples, and they are written for our admonition upon whom the ends of the world are come,”* making this specific application unto Christians, *“Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall”* (verses 10-12). Paul was no fatalist but one who ever enforced moral responsibility. He inculcated no mechanical salvation, but one which must be worked out *“with fear and trembling.”* Charles Hodge of Princeton was a very strong Calvinist, yet on 1 Corinthians 10:12 he failed not to say: *“There is perpetual danger of falling. No degree of progress we have already made, no amount of privileges which we may have enjoyed, can justify the want of caution. ‘Let him that thinketh he standeth,’ that is, who thinketh himself secure. . .neither the members of the church nor the elect can be saved unless they persevere in holiness, and they cannot persevere in holiness without continual watchfulness and effort,”* i.e., against the dangers menacing them.

The above is not the only instance when the apostle made use of the case of those Israelites who perished on their way to Canaan to warn New Testament saints of their danger. After affirming that God was grieved with that generation, saying *“They do alway err in their heart and they have not known (loved) My ways, so I swear in My wrath, They shall not enter into My rest,”* Paul added, *“Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living*

God. But exhort one another daily, while it is called Today, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin” (Heb. 3:12, 13). We are not here warned against an imaginary peril but a real one. *“Take heed”* signifies watch against carelessness and sloth, be on the alert as a soldier who knows the enemy is near, lest you fall an easy prey. Those here exhorted are specifically addressed as *“brethren”* to intimate there are times when the best of saints need to be cautioned against the worst of evils. An *“evil heart of unbelief”* is a heart which dislikes the strictness of obedience and universality of holiness which God requires of us.

After referring again to those *“whose carcasses fell in the wilderness”* to whom God swear *“they shall not enter into My rest, because of their unbelief”* or *“disobedience”* (3:18, 19), the apostle said *“Let us therefore fear lest a promise being left us of entering into His rest, any of you should seem to come short of it”* (Heb. 4:1). *“Fear”* is as truly a Christian grace as is faith, peace or joy. The Christian is to fear temptations, the dangers which menace him, the sin which indwells him, the warnings pointed by others who have made shipwreck of the faith and the severity of God in His dealings with such. He is to fear the threatenings of God against sin and those who indulge themselves in it. It was because Noah was *“moved with fear”* at the warning he had received from God that he took precautions against the impending flood (Heb. 11:7). God has plainly announced the awful doom of all who continue in allowed sin, and fear of that doom will inspire caution and circumspection, and will preserve from carnal security and presumption. And therefore are we counselled *“passing the time of your sojourn here in fear”* (1 Pet. 1:17)—not only in exceptional seasons, but the whole of our time here.

We can barely glance at a few more of the solemn cautions addressed not merely to formal professors but to those who are recognized as genuine saints. *“Be sober, be vigilant, because your adversary the Devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about seeking whom he may devour. Whom resist steadfast in the faith”* (1 Pet. 5:8, 9). Obviously such a warning would be

meaningless if the Christian were not threatened with a most deadly danger. *“Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness”* (2 Pet. 3:17). This warning looks back to the false prophets of (2:1, 2) and what is said of them in verses 18-22. The *“error of the wicked”* here cautioned against includes both doctrinal and practical, especially the latter—forsaking of the *“narrow way,”* the highway of holiness which alone leads to Heaven. *“Hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown”* (Rev. 3:11)—cling tenaciously to the Truth you have received, the faith which has been planted in your heart, to the measure of grace given you.

But how do you reconcile the Christian’s danger with his safety? There is nothing to reconcile, for there is no antagonism. It is enemies and not friends who need reconciling, and warnings are the Christian’s friend, one of the safeguards which God has placed around the truth of the security of His people, preventing them from wresting it to their destruction. By revealing the certain consequences of total apostasy Christians are thereby cautioned and kept from the same: a holy fear moves their hearts and so becomes the means of preventing the very evil they denounce. A lighthouse is to warn against recklessness as mariners near the coast, so that they will steer away from the fatal rocks. A fence before a precipice is not superfluous, but is designed to call to a halt those journeying in that direction. When the driver of a train sees the signals change to red he shuts off steam, thereby preserving the passengers under his care. The danger signals of Scripture to which we have called attention are heeded by the regenerate and therefore are among the very means appointed by God for the preservation of His people, for it is only by attending to the same they are kept from destroying themselves.

