



# The Doctrine of Saints' Perseverance



**Part Two**

**A. W. Pink**



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### **3. Its Nature**

### **4. Its Marvel**

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### **3. Its Nature**

We purpose dealing with this theme, and particularly with that aspect of it which is now to be before us, in rather a different manner than that which was followed by most of the Calvinistic divines in the past; or rather, we propose to throw most of our emphasis upon another angle of it than what they did. Their principal object was to establish this truth, by rebutting the error of Arminians, who insist that those who have been redeemed by Christ and regenerated by the Holy Spirit may nevertheless totally and finally apostatize from the Faith, and so eternally perish. Our chief aim will rather be to counteract the crude manner in which this doctrine has been only too often handled in more recent times and the evil use to which an adulterous generation has put it. While Arminianism has by no means disappeared from Christendom, yet it is the more recent inroads of Antinomianism (the repudiation of the Divine Law and the turning of God's grace into lasciviousness) which have wrought the most damage in our own lifetime.

It is not sufficiently realized by many of the Lord's own people that far more harm than good is likely to be done by immature "Gospellers," who have more zeal than knowledge, and who expect to reap a harvest (secure "results") before the ground is ploughed and harrowed. Many an ignorant evangelist has given his hearers the impression that once they "accept Christ as their personal Saviour" they need have no concern about the future, and thousands have been lulled into a fatal sleep by the soothing lullaby "once saved, always saved." To imagine that if I commit my soul and its eternal interests into the hands of the Lord

henceforth relieves me of all obligation, is to accept sugar-coated poison from the father of lies. When I deposit my money in the bank for safe custody, then my responsibility is at an end: it is now their duty to protect the same. But it is far otherwise with the soul at conversion—the Christian’s responsibility to avoid temptation and shun evil, to use the means of grace and seek after good, lasts as long as he is left in this world.

If our ancestors erred on the side of prolixity their descendants have often injured the cause of Christ by their brevity. Bare statements, without qualification or amplification, are frequently most misleading. Brief generalizations may content the superficial, who lack both the incentive and the patience to make a thorough examination of any subject, but those who value the Truth sufficiently to be willing to “buy” it (Prov. 23:23) appreciate a detailed analysis, if so be that their contemplation thereof enables them to obtain an intelligent and balanced grasp of an important Scriptural theme. The man who accepts a piece of money—be it of paper or metal—after a cursory glance, is far more likely to be deceived with a counterfeit than he who scrutinizes it closely. And they who give assent to a mere summarized declaration of this doctrine are in far greater danger of being deluded than the ones who are prepared to carefully and prayerfully examine a systematic exposition thereof. It is, of course, for the latter we write.

Much confusion and misunderstanding has been caused through failure to clearly define terms. Those who assail this doctrine usually set up a “man of straw” and then suppose they have achieved a notable victory because so little difficulty was experienced in demolishing so feeble an object; and it must be confessed that only too often those who have posed as the champions of the Truth are largely to blame for this. It needs little argument to demonstrate that one who is in love with sin and drinks in iniquity like water does not have his face Heavenwards, no matter what experience of grace he claims to have had in the past. Yet it must not be concluded that the Arminian has gained the day when he appeals to the Christian’s spiritual instincts and

asks: Does it comport with God's holiness for Him to own as His dear child one who is trampling upon His commandments? The Calvinist would return a negative reply to such an iniquity as promptly and emphatically as would his opponent.

*"The righteous shall hold on his way"* (Job 17:9). As Spurgeon pertinently pointed out, "The Scripture does not teach that a man will reach his journey's end without continuing to travel along the road; it is not true that one act of faith is all, and that nothing is needed of daily faith, prayer and watchfulness. Our doctrine is the very opposite, namely, that the righteous shall hold on his way: or, in other words, shall continue in faith, in repentance, in prayer, and under the influence of the grace of God. We do not believe in salvation by a physical force which treats a man as a dead log, and carries him whether he will it or not towards heaven. No, 'he holds on his way,' he is personally active about the matter, and plods on up hill and down dale till he reaches his journey's end. We never thought that merely because a man supposes that he once entered on this way he may therefore conclude that he is certain of salvation, even if he leaves the way immediately. No, but we say that he who truly receives the Holy Spirit, so that he believes in the Lord Jesus Christ, shall not go back, but persevere in the way of faith. . . We detest the doctrine that a man who has once believed in Jesus will be saved even if he altogether forsook the path of obedience."

