



The Doctrine of Saints' Perseverance



Part Six

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9. Its Opposition

It has been shown at length in earlier sections that the concept of a total and final apostasy of a regenerated soul is not according to Truth. To postulate the eternal destruction of one to whom Divine grace has been savingly communicated to the soul is contrary to the whole tenor of the Covenant of redemption, to the attributes of God engaged in it, to the design and work of the Redeemer in it, to the Spirit's mission and His abiding with God's children "*forever*" (John 14:16). One who is indwelt by the Triune God shall not and cannot so fall from holiness and serve sin as to give himself wholly to its behests (authoritative commands). One who has been delivered from the power of darkness and translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son shall never again become the willing subject of Satan. One who has been made the recipient of a supernatural experience of the Truth shall never be fatally deceived by the Devil's lies. True, his will is mutable, but God's promise is unchangeable; his own strength is feeble, but God's power is invincible, his prayers are weak, but Christ's intercession is prevalent.

Yet in all ages this doctrine of the final perseverance of the saints has been opposed and denied. Satan himself believed in the apostasy of Job and had the effrontery to avow it unto Jehovah (Job 1:8-11). We need not be surprised then to find that the supreme imposture of the religious realm repudiates most vehemently this precious truth and pronounces accursed all who hold it. The merit-mongers of Rome are inveterately opposed to everything which exalts free grace. Moreover, they who so hotly deny unconditional election, particular redemption, and effectual calling, must, in order to be consistent, deny the eternal security of the Christian. Since Papists are such rabid sticklers for the "free will" of fallen man, logically, they must deny the

indefectibility of all who are in Christ. If I have by an act of my own volition brought myself into a state of grace, then it clearly follows that I am capable of forsaking the same. If the “free will” of the sinner first inclines him to exercise repentance and faith, then obviously he may relapse into a state of confirmed impenitence and unbelief.

But Rome has by no means stood alone in antagonizing this blessed article of the Father. Others who differ widely from her in many other respects have made common cause with her in this. Considerable sections of “Protestantism,” whole denominations which claim to take the Word of God for their sole Rule of faith and practice, have also strenuously and bitterly fought against those who maintained this truth. These are what are known as Arminians, for James Arminius or Van Harmin, a Dutchman of the sixteenth century, was the first man of any prominence in orthodox circles who opposed the theology taught by John Calvin—opposed it covertly and slyly and contrary to the most solemn and particular promise and pledge which he gave to the Classis (*church governing bodies*) before he was installed as professor of divinity at Leyden in 1602. Since then, for the purpose of theological classification, non-Calvinists and anti-Calvinists have been termed “Arminians.” The one man who did more than any other to popularize and spread Arminianism in the English-speaking world was John Wesley.

We shall now make it our business to examine the attacks which Arminians have made upon this truth of the final perseverance of the saints and the leading arguments they employ to prejudice and overturn it. But let us say at the outset, it is not because we entertain any hope of delivering such people from their errors that we are now writing, still less that we are prepared to enter the lists against them. No, it is useless to argue with those whose hearts are set against the Truth: convince a man against his will and he is of the same opinion still. Moreover God’s eternal Truth is infinitely too sacred to be made the matter of carnal debate and wrangling. Rather is it our

design to help those of God's people who have been harassed by the dogs who yapped at their heels and show that their bark is worse than their bite. We write now with the object of delivering the "babes" from being "*corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ*" (2 Cor. 11:3).

1. By misrepresenting and misstating the truth for which we contend. It is a favourite device of Arminians to set up a "man of straw" and because he is incapable of withstanding their assaults, pretend they have overthrown the Calvinistic tenet itself. To caricature a doctrine and then hold up that caricature to ridicule, to falsify a doctrine and then denounce that falsification as a thing of evil, is tantamount to acknowledging that they are unable to overthrow the doctrine as it is held and presented by its friends. Yet this is the very practice of which Arminian dialecticians are guilty. They select a single part of our doctrine and then take it up as though it were the whole. They sever the means from the end and claim we teach that the end will be reached irrespective of the means. They ignore the safeguards by which God has hedged around this part of His Truth, and which His true servants have ever maintained, and then affirm that such a doctrine is injurious, dangerous, inimical to the promotion of practical godliness. In plain language, they seek to terrify the simple by a bogey of their own manufacture.

That we have not brought an unjust and unfair charge against Arminians will appear from the following citation. "The common doctrine that perseverance requireth and commandeth all saints or believers to be fully persuaded, and this with the greatest and most indubitable certainty of faith, that there is an absolute and utter impossibility either of a total or a final defection of their faith: that though they shall fall into ten thousand enormities and most abominable sins and lie wallowing in them like a swine in the mire, yet they should remain all the while in an estate of grace, and that God will by a strong hand of irresistible grace bring them off from their sins by repentance before they die." Those were the words of one of the most influential of English Arminians in the palmy days of

the Puritans, issuing from the pen of one, John Goodwin, a nephew of the pious and eminent expositor, Thomas Goodwin. In the light of what we have written in previous sections of this series few of our readers should have much difficulty in perceiving the sophistry of this miserable shift.

No well-instructed scribe of Christ ever set forth the doctrine of the saints perseverance in any such distorted manner and extravagant terms as the above, yet such is a fair sample of the devices employed by Arminians when engaged in assailing this truth: they detach a single element of it and then render repugnant their one-sided misrepresentation of the whole. The perseverance which we contend for, and which the operations of Divine grace effectually provide for and secure, is a perseverance of faith and holiness,—a continuing steadfast in believing and in bringing forth all the fruits of righteousness. Whereas as any one can see at a glance, the travesty presented in the above quotation is a preservation in spite of and in the midst of perseverance in abominable sins and lie wallowing in them like a swine in the mire (i.e. quite at home in such filth and content therewith), and yet they shall remain all the while in an “estate of grace” is a palpable contradiction of terms, for an “estate of grace” is one of subjection and obedience to God.

Again, Goodwin makes out the Calvinist to say in God’s name, “You that truly believe in My Son, and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and therefore are fully persuaded and assured from My will and command given unto you in that behalf, yea, according to the infallible Word of Truth you have from Me, that you cannot possibly, no, not by the most horrid sins and abominable practices, that you shall or can commit, fall away either totally or finally from your faith; for in the midst of your foulest actings and courses, there remains a seed in you which is sufficient to make you true believers, and to preserve you from falling away finally, that it is impossible you should die in your sins; you that know and are assured that I will by an irresistible hand work perseverance in you, and consequently that you are out of all danger of condemnation, and that heaven

and salvation belong unto you, and are as good as yours already, so that nothing but giving of thanks appertains to you.”

The incongruity of such a fiction should at once be apparent. First, all true saints do not have a firm and comfortable assurance of their perseverance: many of them are frequently beset by doubts and fears. Second, it is by means of God’s promises and precepts, exhortations and threatenings, that they are stirred up to the use of those things by which perseverance is wrought and assurance is obtained. Third, no rightly-taught saint ever expected his perseverance or the least assurance of it under such a foul supposition as falling into and continuing in “*horrid sins and abominable practices.*” Fourth, the promises of eternal security are made to those in whose mind God writes His laws and in whose hearts He places His holy fear, so that they shall not depart from Him: they are made to those who “*hear*” the voice of the good Shepherd and who “*follow*” the example He has left them. Fifth, so far from “*nothing but giving of thanks*” appertaining to them, they are bidden to work out their own salvation with fear and trembling, to run with patience the race set before them, to make their calling and election sure by adding to their graces and bringing forth the fruits of righteousness.