In the foregoing volume (booklet three) we devoted four sections to a setting forth of the principal springs from which the final perseverance of the saints (in their cleaving unto the Lord,

their love of the Truth, and their treading the path of obedience) does issue, or the grounds on which their eternal security rests. It is therefore fitting, if the balance of truth is to be duly observed, that we should give space unto a presentation of the safeguards by which God has hedged about this doctrine, thereby forbidding empty professors and presumptuous Antinomians from trespassing upon this sacred ground. In this booklet we have already dwelt upon five of these safeguards and we now proceed to point out others. In such a day as this it is the more necessary to enter into detail upon the present branch of our subject that the mouths of certain enemies of the Truth may be closed, that formalists may be shown they have no part or lot in the matter, that hyper-Calvinists may be instructed in the way of the Lord more perfectly, and His own people stirred out of their lethargy.

6. By insisting on the necessity for using the means of grace. There are some who assert that if God has regenerated a soul he is infallibly certain of reaching Heaven whether or not he uses the means appointed, yea that no matter to what extent he fails in the performance of duty or how carnally he lives, he cannot perish. Now we have no hesitation in saying that such an assertion is a grievous perversion of the Truth, and in view of Satan's words to Christ "*If Thou be the Son of God cast Thyself down (from a pinnacle of the temple), for it is written, He shall give His angels charge over Thee, and in their hands they shall bear Thee up*" (Matt. 4:6), there is no room for doubt as to who is the author of such a lie. It is a grievous perversion because a tearing asunder of what God Himself has joined together. The same One who has decreed the end has also ordained the means necessary unto that end. He has promised certain things unto His people, but He requires to be inquired of concerning them; and if they have not, it is because they ask not.

Even among those who would turn away with abhorrence from the extreme form of Antinomianism mentioned above, there are those who regard the use of means quite indifferently in this connection, arguing that whatever be required in order to preserve from apostasy the Lord Himself will attend unto, that

He will so work in His people both to will and to do of His good pleasure that it is quite unnecessary for ministers of the Gospel to be constantly addressing exhortations unto them and urging to the performance of duty. But such a conclusion is thoroughly defective and erroneous, for it quite loses sight of the fact that God deals with His people throughout as moral agents, enforcing their responsibility. Whether or not we can see the consistency between the Divine foreordination and the discharge of human accountability, between the Divine decree and the imperativeness of our making use of the means of grace, is entirely beside the point. Christ exhorted and admonished His apostles, and they in turn the churches; and that is sufficient. It is vain to pit our puny objections against their regular practice.

Just as God has ordained material means for the accomplishment of His pleasure in the material realm, so He has appointed that rational agents shall use spiritual means for the fulfilling of His will in connection with spiritual things. He could make the fields fertile and the trees fruitful without the instrumentality of rain and sunshine, but it has pleased Him to employ secondary causes and subordinate agents in the production of our food. In like manner He could cause His people to grow in grace, make them fruitful unto every good work, and preserve them from everything injurious to their welfare, without requiring any industry and diligence on their part; but it has not so pleased Him to dispense with their concurrence. Accordingly we find Him bidding them "*Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling*" (Phil. 2:12), "*Labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief*" (Heb. 4:11). Promises and precepts, exhortations and threatenings, suitable to moral agents are given to them, calling for the employment of those faculties and the exercise of those graces which He has bestowed upon them.

It is a serious mistake to suppose that there is any conflict between one class of passages which contain God's promises of sufficient grace unto His people, and another class in which He

requires of them the performance of their duty. In his exposition of Hebrews 3:14 John Owen pointed out that the force of the Greek rendered “if we hold the beginning of our confidence firm unto the end” denotes “our utmost endeavour to hold it fast and to keep it firm and steadfast;” adding “Shaken it will be, opposed it will be, kept it will not be, without our utmost diligence and endeavour. It is true our persistency in Christ does not, as to the issue and event, depend absolutely on our own diligence. The unalterableness of our union with Christ, on the account of the faithfulness of the covenant, is that which does and shall eventually secure it. But yet our own diligent endeavour is such an indispensable means for that end that without it, it will not be brought about.” Our diligent endeavour is necessitated by the precept, which God commands us to make use of, and by the order He has established in the relations of one spiritual thing to another.