In order to define our terms we must make it quite clear who it is that perseveres and what it is in which he perseveres. It is the saints, and none other. This is evident from many passages of Scripture. *"He will keep the feet of His saints"* (1 Sam. 2:9). *"For the Lord loveth judgment and forsaketh not His saints: they are preserved forever"* (Psa. 37:28). *"He preserveth the souls of His saints: He delivereth them out of the hand of the enemy"* (Psa. 87:10). *"He maketh intercession for the saints"* (Rom. 8:27). *"He shall come to be glorified in His saints"* (2 Thess. 1:10). All such are preserved in God's love and favour, and accordingly they persevere in the Faith, eschewing all damnable errors; they persevere in a life of faith, clinging to Christ like a drowning man

to a life-buoy; they persevere in the path of holiness and obedience, walking by the light of God's Word and being directed by His precepts—not perfectly so, nor without wandering, but in the general tenor of their lives.

Now a "saint" is a sanctified or separated one. First, he is one of those who were chosen by the Father before the foundation of the world and predestinated to be conformed unto the image of His Son. Second, he is one of those who were redeemed by Christ, who gave His life a ransom for them. Third, he is one who has been regenerated by a miracle of grace, brought from death unto life, and thereby set apart from those who are dead in sin. Fourth, he is indwelt by the Holy Spirit, whereby he is sealed unto the day of redemption. But how may I know whether or not I am a saint? By impartially examining myself in the light of Holy Writ to see if I possess the character and conduct of one. A "saint" is one whose back is toward the world and his face toward God; whose affections are drawn unto things above, who yearns for communion with his Beloved, who grieves over that in himself which displeases God, who makes conscience of his sins and confesses them to God, who prayerfully endeavours to walk as becometh a Christian, but who daily mourns his many offences.

Only those persevere unto the end who have experienced the saving grace of God. Now grace is not only a Divine attribute inherent in His character, it is also a Divine principle which He imparts to His people. It is both objective and subjective. Objectively, it is that free favour with which God eternally and unchangingly regards His people. Subjectively, it is that which He communicates to their souls, which resists their native depravity and enables them to hold on their way. A saint is one who not only has "*found grace in the eyes of the Lord*" (Gen. 6:8), but who has also received "*abundance of grace*" (Rom. 5:17)—"*unto every one of us is grace given*" (Eph. 4:7). The Lord "*giveth grace unto the humble*" (James 4:6), and His grace is an operative, influential, and transforming thing. The Lord Jesus is "*full of grace and truth,*" and of His fullness do all His people receive, "*and grace for grace*" (John 1:14,16). That grace teaches its

recipients “to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world” (Titus 2:11, 12). They come to the Throne of Grace and “find grace to help in time of need” (Heb. 4:16) and thereby prove the Divine declaration “My grace is sufficient for thee” (2 Cor. 12:9).

From all that has been pointed out above it follows that when we affirm the final perseverance of the saints we do not mean,

1. That every professing Christian will reach Heaven. The sprinkling of a few drops of water on the head of an infant does not qualify it for the inheritance of the saints in light, for in a few years’ time that child is seen to be no different than others who received not this ordinance. Nor does an avowal of faith on the part of an adult demonstrate him to be a new creature in Christ. Many born of Papish parents have been convinced of the folly of bowing before idols, confessing their sins to a priest and other such absurdities, but conversion to Protestantism is not the same as regeneration, as many evidenced in the days of Luther. Many a Jew has been convinced of the Messianic claims of Jesus Christ and has believed on Him as such, yet this is no proof of saving grace, as John 2:23, 24; 6:66 plainly shows. Thousands more have been emotionally stirred under the hypnotic appeals of evangelists and have “taken their stand for Christ” and “joined the church,” but their interest quickly evaporated and they soon returned to their wallowing in the mire.