Let us say once more, and it cannot be insisted upon too frequently and emphatically in this degenerate age, that the perseverance of saints which is depicted in Holy Writ is not a simple continuance of Christians on this earth for a number of years after regeneration and faith have been wrought in them, and then their being admitted as a matter of course to Heaven, without any regard to their moral history in the intervening period. No, though that may be how incompetent novices have portrayed it, and how Antinomians have perverted it, yet such a concept is as far removed from the reality as darkness is from light. The perseverance of the saints is a steady pressing forward in the course on which they entered at conversion—an enduring unto the end in the exercise of faith and in the practice of holiness. The perseverance of the saints consists in a continuing

to deny self, to mortify the lusts of the flesh, to resist the Devil, to fight the good fight of faith; and though they suffer many falls by the way, and receive numerous wounds from their foes, yet, if *“faint,”* they *“hold on their way.”*

2. By insisting that this doctrine encourages loose living. We have heard numbers of Arminians declare “If I were absolutely sure that Heaven would be my everlasting portion; then I would drop all religion and take my fill of the world,” to which we replied, Perhaps you would, but the regenerate feel quite different: they find their delight in One who is infinitely preferable to all that can be found in this perishing world. Yet Arminians never tire of saying that this article of the non-apostasy of the saints is a vicious and dangerous one, affording great encouragement unto those who believe themselves to be Christians to indulge themselves in iniquities, such as Lot, David, Solomon and Peter committed. It is granted that those who commit such sins and die without repentance for them and faith in the blood of the Lamb have no inheritance in the kingdom of God and Christ. It is also a fact that God visited the transgressions of those men with His rod and recovered them from their falls. Nor are such instances recorded in the Word to encourage us in sin, but rather to caution us against and make us distrustful of ourselves.

Such a gross view as is propounded in the above objection loses sight entirely of the nature of regeneration, tacitly denying that the new birth is a miracle of grace, effecting a radical change within, renewing the faculties of the soul, giving an entirely different bent to a person’s inclinations. To talk of a child of God falling in love again with sin is tantamount to suggesting that there is no real difference between one who has passed from death unto life, who has had the principle of holiness communicated to him, who is indwelt by the Spirit of God, and those who are unregenerate. That one who has been merely intellectually impressed and emotionally stirred to temporarily reform his outward conduct may indeed return to his former manner of life, is readily conceded; but that one who has

experienced a supernatural work of grace within, who has been made “*a new creature in Christ Jesus,*” can or will lose all relish for spiritual things and become satisfied with the husks which the swine feed on, we emphatically deny.

3. By asserting our doctrine deprives God’s people of the sharpest bit which He has given for curtailng the flesh in them. It is affirmed by many Arminians that the most effectual means for restraining their evil inclinations, alike in the regenerate and the unregenerate, is the fear of the everlasting burnings, and from this premise they draw the conclusion that when a person is definitely assured he has been once and for all delivered from the wrath to come, the strongest deterrent against carnality and lasciviousness has been taken from him. There would be considerable force in this objection if God had not communicated to His children that which operates in them more mightily and effectually than the dread of punishment, and since He has, then the argument has little point or weight to it. Whatever influence the fear of Hell exerts in curtailng the lusts of the flesh, certain it is that the righteous are withheld from a life of sin by far more potent considerations. Faith purifieth the heart (Acts 15:9), faith overcometh the world (1 John 5:4), but Scripture nowhere ascribes such virtues to a dread of the Lake of fire. An unruly horse needs to be held in by a bridle, but one that is well broken in is better managed by a gentler hand than a biting bit.

The case of the saint would certainly be a perilous one if there was no stronger restraint upon his lusts than the fear of Hell: how far does such fear restrain the ungodly! As the nature of a cause determines the nature of its effects, and as a man’s conduct will be determined by the most powerful principle governing him, so a slavish fear can produce only slavish observance, and surely God requires something better than that from His people. Such service as the fear of Hell produces will be weak and wavering, for nothing more unsettles the mind and enervates the soul than alarms and horrors. Nabal’s heart “*died within*” him for fear (1 Sam. 25:37), and the soldiers that kept

the sepulchre “*became as dead men*” for fear (Matt. 28:4): thus any obedience from thence can only be a dead obedience. Moreover, it will be fickle and fleeting at the best: Pharaoh relaxed his persecution of the Hebrews when no longer tormented by God’s plagues, and even gave them permission to leave Egypt; but soon after he repented of his leniency, chiding himself for it, and pursued them with murder in his heart (Exod. 14:5). Those hypocrites whom “fearfulness” surprised, remained hypocrites still (Isa. 33:14).

It is true that believers are bidden to “*fear Him which is able to destroy both body and soul in Hell*” (Matt. 10:28), yet it should be pointed out that there is a vast difference between fearing God and dreading eternal punishment: in the parallel and fuller passage Christ added, “*yea, I say unto you, fear Him*” (Luke 12:5)—not fear Hell! One of the covenant promises which God has made concerning His elect is, “*I will put My fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from Me*” (Jer. 32:40), and that is a filial fear, a respect for His authority, an awesome veneration of His majesty; whereas the fear of the unregenerate is a servile, anxious and tormenting one. The holy fear of the righteous causes them to be vigilant and watchful against those ways which lead to destruction, but the fear of the wicked is occupied only with the destruction itself: the one is concerned about the evils which occasion God’s wrath, the other is confined to the effects of His wrath. But the exercise of faith and the operations of filial fear are not the only principles which regulate the saint: the love of Christ constrains him, gratitude unto God for His wondrous grace has a powerful effect upon his conduct.

4. By declaring it neutralizes the force of exhortations. The argument used by Arminians on this point may be fairly stated thus: if it be absolutely certain that all regenerated souls will reach Heaven then there can be no real need to bid them tread the path that leads thither, that in such case it is meaningless to urge them to run with patience the race set before them; but since God has uttered such calls to His people, then it follows

that their final perseverance is by no means sure, the less so seeing that failure to heed those calls is threatened with eternal death. It is insisted upon that exhortations to effort, watchfulness, diligence etc., clearly imply the contingency of the believer's salvation, that all such calls to the discharge of these duties signify that security is conditional upon his own fidelity, upon the response which he makes unto these demands of God upon him. It should be a sufficient reply to point out that if this objection were really valid then no Christian could have any firm persuasion of his everlasting bliss so long as he was left upon earth: hence the inference drawn by Arminians from the exhortations must be an erroneous one.

What strange logic is this: because I am persuaded that God loves me with an unchanging and unquenchable love therefore I feel free to trample upon His revealed will, and have no concern whether my conduct pleases or displeases Him. Because I am assured that Christ, at the cost of unparalleled shame and suffering, purchased for me eternal redemption, an inalienable inheritance, therefore I am encouraged to forsake instead of to follow Him, vilify rather than glorify Him. That might be the theology of devils, and those they possess, but it would be repudiated and abhorred by any one renewed by the Holy Spirit. How preposterous to argue that because a person believes he shall persevere to the end, that he will therefore despise and neglect everything that promotes such perseverance. Such an argument as the above is tantamount to saying that because God has regenerated a soul He now requires no obedience from him, whereas one of the chief ends for which he is renewed is to capacitate him for obedience, that he may be conformed to the image of His son.

So far from the absolute promises of God concerning the everlasting safety of His people weakening the force of motives to righteousness, they are the very means made use of by the Spirit to stir up the saints, and to encourage them in the practice of righteousness and engage them in the continuance thereof. Most certainly the apostles perceived no inconsistency or

incongruity between the Divine promises and the precepts. They did not judge it meaningless to argue from such blessed assurances to the performance of the duties of holiness. One of them said *“Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God”* (2 Cor. 7:1). Those promises were, *“I will dwell in them and walk in them, and I will be their God and they shall be My people: I will be a Father unto you and ye shall be My sons and daughters”*(6:16, 18), and on them he based his exhortation. After saying, ye *“are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation”* another apostle proceeded to urge, *“Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober and hope to the end. . . And if ye call on the Father ... pass the time of your sojourning here in fear”* (1 Pet. 1:5, 13, 17)—apparently it never occurred to him that such exhortations had been neutralized or even weakened by the doctrine before advanced.