The older writers were wont to illustrate the consistency between God’s purpose and our performance of duty by an appeal to Acts 27. The ship which carried the apostle and other prisoners encountered a fearful gale and it continued so long and with such severity that the inspired narrative declares “*all hope that we should be saved was then taken away*” (verse 20). A Divine messenger then assured the apostle, “*Fear not Paul, thou must be brought before Caesar; and lo God hath given thee all (the lives of) them that sail with thee,*” and so sure was the apostle that this promise would be fulfilled, he said unto the ship’s company “*Be of good cheer, for there shall be no loss of life among you, but of the ship, for I believe that it shall be even as it was told me*” (verses 21-25). Yet next day, when the sailors feared they would be smashed upon the rocks and started to flee out of the ship, Paul said to the centurion “*except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved*” (verse 31)!

Now there is a nice problem which we would submit to the more extreme Calvinists: how can the positive promise “*there shall be no loss of life*” (verse 22) and the contingent “*except these abide in the ship ye cannot be saved*” (verse 31) stand

together? How are you going to reconcile them according to your principles? But in reality there is no difficulty: God made no absolute promise that He would preserve those in the ship regardless of their use of appropriate means. They were not irrational creatures He would safeguard, but moral agents who must discharge their own responsibility, and neither be inert nor act presumptuously. Accordingly we find Paul bidding his companions “*take meat,*” saying “*This is for your health*” (verse 34), and later the ship was lightened of its cargo (verse 38) and its main-sail hoisted (verse 40), which further conduced to their safety. The certainty of God’s promise was not suspended upon their remaining in the ship, but it was a making known of the means whereby God would effect their security.

Reverting to Owen’s exposition of Hebrews 3:14, he said: “Our persistency in our subsistence in Christ is the emergence and effect of our acting grace unto that purpose. Diligence and endeavours in this matter are like Paul’s mariners when he was shipwrecked at Melita. The preservation of their lives depended absolutely on the faithfulness and power of God, yet when the mariners began to fly out of the ship Paul tells the centurion that unless his men stayed therein they could not be saved. But why need he think of the shipmen when God took upon Himself the preservation of them all? He knew full well that He would preserve them; but yet that He would do so in and by the use of means. If we are in Christ God has given us the lives of our souls, and hath taken upon Himself, in His covenant, the preservation of them. But yet we may say, with reference unto the means that He hath appointed, when storms and trials arise, unless we use our own diligent endeavours we cannot be saved.” Alas that some who profess to so greatly admire this Puritan and endorse his teaching have wandered so far from the course which he followed.

If it be asked, Did the purpose of God that Paul and his companions should all reach land safely depend upon the uncertain will and actions of men? The answer is, No, as a cause from which the purpose of God received its strength and support.

But yes, as a means, appointed by Him, to secure the end He had ordained, for God has decreed the subordinate agencies by which the end shall be accomplished as truly as He has decreed the end itself. In His Word God has revealed a conjunction of means and ends, and there is a necessity lying upon men to use the means and not to expect the end without them. It is at our peril that we tear asunder what God has joined together and disrupt the order He has appointed. The same God who bids us believe His promises, forbids us to tempt His providences (Matt. 4:7). Even though the means may appear to us to have no adequate connection with the end, seeing God has enjoined them, we must use the same. Naaman must wash in the Jordan if he would be cleansed of his leprosy (2 Kings 4:10) and Hezekiah must take a lump of figs and lay it on his boil if he is to be recovered (2 Kings 20:4-7).