2. Nor do we mean that seeming grace cannot be lost. Satan is a clever imitator so that his tares are indistinguishable by men from the wheat. By reading theological works and sitting under the preaching of the Word an attentive mind can soon acquire an intellectual acquaintance with the Truth and be able to discuss the mysteries of the Gospel more readily and fluently than can an unlettered child of God. Keen mentality may also be accompanied by a naturally religious disposition which expresses itself in fervent devotions, self-sacrificing effort and proselytizing zeal. But if such an one relapse and repudiates the Truth, that does not overthrow our doctrine: it simply shows he was never born of God. “*They went out from us, but they were not of us; for of they*

*had been of us, they would have continued with us*” (1 John 2:19). Such characters had never been received into the fellowship of apostolic assemblies unless they gave credible appearance of possessing real grace, yet their subsequent departure was proof they had it not. *“Whosoever hath not (in reality) from him shall be taken away even that which he seemeth to have”* (Luke 8:18).

3. Nor do we mean that initial and preparatory grace is a guarantee of glorification. What percentage of blossoms on the apple and plum trees mature and bear fruit? And that is an adumbration in the natural of what is found in the spiritual realm. Many a promising bud is nipped by the frosts of spring and never develops into a flower. In like manner there is a large number who so far from despising and rejecting it, receive the Word with joy, *“yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while”* (Matt. 13:20, 21). That was the case when Christ Himself sowed the Seed, and many a faithful servant of His has found the same thing duplicated in his own ministerial labours. How often has he seen the buds of promise appearing in the lives of some of his young people, only to be saddened later by the discovery that their *“goodness was as a morning cloud and as the early dew it went away”* (Hos. 6:4). *“Ye were willing for a season to rejoice in his light”* (John 5:35) said Christ of certain ones who sat under the preaching of His forerunner; but observe He declared not that they had *“sorrowed unto repentance”*.

Blazing comets and meteors are soon spent and fall from heaven like lightning, but the stars keep their orbits and stations—as do the spiritual “stars” held fast in Christ’s right hand (Rev. 2:1). There is an initial grace which produces a real but transient effect, and there is a saving grace which secures a permanent result. Hebrews 6:4, 5 supplies a solemn illustration of the former. There we read of those *“who were once enlightened,”* that is, whose minds were illumined from on high, so that they perceived clearly the excellency of Divine things. They *“tasted of the heavenly gift,”* so that for a season they lost their relish for the things of the world. They *“were made partakers of the Holy Spirit,”* being convicted by Him of their sins and brought to say with Balaam

*“let me die the death of the righteous”* (Num. 23:10); but thorns sprang up and choked the good Seed, so that they *“bring (forth) no fruit to perfection”* (Luke 8:14). Such are cast forth *“like an untimely birth.”*

4. Nor do we mean that true grace if left in our hands would not be lost. If Adam and Eve when left to themselves lost their innocence, how much more would those who are still affected by indwelling sin destroy themselves, did not the Lord renew them in the inner man *“day by day”* (2 Cor. 4:16). Regeneration does not make the Christian a God—independent and self-sufficient. No, it unites him as a branch to the true Vine, as a member of Christ’s mystical body; and just as a bough detached from the tree immediately withers and as an arm or leg cut off from its body is a lifeless thing, so would the saint perish if it were possible to sever him from the Saviour. But the believer is not his own keeper: *“your life is hid with Christ in God”* (Col. 3:3) declares the apostle. At the new birth our self-righteousness received its death-wound, so that we were glad to look outside of ourselves to the righteousness of Another, and the more we grow in grace the more conscious are we of our weakness and the more are we made *“strong in the Lord and in the power of His might.”*