5. By appealing to cases and examples which, though plausible, are quite inconclusive. In order to prove their contention that a real child of God may so backslide as to lose all relish for spiritual things, renounce his profession and die an infidel, Arminians are fond of referring to alleged illustrations of this very thing. They will point to certain men and women who have come before their own observation, people who were genuinely and deeply convicted of sin, who earnestly sought relief from a burdened conscience, who eventually believed the Gospel, put their faith in the atoning blood of Christ and found rest unto their souls. They will tell of the bright profession made by these people, of the peace and joy which was theirs, of the radical change made in their lives, and how they united with the church, had blessed fellowship with the saints, lifted up their voices in praise and petition at the prayer meetings, were diligent in speaking to their companions of their eternal welfare, how they walked in the paths of righteousness and caused the saints to thank God for such transformed lives. But alas these bright meteors in the religious firmament soon faded out.

It is at this point that the Arminian seeks to make capital out of such cases. He tells of how, perhaps in a few months, the religious ardour of these “converts” cooled off. He relates how the temptations of the world and lusts of the flesh proved too strong for them, and how like dogs they returned to their vomit. The Arminian then alleges that such cases are actual examples of men and women who have “fallen from grace,” who have apostatized from the faith, and by appealing to such he imagines he has succeeded in overthrowing the doctrine of the final perseverance of the saints. In reality, he has done nothing of the sort. He has merely shown how easily Christians may be mistaken, and thus pointed a warning for us not to be too ready to indulge in wishful thinking and imagining all is gold which glitters. Scripture plainly warns us there is a class whose “goodness is as a morning cloud and as the early dew it goeth away” (Hos. 6:4). Christ has told us of those who received the Word with joy, yet had not root in themselves (Matt. 13:20, 21). The foolish virgins carried the lamp of their profession, but they had no oil in their vessels. One may come “near” to the kingdom yet never enter it (Mark 12:34).

In order to make good his objection the Arminian must do something more than point to those who made a credible profession and afterwards falsified and renounced it: he must prove that a person who is truly regenerated, born from above, made a new creature in Christ, then apostatized and died an apostate. This he cannot possibly do, for none such ever existed or ever will. The fact is that while there are many who, in varying degrees, adopt the Christian religion, there are very few indeed who are ever born of the Spirit, and the only way in which we may identify the latter is by their continuance in holiness. He who does not persevere to the end was never begotten by God. Nor is that statement a begging of the question at issue: it is insisting upon the teaching of Holy Writ. “*The righteous also shall hold on his way*” (Job 17:9): observe that it is not “he ought to” nor merely that “he may do so,” but a positive and unqualified “*shall.*” Therefore any one who fails to

“hold on his way,” be he a religious enthusiast, a professing Christian, or zealous church-member, was never *“righteous”* in the sight of God.

We will labour this point a little further because it is probably the one which has presented more difficulty to our readers than any other. Yet it should not, for when resolved by the Word all is clear as a sunbeam. *“I know that whatsoever God doeth, it shall be forever: nothing can be put to it nor anything taken from it: and God doeth it, that men should fear before Him”* (Eccl. 3:14). This is one of the distinctive marks of the Divine handiwork: its indestructibility, its permanency, and therefore it is by this mark we must test both ourselves and our fellows. *“The orthodox doctrine does not affirm the certainty of salvation because we once believed, but certainty of perseverance in holiness if we have truly believed, which perseverance in holiness, therefore, in opposition to all weaknesses and temptations, is the only sure evidence of the genuineness of past experience or of the validity of our confidence as to our future salvation”* (A. A. Hodge). *“Whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die”* (John 11:26) said Christ, for the life that He gives is an *“eternal”* one, which the Devil himself cannot destroy (see Job 2:6!). Thus, unless we acknowledge our mistake in concluding the apostates were once regenerate, we give the lie to the Word of God.

6. By asserting that this doctrine makes all warnings and threatenings pointless. Arminians argue that if the believer be eternally secure in Christ he cannot be in any peril, and that to caution him against danger is a meaningless performance. First, let it be said that we have no quarrel with those who insist that most solemn warnings and awful threatenings are addressed immediately to the children of God, nor have we the least accord with those who seek to blunt the point of those warnings and explain away those threatenings: so far from it, in a previous chapter (booklet five) we have shown that God Himself has safeguarded the truth of the final perseverance of His people by these very measures, and have insisted there are very real

dangers they must guard against and genuine threatenings they are required to heed. So long as the Christian is left in this world he is beset by deadly dangers, both from within and from without, and it would be the part of madness to ignore and trifle with them. It is faith's recognition of the same which causes him to cry out "*Hold Thou me up, and I shall be safe*" (Psa. 119:117).

Yet what we have just admitted above in no way concedes that there is any conflict between the promises and warnings of God: that the one assures of preservation while the other forecasts destruction. For what is it that God has promised unto His people? This: that they "*shall not depart from Him*" (Jer. 32:40), that they shall "*hold on their way*" (Job 17:9), and that to this end He will "*work in them both to will and to do of His good pleasure*" (Phil. 2:13), granting unto them all-sufficient grace (2 Cor. 12:9), and supplying all their need (Phil. 4:19). In perfect accord with these promises are the warnings and threatenings addressed to them, by which God has made known the inseparable connection there is, by His appointment, between a course of evil and the punishment attending the same. Those very threatenings are used by the Spirit to produce in Christians a holy circumspection and caution, so that they are made the means of preventing their apostasy. Those warnings have their proper use, and efficacy in respect of the saints, for they cause them to take heed to their ways, avoid the snares laid for them, and serve to establish their souls in the practice of obedience.

Whether or not we can perceive the consistency between the assurances God has made His people and the grounds He has given them to tremble at His Word, between the comforting promises and the stirring exhortations, between the witnesses to their safety and the warnings of their danger, certain it is that Scripture abounds with the one as much as with the other. If on the one hand the Christian is warranted in being fully persuaded that "*neither principalities nor powers*" shall be able to separate him from the love of God in Christ Jesus, and that God shall

tread Satan under his feet shortly (Rom. 8:38, 39; 16:20): on the other hand, he is bidden to *“put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the Devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers”* (Eph. 6:12, 13), and *“Be sober, be vigilant, because your adversary the Devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about seeking whom he may devour”* (1 Pet. 5:8). Yet though the believer is warned *“Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall,”* it is immediately followed by the declaration *“but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able”* (1 Cor. 10:13, 14). Then let us beware of being wise in our own conceit and charging the Almighty with folly.

Because the enemies of the Christian are inveterate, subtle, and powerful, and the exercise of his graces inconstant, it is salutary that he should live under a continual remembrance of his weakness, fickleness and danger. He needs to be ever watchful and prayerful lest he enter into temptation, recalling what befell the self-confident Peter. Because indwelling corruption remains a part of himself, while he is left in this scene, it behooves him to keep his heart with all diligence, for he who trusteth in his own heart is a fool (Prov. 27:26), unmindful of his best interests. We are only preserved from presumption while a real sense of our own insufficiency is retained. The consciousness of indwelling sin should cause every child of God to bend the suppliant knee with the utmost frequency, humility and fervour. Let not the Christian mistake the field of battle for a bed of rest. Let him not indulge in a slothful profession or carnal delights, while his implacable foes, the flesh, the world, and the devil are ever seeking to encompass his ruin. Let him heed the warnings of a faithful God and he will prove Him to be an unerring Guide and invincible Guard.