They are greatly mistaken who suppose that since the preservation of believers is guaranteed in the covenant of grace that this renders all means and motives, exhortations and threatenings, useless and senseless. Not so. The doctrine of the everlasting security of the saint does not mean that God will preserve him whether or not he perseveres, but rather that He has promised to give him all needed grace for him to continue in the path of holiness. This supposes that believers will be under such advantages and have suitable aids used with them in order to this, and that they shall have motives constantly set before them which induce and persuade unto obedience and personal piety and to guard them against the contrary. Hence the propriety and usefulness of the ordinances of the Gospel, the instructions and precepts, the promises and incentives which are furnished us to perseverance, without which the purpose of God that we should persevere could not be effected in a way suited to our moral nature.

Christians are indeed *“kept by the power of God”* (1 Pet. 1:5), yet it needs to be pointed out that they are not preserved mechanically, as a child is kept in the nursery from falling into the fire by a tall metal fender or guard, or as the unwilling horse

is held in by bit and bridle; but spiritually so by the workings of Divine grace in them and by means of motives and inducements from without which call forth that grace into exercise and action. We quite miss the force of that declaration unless we complete the verse: "*Who are kept by the power of God through faith, unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.*" It is not "for" or "because of faith" but "*through faith*" yet not without it, for faith is the hand which, from a sense of utter insufficiency and helplessness, clings to God and grasps His strength—not always firmly, but often feebly; not always consciously, but instinctively. Though the saint be "*kept by the power of God*" yet he himself has to fight every step of the way. If we read of "*this grace wherein ye stand*" (Rom. 5:2), we are also told "*for by faith ye stand*" (2 Cor. 1:24).

Viewing the event from the standpoint of the Divine decree it was not possible that Herod should slay Christ in His infancy, nevertheless God commanded Joseph to use means to prevent it, by fleeing into Egypt. In like manner, from the standpoint of God's eternal purpose it is not possible that any saint should perish, yet He has placed upon him the necessity of using means to prevent apostasy and everything which has a tendency thereto. True, he must not trust in the means to the exclusion of God, for those means are only efficacious by His appointment and blessing; on the other hand, it is presumption and not faith which talks of trusting God while the means are despised or ignored. Nor have we said anything in this section which warrants the inference that Heaven is a wage that we earn by our own industry and fidelity, rather do the means appointed by God mark out the course we must take if we would reach the desired Goal. It is "*through faith and patience*" we "*inherit the promises*" (Heb. 6:12): our glorification will not be bestowed in return for them, yet there can be no glorification to those devoid of these graces.

The sun shines into our rooms through their windows: those windows contribute nothing whatever to our comfort and enjoyment of the sun, yet are they necessary as means for its

beams to enter. The means and mediums which God has designed for the accomplishment of His ends concerning us are not such as to be “conditions” on which those ends are suspended in uncertainty as to their issue, but are the sure links by which He has connected the one with the other. Exhortations and warnings are not so much the means whereby God’s promises are accomplished, as the means by which the things promised are wrought. God has promised His people sufficient grace to enable and cause them to make such a use of the means that they will be preserved from fatal sins or apostasy, and the exhortations, consolations, admonitions of Scripture are designed for the stirring up into exercise of that grace. The certainty of the end is assured not by the nature or sufficiency of the means in themselves considered, but because of God’s ordination in connection therewith.

God has assured His people that His grace shall be all-sufficient and that His strength shall be made perfect in their weakness, but nowhere has He promised a continuance of His love and favour unto dogs returning to their vomit or to sows which are content to wallow in the mire. If our thoughts on this subject be formed entirely by the teaching of God’s Word (and not partly by carnal reason), then we shall expect perseverance only in that way wherein God has promised it, and that is by availing ourselves of the helps and advantages He has provided, especially the study of and meditation upon His Word and the hearing or reading the messages of His servants. Though God has promised grace unto His people, yet He requires them to—sincerely, believingly, earnestly—seek it: *“Let us therefore come boldly unto the Throne of Grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need”* (Heb. 4:16). And that grace we are constantly in need of as long as we are left here:—“Day by day the manna fell, O to learn that lesson well.”