5. Nor do we mean that true grace may not be hindered in its operations and suffer a relapse. *“The flesh lusteth against the spirit”* (Gal. 5:17): being contrary the one to the other, there is ever a warfare going on between them, one being uppermost to-day and the other so tomorrow. Christian perseverance is to be gauged not so much from single actions as by the more regular habits of the soul. As the functions of the body may be hindered by a swoon or fit, as the activities of the mind are impaired by delirium, so the stirrings of indwelling grace may be interrupted by the power of our natural corruptions. The more the saint yields to the solicitations of the flesh, the feebler become the workings of the principle of grace. That true grace may suffer a serious, though not a fatal, relapse, appears in the cases of Noah, Abraham, David and Peter, which are recorded for our warning and not for our imitation. The health of the soul varies as does that of the body,



and as the latter is frequently the consequence of our own carelessness and folly, such is always the case in connection with the former.

6. Nor do we mean that the comforts of true grace cannot be eclipsed. We may indeed lose the sense of it though not the substance. Communion with Christ is lost when we experience a fall by the way, yet union with Him is not severed thereby. Mutual comforts may be suspended between man and wife though the conjugal knot be not dissolved. Believers may be separated from Christ's smile yet not so from His heart. If they wander from the Sun of righteousness how can they expect to enjoy His light and warmth. Sin and wretchedness, holiness and happiness are inseparably joined together. The way of the transgressor is hard, but peace and joy are the portion of the upright. As a parent suffers his child to scorch his fingers at the flame that he may learn to dread the fire, so God permits His people to lose their comforts for a season that they may prove the bitterness of sin, but He draws them back again unto Himself before they are destroyed thereby.

7. Nor do we mean that the presence of indwelling grace renders it unnecessary that its possessor should persevere. Yet this is one of the silly inferences which Arminians are fond of drawing. They say, "If it is absolutely certain that God will preserve His people from total apostasy, then there is no real need why they must persevere"—as well might we argue that it is unnecessary for us to breathe because God gives us breath, or that Hezekiah needed no longer to eat and drink because God had promised he should live another fifteen years. Wherever saving grace is bestowed it is accompanied by "*the spirit of a sound mind*" (2 Tim. 1:6) so that the soul is preserved from trifling with God or reasoning like a madman. Christians are called upon to work out their own salvation "*with fear and trembling,*" not to conduct themselves recklessly, and to enable them thereto God worketh in them "*both to will and to do of His good pleasure*" (Phil 2:12, 13). Grace does not annul our responsibility but fits us to discharge it; it relieves from no duties, but equips for the performance of them.

We turn now to the positive side: having dwelt upon what is not signified or implied by the final perseverance of the saints, let us now endeavour to show whereof it consists. And here it should be duly noted that the Holy Spirit has not restricted Himself to a single expression but has used a great variety of words to describe this duty and blessing. In matters of great spiritual importance God has employed many different terms in His Word, for the instruction, comfort and support of His people. Out of the scores which set forth the believer's perseverance we may cite these. It is to "*continue following the Lord our God*" (1 Sam. 2:14), to "*walk in the paths of righteousness*" (Psa. 23:5), to be "*steadfast in the Covenant*" (Psa. 78:37), to "*endure unto the end*" (Matt. 24:13), to "*deny self and take up the cross daily*" (Luke 9:23), to "*abide in Christ*" (John 15:4), to "*cleave unto the Lord*" (Acts 11:23), to "*press toward the mark*" (Phil. 3:14), to "*continue in the faith grounded and settled*" (Col. 1:13), to "*hold fast faith and a good conscience*" (1 Tim. 1:19), to "*hold fast the confidence and rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end*" (Heb. 3:6), to "*run with patience the race that is set before us*" (Heb. 12:1), to "*stablish our hearts*" (James 5:8), to "*be faithful unto death*" (Rev. 2:10).

In the limited space at our disposal it is advisable to epitomize the main branches of this subject under a few heads.