7. By drawing a false inference from the Divine righteousness. Arminians are fond of quoting that *“God is no respecter of persons,”* from which they argue that His justice requires Him to apportion the same retribution unto sinning Christians as He does unto non-Christians who transgress; and since our doctrine

gives no place to the eternal punishment of a saint, it is said we charge God with partiality and injustice. That the Lord “*is righteous in all His ways and holy in all His works*” (Psa. 145:17) is contended for as earnestly for by us as by our opponents; but what the Arminian denies is maintained by the Calvinist, and that is, the absolute sovereignty of God. That the Most High is obliged to apportion equal punishment to equal faults and equal rewards to equal deservings, cannot be allowed for a moment. Being above all law, the Framer and not the subject of it, God’s will is supreme, and He doeth whatsoever pleaseth Him. If God bestows free grace and pardoning mercy to those in Christ and withholds it from those out of Christ, who shall say unto Him, What doest Thou? Has He not the right to do what He chooses with His own: to give a penny to him who labours all day and the same to him that works but one hour (Matt. 20:12-15)!

To argue that because God is no respecter of persons that therefore He must deal with Christians and non-Christians alike is to ignore the special case of the former. They sustain a nearer relation to Him than do the latter. Shall a parent treat a refractory child as he would an insubordinate employee—he would dismiss the one from his service, must he turn the other out of his home? The Scriptures teach that God the Father is tender to His own dear children, recovering them from their sins and healing their backslidings, while He suffers aliens to lie wallowing in their rebellions and pollutions all their lives. Furthermore a Surety stood for them and endured in their stead the utmost rigor of the Law’s sentence, so that God is perfectly righteous in remitting their sins. Nevertheless, so that they may know He does not look lightly upon their disobedience, He “*visits their transgressions with the rod and their iniquity with stripes*” (Psa. 89:32). Finally, they are brought to sincere repentance, confession, and forsaking of their sins, and thereby they obtain the relief provided for them, which is never the case with the children of the Devil.

8. By alleging our doctrine makes its believers proud and

presumptuous. That the carnal may wrest this doctrine, like other portions of the Truth, to their own destruction, is freely admitted (2 Pet. 3:16); but that any article of the Faith which God has delivered unto His saints has the least tendency unto evil, we indignantly deny. In reality, the doctrine of the saints' perseverance in holiness, in humble dependence upon God for supplies of grace, lays the axe at the very root of the proud and presumptuous conceits of men, for it casts down their high thoughts and towering imaginations concerning their own native ability to believe the Gospel, obey its precepts, and continue in the faith and practice thereof. We rest wholly on the goodness and faithfulness of God, the merits of Christ's blood and the efficacy of His intercession, the power and operations of the Spirit, having "*no confidence in the flesh*" (Phil. 3:3). Only the Day to come will reveal how many who "trusted in themselves" and were persuaded of their inherent power to turn unto God and keep His commandments, were thereby hardened and hastened to their eternal ruin.

Let any candid reader ponder the following question. Which is the more likely to promote pride and presumption: extolling the virtues and sufficiency of man's "freewill," or emphasizing our utter dependence upon God's free grace? Which is more apt to foster self-confidence and self-righteousness: the Arminian tenet that fallen man has the power within himself to turn unto God when he chooses and do those things which are pleasing in His sight, or the Calvinist's insistence upon the declarations of Scripture that even the Christian has no strength of his own, that apart from Christ he can "*do nothing*" (John 15:5), that we are "*not sufficient of ourselves*" to so much as "*think anything as of ourselves*" (2 Cor. 3:5), that "*all our springs*" are in God (Psa. 87:7), and that because of our felt weakness and acknowledged helplessness, God graciously keeps our feet and preserves us from destruction? It is just because our doctrine is so flesh-abasing and pride-mortifying that it is so bitterly detested and decried by the pharisees.

9. By pretending our doctrine renders the use of means

superfluous. If Christians are secure in the hand of God and He empowers them by His Spirit, why should they put forth their energies to preserve themselves? But such reasoning leaves out of account that, throughout, God deals with His people as moral agents and accountable creatures. Rightly did Calvin point out, "He who has fixed the limits of our life, has also entrusted us with the care of it; has furnished us with means and supplies for its preservation; has also made us provident of dangers, and, that they may not oppress us unawares, has furnished us with cautions and remedies. Thus it is evident what is our duty." Grace is not given to render our efforts needless but to make them effectual. To say that assurance of final salvation cuts the nerve of enterprise is contrary to all experience: who will work the harder, the man without hope or even a half-expectation, or one who is sure that success will crown his labours.

10. By arguing that our doctrine makes "rewards" meaningless. If it be God who preserves us, then there is no room left for the recognition of our fidelity or owning of our efforts. If there be no possibility of the saint falling away finally, then is his perseverance incapable of reward by God. Answer: Heaven is not something which the Christian earns by his obedience or merits by his fidelity, nevertheless, everlasting felicity is held before him as a gracious encouragement, as the goal of his obedience. Let it be recognized that the reward is not a legal one but rather one of bounty, in accord with the tenor of the Covenant of Grace, and all difficulty should vanish. Let this point be decided in the light of our Surety's experience: was it not impossible that Christ should fail of His obedience? yet did not God reward Him (Phil. 2:10, 11)! So, in our tiny measure, because of the "joy set before us" we despise our cross and endure suffering for Christ's sake.

And now a word by way of application. Since this article of Faith be so much criticized and condemned as a thing fraught with evil tendencies, let the Christian make it his studied business that his conduct gives the lie to the Arminians' objections. Let him make it his constant concern to "*adorn the*

doctrine of God our Saviour in all things” (Titus 2:10), by taking heed to his ways, giving no license to the flesh, attending to the Divine warnings, and rendering glad and full response to His exhortations. Let him show forth by his daily life that this preservation is a continuance in faith, in obedience, in holiness. Let him see to it that he evidences the reality of his profession and the spirituality of his creed by growing in grace and bringing forth the fruits of righteousness. Let him earnestly endeavour to keep himself in the love of God, and to that end avoid everything calculated to chill the same, and thereby he will most effectually “*put to silence the ignorance of foolish men*” (1 Pet. 2:15).

In the above discussion we sought to show how pointless is the reasoning of Arminians in the opposition which they make to this blessed article of the Faith: but now in that which follows we shall seek to demonstrate that their use of Scripture is equally unhappy. If the charges they bring against this doctrine be baseless, if the inferences they draw and the conclusions they make upon it are wide of the mark, certainly their interpretations and applications of Holy Writ concerning this subject are quite erroneous. Nevertheless they do appeal directly to God’s Word and attempt to prove from its contents that one and another of the saints renounced the Faith, went right back again into the world, and died in their sins; that certain specific cases of such are there set before us of men who not only suffered a grievous fall by the way or entered into a backslidden state, but who totally, finally and irremediably apostatized. In addition to these specific examples, they quote various passages which they contend teach the same fearful thing. It is therefore incumbent upon us to examine attentively the cases they point to and weigh carefully the passages they cite.

Before entering immediately into this task, however, one or two general remarks need to be made that the issue between Calvinists and Arminians may be the more clearly drawn. First, it must be laid down as a broad principle that God’s Word cannot contradict itself. It is human to err and the wisest of

mortals is incapable of producing that which is without flaw, but it is quite otherwise with the Word of Truth. The Scriptures are not of human origin, but Divine, and though holy men were used in the penning of them, yet so completely were they controlled and moved by the Holy Spirit in their work that there is neither error nor blemish in the Sacred Volume. That affirmation concerns, of course, the original manuscripts: nevertheless we have such confidence in the superintending providence of God, we are fully assured He has guarded His own holy Word with such jealous care, that He has so ordered the translation of the Hebrew and Greek into our mother tongue that all false doctrine has been excluded. Since then the Scriptures are Divinely inspired they cannot teach in one place it is impossible that the child of God should be eternally lost, and in another place that he may be, and in yet another that some have been so.