Much confusion has resulted on this and other points through failure to distinguish between impetration [to accomplish] and application, or what Christ purchased for His people and God’s actually making over the same unto them according to the order

of things He has established. As faith is indispensable before justification so is perseverance before glorification, and that necessarily involves the use of means. True, our faith adds nothing whatever to the merits of Christ in order to our justification, yet until we believe, we are under the curse of the Law; nor does our perseverance entitle us to glorification, yet only those who do persevere unto the end will be glorified. Now as God requires obedience from all the parts and faculties of our souls, so in His Word He has provided motives to the obedience required, motives suited unto “all that is within us”—that love, fear, hope, etc. may be called into action. Of ourselves we are not sufficient to make a good use of the means, and therefore we beg God to work in us that which He requireth: Colossians 1:29.

God has promised to repair the spiritual decays of His people and to heal their backslidings freely, yet He will do so in such a way as wherein He may communicate His grace righteously to the praise of His glory. Therefore are duties, especially that of confession of sins to God, prescribed to us in order thereto. “*He that covereth his sins shall not prosper, but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy*” (Prov. 28:13). “*I will heal their backsliding*” (Hos. 14:4): there is the promise and the end. But first “*Take with you words and turn to the Lord: say unto Him, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously*” (verse 2): there is the duty and the means unto that end. Although repentance and confession be not the procuring cause of God’s grace and love, from whence alone our healing or recovery proceeds, yet are they required in the appointed method of God’s dispensing His grace.

It must be insisted upon that the Christian’s concurrence with the Divine will by no means warrants the horrible conclusion that he is entitled to divide the honours with God. How could this possibly be, seeing that if he does what he is bidden he remains but an “unprofitable servant?” How could it be, when to whatever extent he does improve the means it is only the power of Divine grace which so enabled him? How could it be, when he is most sensible in himself that far more of failure than

success attends his efforts? No, when the redeemed have safely crossed the Jordan and are safely landed on the shores of the heavenly Canaan they will exclaim with one accord “*Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy name give glory, for Thy mercy, for Thy Truth’s sake*” (Psa. 115:1).

To sum up. The doctrine of the perseverance of the saints, in the pursuit and practice of holiness as it is set forth in God’s Word, provides no shelter for either laziness or licentiousness: it supplies no encouragement for us to take our regeneration and glorification for granted, but bids us “*give diligence to make your calling and election sure*” (2 Pet. 1:10). Exhortations and threatenings are not made unto us as those already assured of final perseverance, but as those who are called to the use of means for the establishment of our souls in the ways of obedience, being annexed to those ways of grace and peace which God calls His saints unto. Perseverance consists in a continual exercise of spiritual graces in the saints, and exhortations are the Divinely appointed means for stirring those graces into action and for a further increase of them. Therefore those preachers who do not press upon the Lord’s people the discharge of their duties and are remiss in warning and admonishing them, fail grievously at one of the most vital points in the charge committed to them.

7. By enforcing the threatenings of Scripture. The One with whom we have to do is ineffably holy and therefore does He hate sin wherever it is found. He will not ignore sin in His own children when it is unjudged and unconfessed any more than He will in those who are the children of the Devil. The pope and his underlings may traffic in their vile “indulgences” and “special dispensations,” but the Lord God never lowers His standard, and even those in Christ are not exempted from bitter consequences if they pursue a course of folly. But God is also merciful and faithful, and therefore He threatens before He punishes and warns before He smites. In His Word He has described those ways which lead to disaster and destruction, that we may shun them; yet those who deliberately follow them may know for

certain that they shall receive the due reward of their defiance. It is therefore incumbent upon the minister of the Gospel to press the Divine threatenings, as it is the part of wisdom for his hearers or readers to take the same to heart.

“If ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses” (Matt. 6:15). *“And that servant which knew his Lord’s will and prepared not himself, neither did according to His will, shall be beaten with many stripes”* (Luke 12:47—spoken to Peter: 5:41). *“Behold, thou art made whole: sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee”* (John 5:14). *“If a man abide not in Me, he is cast forth as a branch and is withered, and men gather them and cast into the fire and they are burned”* (John 15:6—spoken to the eleven apostles). *“For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die; but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live”* (Rom. 8:13). *“Be not deceived, God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the spirit, shall of the spirit reap life everlasting”* (Gal. 6:7, 8). Have such passages as these been given due place in the preachings and writings of the orthodox during the past fifty years? No indeed: why?