1. Spiritual perseverance is the maintaining of a holy profession or a continuance in the word and doctrine of Christ. Wherever saving faith is imparted the soul receives the Scriptures as a Divine revelation, as the very Word of God. Faith is the visive faculty of the heart, by which the majesty and excellency of the Truth is perceived and by which such conviction and certainty is conveyed that the soul knows it is none other than the living God speaking to him. Faith "*hath received His testimony*" and thereby "*hath set to his seal that God is true*" (John 3:33). Henceforth he takes his stand on the impregnable rock of Holy Writ and neither man nor Devil can move him therefrom: "*the voice of a stranger he will not follow*" (John 10:5). While one who is not regenerated may intellectually believe and verbally profess his faith in the whole of revealed Truth, yet no regenerated person will repudiate

the same.

*“Some shall depart from the Faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of demons”* (1 Tim. 4:1). How many have done so within the memory of our older readers! Those who were looked upon as towers of orthodoxy succumbed to “evolutionism” and the “higher criticism.” Those who were regarded as staunch Protestants became ensnared by Romanism. Multitudes of the rank and file who were once members of evangelical churches and teachers in the Sunday Schools, have been poisoned by infidelity and repudiated their former beliefs. But all such cases were merely the chaff being separated from the wheat, thereby causing the true to stand out more plainly from the false: *“For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest”* (1 Cor. 11:19). When many of Christ’s disciples went back and walked no more with Him the apostles were not shaken, for when He asked them *“Will ye also go away?”* their spokesman answered *“Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life”* (John 6:66, 68).

*“Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on Him, If ye continue in My Word, then are ye My disciples indeed”* (John 8:31). That is one of the marks of those who are disciples of Christ in reality and not only in appearance. They are all *“taught of the Lord”* (Isa. 54:13) and not merely by men, and *“I know that whatsoever God doeth it shall be forever: nothing can be put to it, nor anything taken from it”* (Eccl. 3:14). False Christs and false prophets may seek to beguile them, but it is not possible to deceive the elect (Matt. 24:24). Hymeneus and Philetus may err concerning the Truth, even denying the resurrection, and in consequence *“overthrow the faith of some,”* yet we are at once assured *“Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, the Lord knoweth them that are His”* (2 Tim. 2:17-19)—none with a saving faith can be overthrown. And why? Because they are enabled to continue in God’s Word. Uninfluenced by “current opinion” or “modern thought,” the child of God even though the last one left on earth, would *“hold fast the profession of faith without wavering”* (Heb. 10:23).

2. The maintaining of holy affections and principles. It should be clearly understood that perseverance is not a distinct and particular grace, separate from all others, rather is it a virtue which crowns all virtues, a grace which sets a glory on every other grace. The first stirrings of the new life are seen in conviction of sin and contrition for the same, yet repentance is not an act to be performed once for all, but a grace to be exercised constantly. Faith is that which lays hold of Christ and obtains from Him pardon and cleansing, yet so far from that being something which needs not to be repeated, it is an experience which requires to be renewed day by day. The same holds good of love, of hope, of zeal. Perseverance is the continued exercise of holy affections and principles so that we do not merely trust for a while, love for awhile, obey for a while, and then cease; but forgetting those things which are behind we press forward to those before. *“These all died in faith”* (Heb. 11:13): they not only lived by faith, but they continued doing so to the very end of their earthly pilgrimage.

*“Blessed are they that mourn”* (Matt. 5:4). Mark well the tense: not they that mourned in the past, but who still do so. Even Pharaoh and Ahab, yea Judas also, had transient qualms of conscience, but those were nothing more than the stirrings of nature. But the child of God has within him a deeper principle, a principle of holiness which is contrary to evil, and this makes its possessor grieve over his sinfulness. *“Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness;”* not only who once hungered after righteousness, but who long ardently for it now. *“Blessed is the man that endureth temptation”* (James 1:12): how much theology is to be found in the grammar of Scripture! *“To whom coming as unto a living Stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, precious”* (1 Pet. 2:4): yes “coming” for fresh supplies of grace, for further counsel and instruction, for heart-reviving communion. *“Blessed is he that watcheth and keepeth his garments”* (Rev. 16:15): they upon whom the benediction of God rests are not those who once ran well, but whose graces continue in exercise.