Second, it has been shown at length in previous sections that God's Word clearly teaches the final perseverance of His saints, and that, not in one or two vague and uncertain verses but in the most positive and unequivocal language of many passages. It has been shown that the eternal security of the Christian rests upon a foundation that "standeth sure," which Satan and his emissaries cannot even shake; that his everlasting felicity depends, ultimately upon nothing in or from himself, but is infallibly secured by the invincibility of the Father's purpose, the immutability of His love, and the certainty of His covenant faithfulness; that it is infallibly secured by the Surety engagements of Christ, by the sufficiency of His atonement, and by the prevalency of His unceasing intercession; that it is infallibly secured by the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit, by His abiding indwelling, and by the efficacy of His keeping power. The very honour, veracity, and glory of the Triune Jehovah is engaged, yea, pledged in this matter. In order "*more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel*" the Most High has gone so far as to "*confirm it by an oath*" (Heb. 6:17). Thus, the indefectibility of the Church is made infallibly certain, and no "special pleading" of men,

however subtle and plausible, can have the slightest weight in the balance against it.

Third, in view of what has been pointed out in the last paragraph it should be patent to all honest and impartial minds that the cases cited by Arminians as examples of children of God apostatizing and perishing must be susceptible of being diagnosed quite differently, and that the Scriptures they appeal to in support of their contention must be capable of being interpreted in full harmony with those which clearly affirm the opposite. It is a basic principle of exegesis that no plain passage of the Word is to be neutralized by one whose meaning appears to be doubtful or ambiguous, that no explicit promise is to be set aside by a parable the significance of which is not readily determined, that no doctrinal declaration is to be nullified by the arbitrary interpretation of a figure or type. That which is uncertain must yield to what is simple and obvious, that which is open to argument must be subordinated to what is beyond any debate. True, the Calvinist must not resort to any subterfuges to avoid a difficulty, nor wrest a passage adduced by his opponents so as to make it teach what he wants. If he be unable to explain a verse he must honestly admit it, for no single man has all the light; nevertheless, we must believe there is an explanation, and that, in full accord with the Analogy of Faith, we must humbly wait upon God for further light.

Fourth, in order to disprove the doctrine of the final perseverance of the saints the Arminian is bound to do two things: produce the case of one who was truly born again, and then demonstrate that this person actually died in a state of apostasy, for unless he can do both his example is not to the point. It is not sufficient for him to bring forward one who made a credible profession and then repudiated it, for Scripture itself shows emphatically that such a person was never regenerate: the man who “dureth for a while” only, and then in a season of temptation or persecution is “offended” and falls away, is described by Christ as one “*who hath not root in himself*” (Matt. 13:21)—had the “*root of the matter*” (Job 19:28) been in him he

had survived the testing. To the same effect the apostle declares of such *“they went out from us, but they were not of us; if they had been of us, they would have continued with us”*(1 John 2:19). Nor is it sufficient for the Arminian to point to genuine children of God who backslide or meet with a grievous fall: such was the experience of both David and Peter; yet so far from being abandoned of God and suffered to die in that state, each was graciously brought to repentance and restored to communion with the Lord. Let us now look at the examples advanced.

1. The case of Adam. Here is one who was the immediate workmanship of God’s own hands, created in His image and likeness, *“blessed”* by the Lord and pronounced *“very good”* (Gen. 1:28, 31). Here is one who had no sinful heredity behind him and no corruption within him, instated in the Divine favour, placed in a garden of delights and given dominion over all terrestrial creatures. Yet he abode not in that fair estate, but fell from grace, disobeyed his Maker, and brought upon himself spiritual death. When he heard the voice of the Lord God, instead of fleeing to Him for mercy, he hid himself; when arraigned before Him, instead of penitently confessing his sin he sought to brazen it out, seeking to throw the blame upon Eve and casting the onus upon God for giving her to him. In the sequel his awful doom is plainly intimated, for the Lord God *“drove out the man”* from Eden and barred his way back to *“the tree of life”* by stationing around it *“cherubim and a flaming sword”* (Gen. 3:24). Now, say our opponents, what could be more to the point! Adam certainly had *“the root of the matter”* within him, and it is equally certain that he apostatized and perished. If sinless Adam fell then obviously a Christian who still has sin indwelling him may fall and be lost.

How, then, is the fatal fall of Adam to be explained consistently with the doctrine of the final perseverance of the saints? By calling attention to the immeasurable difference there was between him and them. What does the case of Adam make manifest? This: the defectibility of man when placed in the most

favourable and advantageous circumstances. This: that creaturehood and mutability are correlative terms: “*man being in honour abideth not*” (Psa. 49:12). This: that if the creature is to be kept from committing spiritual suicide a power outside of himself must preserve him. The case of Adam supplies the dark background which brings out more vividly the riches of Divine grace which it is the glory of the Gospel to exhibit. In other words, it serves to demonstrate beyond any peradventure of a doubt the imperative necessity of Christ if the creature—be he fallen or unfallen—is to be saved from himself. There is the fundamental, tremendous, vital difference between the case of Adam and that of the Christian: he was never in Christ, whereas they are; he was never redeemed by blood of infinite worth, they have been; there was none to intercede for him before God, there is for them.

“*Howbeit that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; and afterward that which is spiritual*” (1 Cor. 15:46). Though the immediate application of these words be unto the bodies of believers, yet they enunciate a general and basic principle in the ways of God with men, in the manifestation of His purpose concerning them. Adam appears on the earth before Christ: Cain was given to Eve before Abel; Ishmael was born before Isaac and Esau before Jacob: the elect are born naturally before they are born again supernaturally. In like manner, the Covenant of Works took precedence over the Covenant of Grace, so far as its revelation was concerned. Thus Adam was endowed with a natural power, namely, that of his own free will, but the Christian is endowed with a spiritual and supernatural power, even God’s working in him “*both to will and to do of His own good pleasure.*” Adam was given no promise of Divine preservation, but the saints are. Adam stood before God in dependence upon his own creature righteousness, and when that was lost, all the blessings and virtues arising from it were lost; whereas the believer’s righteousness is in Christ: “*in the Lord have I righteousness and strength*” (Isa. 45:24) is his joyous confession, and since his righteousness is in Christ it is an

unassailable and non-forfeitable one.

Adam was placed under a covenant of works: do this and thou shalt live, fail to do and thou must die. It was a covenant of strict justice, unmixed with mercy, no provision being made for any failure. The grace or strength or power with which Adam was endowed, was entrusted to himself and his own keeping. But with His saints God has made a *“better covenant”* (Heb. 8:6), of which Jesus is the *“Surety”* (Heb. 7:22) and in Him are treasured up inexhaustible supplies of grace for them to draw upon. This *“better covenant”* is one in which justice and mercy harmoniously blend together, wherein *“grace reigns through righteousness.”* In this *“better covenant”* God has promised to keep the feet of His saints, to put His fear in them so that they *“shall not depart from”* Him (Jer. 32:40). In this covenant God has made provision for our failures, so that *“if we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness”* (1 John 1:9). Thus our state by redemption and regeneration is far, far better than was that of our first parents by creation, for we are given what unfallen Adam had not, namely, confirmation of our wills in holiness—though not every act is such—For He *“works in us that which is well pleasing in His sight through Jesus Christ”* (Heb. 13:21), which He never did in Adam. We may add that most of what has been said above applies to the case of the angels who fell.