There are three particular passages which claim a fuller notice from us in this connection, passages which are among the most solemn and frightful to be found in all the Word of God, yet which are nevertheless addressed immediately unto the people of God. Before citing the same we would preface our remarks upon them with this general observation: they have not received the attention they ought in the practical ministrations of God’s servants. The minister of the Gospel has only discharged half his duty when he clears these verses of the false glosses which his opponents have placed upon them. It is quite true that Arminians have made an altogether unwarrantable and wrong use of them, but probably God suffered His enemies to thereby bring them into prominent notice because His friends ignored them. The Christian teacher must not only show there is no conflict

between these passages and such verses as John 10:28 and Phil. 1:6, but he must also bring out their positive meaning and the solemn bearing which they have upon Christians themselves.

“For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Spirit, 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” (Heb. 6:4-8). Those words are addressed to “*holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling*” (3:1), and their connection is as follows. In 5:11-14 the apostle had reproved the Hebrews for being slow in their apprehension of the Truth and in walking suitably thereto, and after the exhortation of 6:1-3 he warns them of the awful danger of continuing in a slothful state—*“For it is impossible.”*

But, it may be objected. Surely it is not the intention of our Heavenly Father to terrorize His own dear children. No, certainly not; yet He would have them suitably affected thereby. Though such threatenings are not designed to work in Christians a fear of damnation, yet they should beget in them a holy care and diligence of avoiding the evils denounced. There is no more incongruity between a Christian’s being comforted by the Divine promises and alarmed by the Divine threatenings, than there is between his living a life of joyful confidence in God and also one of humble dependence upon Him. We must distinguish between things that differ: there is a fear of caution as well as of distrust, a fear that produces carefulness and watchfulness as well as one which fills with anxiety. There is a vast difference between a thing that is meant to weaken the security of the flesh, and the confidence that faith has in Christ. Assurance of perseverance is quite consistent with and ought ever to be

accompanied by “*fear and trembling*” (Phil. 2:12, 13).

In his opening remarks on Hebrews 6:4-6 John Owen said, it “is a needful and wholesome commination (denunciation) duly to be considered by all professors of the Gospel.” And in the course of his masterly exposition pointed out, “For not to proceed in the way of the Gospel and obedience thereto is an untoward entrance into a total relinquishment of the one and the other. That they therefore may be acquainted with the danger hereof, and be stirred up to avoid that danger, the apostle gives them an account of those who, after a profession of the Gospel, beginning at a non-proficiency under it, do end in apostasy from it. And we may see that the severest comminations are not only useful in the preaching of the Gospel, but exceeding necessary towards persons that are observed to be slothful in their profession.” Scripture nowhere teaches that the saint is so secure that he needs not to be wary of himself, nor unmindful of the defection of those who for a time seemed to run well.

Another of the Puritans said on this passage, “Certainly all of us should stand in fear of this heavy judgment of being given up to perish by our apostasy, to an obstinate heart, never to reconcile ourselves by repentance, even the children of God; for he proposeth it to them. . . The apostle saith, It is impossible they should be saved, because it is impossible they should repent. This is a fearful state, and yet, as fearful as it is, it is not unusual: it is a thing we see often in some that have made a savoury profession of the name of God, and afterwards have been blasted. O, then, you that have begun and have had a taste of the ways of God, and to walk closely with Him, you should lay this to heart! Therefore this is propounded to believers, that they should keep at a very great distance from such a judgment, lest we grow to such an impenitent state as to be given up to a reprobate mind and vile affections” (Thomas Manton). The best preventative is a conscience kept tender of sin, which mourns over and confesses to God our transgressions, and seeks grace to mortify our lusts.

“For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the

knowledge of the Truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins; but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries. He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses; of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant wherewith He was sanctified an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace? For we know Him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto Me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge His people. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Heb. 10:26-31). It is outside our present design to give an exposition of these verses (which we did when going through that Epistle), as we shall not now expose the Arminian errors thereon (which we hope to very shortly); rather do we now direct attention unto them as another example of the fearful threatenings which are directly addressed to Christians, and which it is madness and not wisdom to scoff at.