Christians are *“kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time”* (1 Pet. 1:5). God does not preserve His people by the mere putting forth of physical power, but by renewing their graces, particularly their faith. It is through their continued reliance upon Christ, their trusting in the Divine promises and on God’s perfections as engaged to fulfil them, their keeping of His commands and their overcoming the world (1 John 5:4) that the saints are secured from fatality. And their faith is maintained by Christ’s constant intercession—*“I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not”*—and God’s response thereto, who fulfils *“all the good pleasure of His goodness in them and the work of faith with power”* (2 Thess. 1:11). This does not mean that the Christian’s faith continues in unabated exercise all his days, for as the most fruitful tree passes through a wintertime of non-bearing so it often is in the experience of the believer, yet as the life is still in the tree though leafless so faith remains and bursts forth afresh. *“Lord I believe, help Thou mine unbelief”* expresses his general course.

3. The maintaining of holy conduct or good works. When a person’s understanding has been supernaturally enlightened and his affections Divinely renewed there cannot but follow a radical change of conduct, though this is made more prominent and radical in some cases than in others. The difference is much more apparent in one who was thoroughly irreligious and guilty of gross outward sins before his new birth than another who was regulated by the training of pious parents and preserved from debauchery. Yet even with the latter a *“new creation”* must express itself in a new life: the Word will be read and meditated upon not so much as a duty but a delight, prayer will be engaged in not perfunctorily but heartily, the Lord’s people will not only be respected but loved for whatever of Christ may be seen in them, honesty and truthfulness will mark his dealings with his fellows not only because this is right but because he would not grieve the Spirit, while daily work is performed not as an irksome task which must be done but as a service gladly rendered unto Him whose providence has wisely and graciously ordered his lot.

At regeneration God imparts spiritual life to the soul, and all life is followed by motion and operation. Before the new birth the soul was spiritually dead, and at the new birth it was entirely passive, being wrought upon by God; but after the new birth the soul becomes active. Perseverance then is the endeavours of the soul to concur with God's quickening of it. Hence it is that the Christian life is often described under the figure of walking: "*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). The motions of the body are transferred to the soul, which by faith and love is conducted along the way of God's statutes (Ezek. 36:27). Walking is a voluntary action and the renewed soul has pleasure in the path of godliness. Walking is a steady and continuous action, and not a spasmodic and irregular one: so the Christian pursues an obedient course not by fits and starts but steadily and steadfastly. Walking is a progressive motion, moving onwards to a goal: so the Christian normally goes on "*from strength to strength*" (Psa. 84:7). Walking as such is incessant, for it ceases as soon as we sit down by the wayside: so the Christian life is a walking to the very end of his pilgrimage and until Heaven is reached perfect rest is not entered into.

*"But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life"* (Jude 20, 21). It is by such exhortations that the Christian is stirred to use the means that make for constancy. Care has to be taken if there is to be spiritual growth. It is not sufficient to be established in the faith, we must daily increase therein: the foundation is laid that a house may be erected thereon, and that is built steadily, bit by bit. For this, prayer is required: this is the channel through which health and strength is obtained. Neglect of prayer is followed by arrested growth, nay by decay of graces, for if we go not forward we backslide. To pray aright the assistance of the Holy Spirit has to be sought. Further, we must keep ourselves in God's love by avoiding everything which displeases Him and by maintaining close and regular communion with Him. Should

we leave our first love, then we must repent and do the first works (Rev. 2:4). Finally, hope must be kept in exercise: the heart fixed upon the glorious prospect and consummation awaiting us.