2. The case of king Saul. It is affirmed by Arminians that this king of Israel was a regenerate man. In support of this contention they appeal to a number of things recorded about him. First, that the prophet Samuel *“took a vial of oil and poured it upon his head and kissed him”* (1 Sam. 10:1). Second, because it is said that *“God gave him another heart”* (verse 9). Third, because we are told *“the Spirit of God came upon him and he prophesied”* (verse 11). Then it is pointed out that Saul acted in fearful presumption and disobedience (1 Sam. 13:9, 13), thereby displeasing the Lord so that it was announced the kingdom should be taken from him (verses 13, 14). That because of God’s displeasure *“the Spirit of the Lord departed*

from Saul and an evil spirit from the Lord troubled him” (16:14). That later, when menaced by the Philistines, he “enquired of the Lord” but “the Lord answered him not” (28:6). Finally, how that he had recourse to a witch and ultimately fell upon the field of battle sorely wounded, and ended his life by taking a sword and falling upon it (31:4), thereby sealing his doom by the unpardonable act of suicide.

In reply thereto we would say: we grant the conclusion that Saul passed out into an eternity of woe, but we do not accept the inference that he was ever a regenerate man. At the outset it must be remembered that the very installation of Saul upon the throne expressed the Lord’s displeasure against Israel, for as He declared to the prophet “*I gave thee a king in Mine anger (compare with 1 Sam. 8:5,6) and took him away in My wrath*” (Hos. 13:11). Concerning the three things advanced by Arminians to show that Saul was a regenerate man, they are no proofs at all. Samuel’s taking of the vial of oil and kissing him were simply symbolic actions, betokening the official status that had been conferred upon Saul: this is quite clear from the remainder of the verse, where the prophet explains his conduct, “*Is it not because the Lord hath anointed thee to be captain over His inheritance?*” (10:1)—not because “*The Lord delighteth in thee*” or because thou art “*a man after His own heart.*” It is not said the Lord gave Saul “a new heart,” but “*another.*” Moreover, the Hebrew word (haphak) is never translated “gave” elsewhere, but in the great majority of instances “turned:” it simply means the Lord turned his heart from natural timidity (see 1 Sam. 10:21, 22) to boldness (compare with 1 Sam. 11:1-7; 13:1-4). That the Spirit of God came upon him so that he prophesied is no more than is said of Balaam (Num. 22:38; 24:2) and Caiaphas (John 11:51).

3. The case of Solomon. This is admittedly the most difficult one presented in Scripture, and it is our belief that God meant it to be such. His history is such a solemn one, his fall so great, his backsliding so protracted, that had his spiritual recovery and restoration to fellowship with the Lord been made unmistakably

plain, a shelter would be provided for the careless and presumptuous. In Solomon the monarchy of Israel reached its zenith of splendour, for he reaped the harvest of glory for which David both toiled and suffered, entering into such a heritage as none else before or since has ever enjoyed. But in Solomon, too, the family of David entered its decline, and for his sins the judgments of God fell heavily on his descendants. Thus he is set before us as an awful warning of the fearful dangers which may surround and then overthrow the loftiest virtues and most dazzling mundane greatness.

That Solomon was a regenerate man we doubt not: that he enjoyed the favour of God to a most marked degree the inspired narrative makes plain. That he suffered a horrible decline in character and conduct is equally evident. Neither the special wisdom with which he was endowed, the responsibilities of the exalted position he occupied, nor the superior privileges which were his, rendered him proof against the temptations he encountered. He fell from his first estate and left his first love. His honour and glory were sadly eclipsed, and so far as the historical account of the books of Kings and Chronicles is concerned, he was buried in shame, the dark shadows of a misspent life and wrecked testimony shrouded his grave. Over the fate of Solomon there rests such a cloud and silence that many good men conclude he was lost: on the other hand there are those who do not believe that he so fell as to lose the favour of God and perish eternally.

With others, it is our own conviction that before the end of his earthly pilgrimage Solomon was made to repent deeply of his waywardness and wickedness. We base this conviction upon three things. First, the fact that he was the writer of the book of Ecclesiastes (1:1) and that it was penned at a later period of his life than the Proverbs and Canticles (see 1 Kings 4:32). Now to us it seems impossible to ponder Ecclesiastes without being struck with its prevailing note of sadness and without feeling that its writer is there expressing the contrition of one who has mournfully returned from the paths of error. In that book he

speaks out the bitter experiences he had gone through in pursuing a course of folly and madness and of the resultant “vexation of spirit”—see especially 7:2, 3, 26, 27 which is surely a voicing of his repentance. Second, hereby God made good His express promise to David concerning Solomon: *“I will be his Father and he shall be My son. If he commit iniquity, I will chastise him with the rod of men, and with the stripes of the children of men: but My mercy shall not depart away from him, as I took it from Saul”* (2 Sam. 7:14, 15). Third, centuries after his death the Spirit declared, *“Did not Solomon king of Israel sin by these things? yet among many nations was there no king like him, who was beloved of his God”* (Neh. 13:26).

4. The case of Judas. Though his be not nearly so difficult of solution, nevertheless it is admittedly a very mysterious one, and there are features about it which pertain to none other. But that which more immediately concerns us here is to show there is nothing in this awful example which militates in the least against the doctrine for which we are contending. That Judas is eternally lost there is no room to doubt: that he was ever saved there is no evidence whatever to show. Should it be said that the Lord would never have ordained a bad man to be one of His favoured apostles, the answer is, that God is not to be measured by our standards of the fitness of things: He is sovereign over all, doing as He pleases and giving no account of His matters. Moreover, He has told us that our thoughts and ways are not as His. The mystery of iniquity is a great deep, yet faith has full confidence in God even where it cannot understand.

That Christ was in nowise deceived by Judas is clear from John 6:64, *“For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were that believed not, and who should betray Him.”* Furthermore, we are told that He declared on this solemn occasion, *“Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil”* (verse 70). Notably and blessedly did that act make manifest the moral excellency of the Saviour. When the Son became incarnate He averred *“Lo I come to do Thy will, O God”* (Heb. 10:7), and God’s will for Him was revealed *“in the volume of the Book.”*

In that Book it was written that a familiar friend should lift up his heel against Him (Psa. 41:9). This was a sore trial, yet the perfect Servant balked not at it, but complied therewith by calling a “*devil*” to be one of His closest attendants. Christ rendered full obedience to the Father’s pleasure though it meant having the son of perdition in most intimate association with Him for three years, constantly dogging His steps even when He retired from His carping critics to be alone with the twelve.

Appeal is made by the Arminians to John 17:12, “*While I was with them in the world, I kept them in Thy name: those that Thou gavest Me I have kept, and none of them is lost but the son of perdition, that the Scripture might be fulfilled.*” Yet there is nothing here which supports their contention. Judas was “given to” Christ and “chosen” by Him as an apostle, but he was never given to Him by a special act of grace, nor “chosen in Him” and united to Him as a member of Him, as the rest of the apostles and as all the election of grace are. This is clear from His words in John 13:19, “*I speak not of you all (compare with verses 10, 11): I know whom I have chosen;*” that is chosen unto eternal life, for otherwise He had chosen Judas equally with the others. Let it be carefully noted that in John 17:12 Christ says not “none of them is lost except the son of perdition.” In using the disjunctive “*but*” He sharply contrasted Judas from the rest, showing he belonged to an entirely different class: compare Matt. 12:4; Acts 27:22; Rev. 21:27, where the “*but*” is in direct opposition to what precedes.

Christ’s statement in John 17:12 was designed to show that there had been no failure in the trust committed to Him, but rather that He had complied with His commission to the last detail. It also served to assure the eleven of this, that their faith might not be staggered by the perfidy of their companion. It gave further proof that He had not been deceived by Judas, for before he betrayed Him, He terms him “*the son of perdition.*” Finally, it declared God’s hand and counsel in it: Judas perished “that the Scripture might be fulfilled.” Among the reasons why God ordered that there should be a Judas in the apostolate, we

suggest it was in order that an impartial witness might bear testimony to the moral excellency of Christ: though in the closest possible contact with Him by day and night, he could find no flaw in Him, but confessed "*I have betrayed the innocent blood*" (Matt. 27:4). It was not from saving grace Judas "fell," but from "*ministry, and apostleship*" (Acts 1:25).