The scope of the above passage is easily grasped: Hebrews 10:23 gives an exhortation, verses 24, 25 announce the means of continuing in that profession, while verses 26-31 declare what will befall those who relinquish the Truth. In his comments John Owen points out, "The apostle puts himself among them ("if we sin" etc.), as is his manner in comminations: both to show that there is no respect of persons in this matter, but that those who had equally sinned shall be equally punished; and to take off all appearances of severity towards them, seeing he speaks nothing of this nature but on such suppositions as wherein if he were himself concerned he pronounceth it against himself also. The word 'willingly' signifies, of choice—without surprisal, compulsion or fear . . . If a voluntary relinquishment of the profession of the Gospel and the duties of it be the highest sin, and be attended with the height of wrath and punishment, we ought earnestly to watch against everything that inclineth or disposeth us thereto."

John Owen concluded his remarks on these verses by saying,

“This therefore is a passage of Holy Writ which is much to be considered, especially in these days wherein we live, wherein men are apt to grow cold and careless in this profession, and to decline gradually from what they had attained unto. To be useful in such a season it was first written, and it belongs unto us no less than unto them to whom it was first originally sent. And we live in days wherein the security and contempt of God, the despite of the Lord Christ and His Spirit, are come to the full, so as to justify the truth that we have insisted on.” If the pressing of this passage on the attention of all professing Christians was deemed so necessary in the palmy days of the Puritans, how much more so in the dark times in which our lot is cast! How woefully remiss, then, are those preachers who not only fail to devote a whole sermon to these verses, but who never so much as quote them from one years’ end to another, except it be to refute the Arminians in such a manner that empty professors are made to believe there is nothing for them to fear.

“For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them. But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again, and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire” (2 Pet. 2:20-22). At the close of his remarks on this passage Matthew Henry says, “If the Scriptures give such an account of Christianity on the one hand and of sin on the other as we have in these verses, we certainly ought highly to approve of the former and persevere therein, because it is a ‘way of righteousness’ and a ‘holy commandment,’ and to loathe and keep at the greatest distance from the latter because it is set forth as offensive and abominable.” Far better never to make a profession, than make a fair one and then sully and repudiate it.

“He that being often reproved hardeneth his neck, shall

suddenly be cut off, and that without remedy” (Prov. 29:1). The solemn threatenings of Scripture are so many discoveries to the Church in particular and to the world in general of the severity of God against sin and that He adjudges them worthy of eternal destruction who persist therein. If professing Christians turn a deaf ear to exhortations, admonitions and warnings, if they steel their hearts against entreaties and threatenings, and determine to follow a course of self-will and self-pleasing, they place themselves beyond the hope of mercy. It is therefore the imperative duty of the servant of Christ to faithfully warn God’s people of the fearful danger of backsliding and of what awaits them if they remain in that state: to definitely point out the connection which God has established between sin and punishment, between apostasy and damnation, so that a holy fear may be instilled to preserve them from making shipwreck of the faith, and to prevent carnal professors from indulging the vain hope of once in grace always in grace.

8. By holding up the rewards. Many preachers have failed to do so, allowing the fear of man to withhold from God’s children a portion of their necessary bread. Because certain enemies of the Truth have wrested this subject, they deemed it wisest to be silent thereon. Because Papists have grievously perverted the teaching of Scripture upon “rewards,” insidiously bringing in their lie of creature-merits at this point, not a few Protestants have been chary of preaching thereon, lest they be charged with leaning toward Romanism. Rather should this very abuse move them to be the more diligent and zealous in presenting their right and true meaning and use. Threatenings and rewards: does not the one naturally suggest the other? The former to act as deterrents, the latter as stimulants: deterrents against evil doing, stimulants or incentives unto the discharge of duty. But if the one has been shelved in the pulpit, the other has received scant attention even in orthodox quarters. We can but briefly touch upon the subject here, but hope to devote a separate article to it in the next section (booklet six).