4. Such maintaining of a holy profession, holy affections and holy action is necessary in order to salvation. The very term “salvation” clearly implies danger, and of none can it be said that they are completely saved until they are completely delivered from danger, and certainly the Christian is not so while sin remains in him and he is left in a wicked world and exposed to the assaults of the Evil One. *“See that ye refuse not Him that speaketh: for if they escaped not who refused Him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape if we turn away from Him that speaketh from heaven”* (Heb. 12:25). Multitudes of those who came out of Egypt, crossed the Red Sea, fed on the manna and drank of the water from the smitten rock, afterward perished in the wilderness, and we are told *“Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples, and they are written for our admonition....wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall”* (1 Cor. 12:10, 11), for a holy God will no more be mocked now than He would be then.

As we have seen in an earlier paragraph 1 Pet. 1:5 places salvation in the future—as also does Rom. 13:11; 1 Tim. 4:16—unto which the saints are kept by the power of God through faith. Heaven can only be reached by continuing along the sole path that leads thither, namely, the “Narrow Way.” Those who persevere not in faith and holiness, love and obedience, will assuredly perish. Whatever temporal faith, natural love, goodly attainments, and confident assurance may appear for a while, they are a bed shorter than a man can stretch himself upon and a covering narrower than the soul can wrap itself in (Isa. 28:20). *“Many false prophets shall arise and shall deceive many, and because iniquity shall abound the love of many shall* (not merely wane or cool off, but) *wax cold. But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved”* (Matt. 24:13). All temptations to deny the Faith, to forsake Christ, to go back unto the world, to give free rein to the lusts of the flesh, must be resisted to our last breath, or our

profession will prove worthless.

5. Enablement for this perseverance is wrought in the saints by God. Their deliverance from a total and final falling away is not owing to any power or sufficiency in themselves. Though their moral agency be not impaired and though continuance in well doing be required of them, yet their enduring unto the end is not to be attributed unto their fidelity nor to the strength of the new nature which they received at regeneration. No, Christian perseverance depends wholly and entirely on the will and fidelity, the influence and energy of God, working in them both to will and to do of His good pleasure, making them perfect in every good work to do His will, working in them that which is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ (Heb. 13:21). It is God, who having begun a good work in them, will carry it on until the day of Jesus Christ (Phil. 1:6). “If the Holy Spirit were taken from the believer, and he left to himself to stand or fall, he would immediately cease to be a believer and fall totally from a state of grace” (S. Hopkins).

Freely will any renewed person subscribe to the following lines:-

“If ever it should come to pass  
That any sheep of Christ should fall away,  
My feeble, fickle soul, alas!  
Would fall a thousand times a day;  
Were not Thy love as firm as free,  
Thou soon would’st take it Lord, from me.”

6. Christian perseverance is consistent with being sanctified but in part. It is most important that this be clearly stated, lest the Lord’s people conclude they are outside the pale of the Covenant. At the new birth a holy principle or nature is imparted to them, but the old and sinful nature is not eradicated, nor is it to the slightest degree improved. Indwelling corruptions are as much opposed to God as they were before conversion, and just as active. Pray against them as he may, strive against them as he will, yet the believer is constantly overcome by them: frequently does he have to exclaim with David “*iniquities prevail against me*” (Psa. 65:3).



The experience described in Romans 7:14-25 is that of every genuine Christian. God gives no man such a measure of grace in this life as to make him sinless. *“In many things we all offend”* (James 3:2), and by sudden surprisals and under great temptations believers may fall into particular gross outward acts of sin, yet they will not become totally corrupt and sinful as the unregenerate are, nor do they sin with their whole heart. Christian sanctification then is the maintaining of holy affections and actions in the midst of native depravity and all its out-flows. Despite great discouragements their faith and grace never wholly fail. Sanctified but in part now, glorified in the future.