We turn now to look at some of those Scriptures appealed to by Arminians in support of their contention that those who have been born of the Spirit may fall from grace and eternally perish. We say "some of them," for were we to expound every passage cited and free them from the false meaning attached thereto, this section would be extended to an undue and wearisome length. We shall therefore single out those verses which our opponents are fondest of quoting, those which they regard as their chief strongholds, for if they be overthrown we need not trouble with their weaker defences. It is hardly necessary to say that there is not one passage in all the Word of God which expressly states the dogma the Arminians contend for, and therefore they are obliged to select those which abound in figurative expressions, or which treat of national and temporal destruction, or those relating to unregenerate professors, thereby deceiving the unwary by the mere sound of words and wresting the Scriptures by straining fragments divorced from their contexts.

John Wesley in his "Serious Thoughts" on the apostasy of saints framed his first proposition thus: "That one who is holy and righteous in the judgment of God Himself may nevertheless so fall from God as to perish everlastingly." In support of this he quoted, "*But when the righteous turneth away from his righteousness and committeth iniquity and doeth according to all the abominations that the wicked man doeth, shall he live? All his righteousness that he hath done shall not be mentioned: in his trespass that he hath trespassed and in his sin that he hath sinned, in these shall he die*" (Ezek. 18:24). That the founder of Wesleyan Methodism understood this to refer to eternal death is evident from the purpose for which he adduced it. As this passage is generally regarded by Arminians as "unanswerable

and unassailable” we will consider it at more length.

This construing of “*shall he die*” as “shall perish eternally” is contrary to the entire scope and design of Ezek. 18, for this chapter treats not of the perseverance or apostasy of the saints, neither of their salvation nor damnation. Its sole aim is to vindicate the justice of God from a charge that He was then punishing the Jews (temporally) not for their own sins but for the sins of their forebears, and therefore there was manifest unfairness in His dealings with them. This chapter has nothing whatever to do with the spiritual and eternal welfare of men. The whole context concerns only the house of Israel, the land of Israel, and their conduct in it, according to which they held or lost their tenure of it. Thus it has no relevancy whatever to the matter in hand, no pertinency to the case of individual saints and their eternal destiny.

Again, though the man here spoken of is indeed acknowledged by the Lord to be “*righteous*,” yet that righteousness by which he is denominated only regards him as an inhabitant of the land of Palestine and as giving him a claim to the possession and enjoyment of it, but not as justifying him before God and giving him title to everlasting life and felicity. For this “*righteousness*” is called “*his*” (verse 24) and not Another’s (Isa. 45:24; Jer. 23:6), that which he had “*done*” (verse 24 and compare with verses 5-9) and not what Christ had done for him (Rom. 5:19); it was a righteousness of works and not of faith (Rom. 4:5, Phil. 3:9). This man was “*righteous*” legally but not evangelically. Thus, if a thousand such cases were adduced it would not militate one iota against the eternal security of all who have been constituted righteous before God on the ground of Christ’s perfect obedience being reckoned to their account and who have been inwardly sanctified by the Spirit and grace of God.

Let the reader carefully peruse the whole of chapter 18. The mission of the prophet Ezekiel was to call Israel to repentance. He pointed to the awful calamities which had come upon the nation as proof of their great guilt. They sought to escape that

charge by pleading *“The fathers have eaten sour grapes and the children’s teeth are set on edge.”* The prophet answers, that, though in His governmental and providential dealing God often visits the father’s sin on sinful children, yet the guilt of sinful fathers is never in His theocracy (according to the covenant of Horeb) visited on righteous children. He went further, and reminded them that temporal prosperity was restored to the Nation as soon as an obedient generation succeeded a rebellious, and that as soon as a rebellious individual truly repented he was forgiven, just as when a righteous man became wicked he was plagued in his body or estate.

“Then the Lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him and forgave him the debt . . . And his lord was wroth and delivered him to the tormentors” (Matt. 18:27, 34). This is quoted to prove that “persons truly regenerated and justified before God, may through high misdemeanours in sinning, turn themselves out of the justifying grace and favour of God, quench the spirit of regeneration, and come to have their portion with hypocrites and unbelievers.” Arminians are not the only ones who wrest this passage, for Socinians quote verses 24-27 to disprove the atonement of Christ, arguing therefrom that God freely forgives sins out of His “compassion,” without any satisfaction being rendered to His broken Law. Both of these erroneous interpretations are the consequence of ignoring the scope and design of this passage: Christ was not there showing either the ground on which God bestows pardon or the doom of apostates.

The scope and intention of Matt. 18:23-35 is easily perceived if the following details be attended to. 1. Christ is replying to Peter’s *“how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him”* (verse 21)? 2. It is a parable or similitude of *“the kingdom of heaven”* (verse 23), which has to do with a mixed condition of things, the whole sphere of profession, in which the tares grow together with the wheat. 3. From Christ’s application in verse 35 we see that He was enforcing Matt. 6:14, 15. On account of the mercy and forgiveness which the Christian has

received from God in Christ, he ought to extend forgiveness and kindness to his offending brethren (Eph. 4:32). Failure so to do is threatened with awful vengeance. “IF” I forgive not from my heart those who offend me, then I am only an unregenerate professor. Note how Christ represented this character at the beginning: no quickened soul would boast “*I will pay Thee all*” (verse 26)!

Luke 11:24-26, appealed to by Arminians, need not detain us, for the last clause of Matt. 12:45 proves it is a parable about the nation of Israel—freedom from the spirit of idolatry since the Babylonian captivity, but possessed by the Devil himself when they rejected Christ and demanded His crucifixion. Nor should John 15:6 occasion any serious difficulty. Without proffering a detailed exposition, it is sufficient to point out that the “*Vine*” is not a figure of vital relationship (as is “*the body*,” 1 Cor. 12:11; Col. 1:24), but only of external and visible. This is clear from such passages as Psalm 80:8-14; Jeremiah 2:21; Hosea 10:1; Revelation 14:18, 19. Thus there are both fruitful and fruitless “branches” (as “good” and “bad” fishes Matt. 13:48): the latter being in Christ only by profession—hence the “*as a branch*.” Confirmatory of this the Father is here designated “*the Husbandman*” (verse 1)—a term having a much wider scope than “*the Dresser*” of His vineyard (Luke 13:9).

“*For if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest He also spare not thee*” (Rom. 11:21). But such a passage as this (verses 17-24) is nothing to the purpose. The “natural branches” were the unbelieving portion of the Jews (verse 20), and they were “broken off” from the position of witness for God in the earth, the “kingdom” being taken from them and given to others: Matt. 21:43. What analogy is there between these and the supposed case of those united to Christ and later becoming so severed from Him as to perish? None whatever: a much closer parallel would be found in a local church having its candlestick “*removed*” (Rev. 2:5): set aside as Christ’s witness on earth. True, from their case the apostle points a solemn warning (verse 22) but that warning is heeded by the truly regenerate, and thus

is made a means of their preservation.

“Through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish for whom Christ died?” (1 Cor. 8:11). 1. It is not affirmed that the weak brother had “perished!” 2. From the standpoint of God’s purpose and the sufficiency of His keeping power, the feeblest of His children will not perish. 3. But the strong Christian is here warned of and dehorted from a selfish misuse of his “liberty” (verse 9) by pointing out the horrible tendency of the same. Though Christ will preserve His lambs, that does not warrant me in casting a stumblingstone before them. No thanks were due the Roman soldier that not a bone of Christ’s body was broken when he thrust his spear into the Saviour’s side, and the professing Christian who sets an evil example before babes in Christ is not guiltless because God preserves them from becoming infidels thereby. My duty is to so walk that its influence on others may be good and not bad.