In Scripture “eternal life” is presented both as a “gift” and as a

“reward”—the reward of perseverance. To some it may appear that such terms and concepts are mutually opposed. Yet is not prayer both a privilege and a duty? Is not the natural man startled when he finds that God bids His people to *“rejoice with trembling”*—what a seeming paradox! The apparent difficulty is removed when it is seen that the “rewards” which God has promised His people are not those of justice but of bounty; that they are not a proportioned remuneration or return for the duties which we perform or the services we have rendered, but the end to which our obedience is suited. Thus the rewards proposed unto us by God are not calculated to work in His people a legal spirit but are designed to support our hearts under the self-denials to which we are called, to cheer us amid the sufferings we encounter for Christ’s sake, and to stir us to acts of obedience meet for what is promised. Certainly Moses was inspired by no mercenary spirit when *“he had respect unto the recompense of the reward”* (Heb. 11:26).

That eternal life and glory is set forth in God’s Word as the reward and end of perseverance which await all faithful Christians is clear from Hebrews 10:35, to cite no other passages now: *“Cast not away therefore your confidence which hath great recompense of reward.”* On those words Matthew Henry said, “He exhorts them not to cast away their confidence, that is, their holy courage and boldness, but to hold fast the profession for which they had suffered so much before, and borne those sufferings so well. Second, he encourages them to this by assuring them that the reward of their holy confidence is very great: it carries a present reward in it, in holy peace and joy and much of God’s presence and power visited upon them; and it shall have a great recompense of reward hereafter.” While the Christian sincerely endeavours to walk obediently and mix faith with God’s promises the Spirit comforts and witnesses with his spirit that he is a child of God; but when he becomes careless of duty, and neglects the means of grace, He not only withholds His witness but suffers the threatenings of Scripture to so lay hold of him that Psalm 38:2, 3 becomes his experiences.

9. By insisting on steadfastness. *“Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering”* (Heb. 10:23). Press forward along the path of holiness, no matter what obstacles and opposition you meet with. Your very safety depends upon it, for if you deny the faith either by words or actions, you are *“worse than an infidel”* who never professed it. The very fact that we are here bidden to *“hold fast”* our Christian profession implies that it is no easy task assigned us, that there are difficulties to be overcome which call for the putting forth of our utmost strength and endeavours in the defence and furtherance of it. *“Without wavering”* means, with unvarying and unflinching constancy. Sin is ever seeking to vanquish the Christian; the world is ever endeavouring to draw him back into its seductive embraces; the Devil, like a roaring lion, is ever waiting to devour him. Therefore the call to him is *“be ye steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord”*—the duties He has assigned (1 Cor. 15:58).

The need for pressing such exhortations as the above appears from the solemn warning addressed to those whom the apostle calls *“beloved”* in 2 Pet. 3:17: *“Beware lest ye also being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness.”* Upon this Matthew Henry says, *“We are in great danger of being seduced and turned away from the Truth. Many who have the Scriptures and read them do not understand what they read, and too many of those who have a right understanding of the sense and meaning of the Word are not established in the belief of the Truth, and all these are liable to fall into error. Few attain to the knowledge and acknowledgement of doctrinal Christianity; and fewer find so as to keep in the way of practical godliness, which is the narrow way which only leadeth unto life. There must be a great deal of self-denial and suspicion of ourselves, and submitting to the authority of Christ Jesus our great Prophet, before we can heartily receive all the truths of the Gospel, and therefore we are in great danger of rejecting the Truth.”* Ministers of Christ, then, need to insist much upon the imperativeness of steadfastness and constancy.

10. By withholding from backsliders the comfort of the truth of eternal security. After all that has been said under the previous heads there is little need for us to enlarge upon this point. Any preacher who encourages the slothful and the undutiful is doing great harm to souls. To tell those who have deserted the paths of righteousness that because they once believed in Christ all will come out well with them in the end, is to put a premium on their carnality. To assure those who have forsaken the means of grace and gone back again into the world that because they formerly made a credible profession God will recover and restore them, is to say what Scripture nowhere warrants. A griping purgative and not rich and savoury viands is what is needed by one whose system is out of order. The Divine threatenings and not the promises need to be pressed upon those who are following the desires and devices of their own hearts. Only by heeding the ten things mentioned in these sections is the precious truth of the eternal security of the saints safeguarded from profanation.

The fifth of seven booklets.