First Corinthians 9:27 simply informs us of what God required from Paul (and all His servants and people), and what, by grace he did in order to escape a possible calamity. 2 Corinthians 6:1 refers not to saving grace but to ministerial as verse 3 shows: as labourers together in Christ’s vineyard they are exhorted to employ the gifts bestowed upon them. *“Ye are fallen from grace”* (Gal. 5:4) is to be interpreted in the light of its setting. The Galatians were being troubled by Judaizers who affirmed that faith in Christ was not sufficient for acceptance with God, that they must also be circumcised. The apostle declares that if they should be circumcised with the object of gaining God’s favour then Christ would profit them nothing (verse 2), for they would thereby abandon the platform of grace, descending to fleshly ceremonies; in such case they would leave the ground of free justification for a lower and worthless plane.

“Holding faith and a good conscience, which some having put away, concerning faith have made shipwreck; of whom is Hymeneus and Alexander” (1 Tim. 1:19, 20). So far from these being regenerated men who spiritually deteriorated, Hymeneus was a profane and vain babbler, who increased from one degree

of impiety “*unto more ungodliness*” (2 Tim. 2:16, 17); while Paul said of Alexander that he did him “*much harm*” and “*greatly withstood his preaching*” (2 Tim. 4:16, 17). Their “putting away” a good conscience does not necessarily imply they formerly had such, for of the unbelieving Jews who contemptuously refused the Gospel (Acts 13:45, 46) it is said—the same Greek word being used—that they “put it from” them. They made shipwreck of the Christian Faith they professed (compare with Gal. 1:23) for they denied a future resurrection (2 Tim. 2:18), which resulted in overthrowing the doctrinal faith of some of their hearers; but as 2 Tim. 2:19 shows this was no apostasy of real saints.

Hebrews 6:4-8. There are two sorts of “enlightened” persons: those who are savingly illuminated by the Holy Spirit, and those intellectually instructed by the doctrine of the Gospel. In like manner, there are two kinds of “tasting” of the heavenly gift, the good Word of God, and the powers of the world to come: those who under a fleeting impulse merely sample them, and those who from a deep sense of need relish the same. So there are two different classes who become “partakers of the Holy Spirit:” those who only come under His awe-inspiring and sin-convicting influences in a meeting where His power is manifest, and those who receive of His grace and are permanently indwelt by Him. The “repentance” of those viewed here is but that of Cain, Pharaoh and Judas, and those who openly repudiate Christ become hopelessly hardened, given up to a reprobate mind.

The description furnished of the above class at once serves to identify them, for it is so worded as to come far short of the marks of the children of God. They are not spoken of as God’s elect, as those redeemed by Christ, as born of the Spirit. They are not said to be justified, forgiven, accepted in the Beloved, or “*made meet for the inheritance of the saints in light.*” Nothing is said of their faith, love or obedience. Yet these are the very things which distinguish the saints from all others! Finally, the description of this class in terms which fall below what pertains to the regenerate is employed again in verse 9: “*But (not and’)*,”

beloved, we are persuaded better things of you (in contrast from them) and things which (actually) accompany salvation."

Hebrews 10:26-29. The apostle says nothing here positively of any having actually committed this fatal sin, but only supposes such a case, speaking conditionally. This particular "sin" referred to here must be ascertained from the Epistle in which this passage occurs: it is the deliberate repudiation of Christianity after being instructed therein and making a public profession thereof and going back to an effete Judaism—the condition of such would be hopeless. The nearest approach to such sin today would be for one who had been taught the Truth and intelligently professed to the same, renouncing it for, say, Romanism, or Buddhism. To renounce the way of salvation set forth by the Gospel of Christ is to turn the back on the only Mediator between God and men. "There remaineth no more sacrifice for sins" for those who prefer "calves and goats" (Judaism) or "Mary and the saints" (Romanism) rather than the Lamb of God.

"Now the just shall live by faith, but if any man draw back My soul shall have no pleasure in him" (Heb. 10:38). This also is purely hypothetical, as the "if" intimates: it announces what would follow should such a thing occur. To quote what is merely suppositionary rather than positive, shows how weak the Arminian case is. That there is nothing here whatever for them to build upon is clear from the very wording and structure of the sentence: it is not "Now the just shall live by faith and if any man draw back." The "*but if any man draw back*" places him in opposition to the class spoken of in the first clause. This is further evident in what immediately follows: "*But we are not of them that draw back unto perdition, but of them that believe to the saving of the soul*" (verse 39). Thus, so far from this passage favouring the total apostasy of real saints, it definitely establishes the doctrine of their final perseverance.

"There shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them" (2 Pet. 2:1). Any seeming difficulty here is at once

removed if attention be carefully paid to two things. First, it is not said they were redeemed, but only “*bought.*” The first man was given “*dominion*” over all things terrestrial (Gen. 1:28), but by his fall lost the same, and Satan took possession by conquest. Christ does not dispossess him by the mere exercise of Divine power, but as the Son of man He secured by right of purchase all that Adam forfeited. He “*buyeth that field*” (Matt. 13:44) which is “*the world*” (verse 39)—i.e. the earth and all in it. Second, it is not said they were bought by Christ, but “*the Lord,*” and the Greek word is not the customary “*kurios*” as in verses 9, 11, 20, but “*Despotes,*” which signifies dominion and authority—translated “*masters*” in 1 Tim. 6:1, 2; Titus 2:9; 1 Pet. 2:18. It was as a Master He bought the world and all in it, acquiring thereby an unchallengable title (as God-man) to rule over it. He therefore has the right to demand the submission of every man, and all who deny Him that right, repudiate him as the Despotes.

2 Pet. 2:20-22. There are none of the distinguishing marks of God’s children ascribed to the characters mentioned in this passage, nothing whatever about them to show they were ever anything more than formal professors. Attention to the following details will clarify and simplify these verses. 1. The “*pollutions of the world*” here “*escaped*” are the gross and outward defilements (in contrast from the inward cleansing of the regenerate), as is clear from the “*again entangled therein.*” 2. It was not “*through faith in*” but “*through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour*” that this reformation of conduct and amendment of walk was effected. 3. These are not said to have “*loved the way of righteousness*” (Psa. 119:47, 77, 159), but merely to have “*known*” it: there is a twofold knowledge of the Truth: natural and spiritual, theoretical and vital, ineffectual and transforming—it is only the former the apostates had. The heart of stone was never taken from them. 4. They were never “*saints*” or “*sheep*” but “*dogs*” domesticated and “*swine*” externally washed.

“These are spots in your feasts of charity, when they feast with you, feeding themselves without fear; clouds they are

without water, carried about of winds; trees whose fruit withereth; without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots” (Jude 12). It is the words *twice dead* which the Arminian fastens upon, but we have quoted the whole verse that the reader may see that it is couched in the language of imagery. A manifestly figurative expression is taken literally: if “*twice dead*,” it is argued they were twice alive—the second time by the new birth, the life from which they had killed. The Epistle in which this expression occurs supplies the key to it. Its theme is Apostasy: of the Israelites (verse 5), angels (verse 6), and lifeless professors in Christendom (verses 8-19), from which the saints are “*preserved*” (verse 1) and “*kept*” (verse 24). Those of verse 12 were dead in sin by nature, and then by apostasy—by defection from the faith, they once professed. “*I will not blot out his name*” (Rev. 3:5) is a promise to the overcomer, every believer (1 John 5:4).

The sixth of seven booklets.