7. From all that has been before us it will thus be seen that perseverance can be predicated only of those who *“know the grace of God in truth”* (Col. 1:6), who experience its supernatural operations in their own souls. Not a suppositionary grace which may be held in reckless abandonment, but a spiritual grace which causes its possessor to walk cautiously. What Scripture teaches is that, there never was, never will be, and never can be such a thing as the total and final falling away of one who has really repented and trusted on Christ; that in every instance where a Divine miracle of grace has been wrought that soul shall stand when this world and all its works shall be burned up. Rightly has it been said, *“The question of the perpetuity of grace is the question of a genuine Gospel. Is grace permanent, then the Gospel is a reality. Is grace temporary, then the Gospel is a will o’ the wisp, a phantom benediction, a dream of blessedness from which one may awake, to find himself bereft of all that raptured him”* (G. S. Bishop).

#### **4. Its Marvel**

This is an aspect of our subject which has received far too little attention from those who have written and preached thereon. Amid all the dust which controversy has raised up, only too often one of the grandest wonders of Divine grace has been hidden from the sight of the theological contestants: alas, how frequently is this the case, that being so occupied with the shell we reach not the kernel. Even those who have sought to defend this truth against

the assault of Papish and Arminian antagonists did not sufficiently hold up to view the glorious miracle which it embodies. The security of the saint concerns not only the Divine veracity and faithfulness but it also exemplifies the workings of Divine power. The believer's cleaving unto the Lord, despite all hindrances and temptations to the contrary, not only manifests the efficacy of God's so-great salvation but displays the marvels of His workmanship therein. That the gates of Hell shall not prevail against the Church of Christ, that Satan is unable to destroy a single member of it, that the weakest shall be more than conqueror through Him that loved them, should fill us with admiration and adoration.

All the blessings of the Christian's life may be summed up in two eminent ones, for they include all the others of which he is the recipient from the moment of the new birth to his arrival in Heaven, namely, regeneration or instating him into life and the preservation of that life through all the difficulties and dangers of his pilgrimage to the safe conducting him unto glory. Hence it is we so often find them linked together in Scripture. Just as the work of creation at the first and then the upholding of all things by Divine power and providence are yoked together as works of like wonder (Heb. 1:2, 3) so we find regeneration and preservation joined together as the sum of the operations of grace. "*Hath He not made thee and established thee*" (Deut. 32:6); "*I have made and will bear, even I will carry and deliver you*" (Isa. 46:4). In Psalm 66:9 both are comprehended in one word "*who putteth* (margin) *thy soul in life*" and "*who holdeth thy soul in life,*" first imparting life and then sustaining it. So also in the New Testament: "*I give unto them eternal life and they shall never perish*" (John 10:28); "*begotten us again unto a living hope. . . kept by the power of God through faith*" (1 Pet. 1:3, 5): "*sanctified by God the Father and preserved in Jesus Christ*" (Jude 1).

This great marvel of Divine preservation is enlarged upon and celebrated in Psalm 66. After saying "*O bless our God, ye people, and make the voice of His praise to be heard: which holdeth our*

*soul in life, and suffereth not our feet to be moved*” (verses 8, 9) the Psalmist pointed out first, they had been proved and tried “*as silver is tried*” (verse 10), which denotes the sorest of trials (Ezek. 22:22). Second, God had brought them “*into the net*” and had “*lain affliction upon their loins*” (verse 11): that is, He had so encompassed them round about with afflictions that there was no way of escaping out of them (compare with Isa. 51:20). Third, God had caused men to “*ride over their heads*” (verse 12): that is, they were delivered to the will of cruel enemies, who treated them as slaves. Fourth, they had gone “*through fire and water*” (verse 12), which denotes the extremity of evils. Nor were these various dangers perils to their outward man only, but tryings and testings of their faith, as “*Thou, Lord, hast proved us*” (verse 10) intimates. Yet through all of them they had been sustained and preserved. God had supported their faith and upheld them under His sorest chastenings.

Having blessed God on behalf of other saints and invited his readers to do the same, the Psalmist added a personal testimony, recounting the Lord’s goodness unto himself. “*Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what He hath done for my soul*” (verse 16), which confession continues to the end of the Psalm. That testimony is not to be divorced from its context but regarded as the continuation of what he had affirmed in the preceding verses. It was as though he said, what I ask you to praise the Lord for is not something with which I have had no firsthand acquaintance but rather of that I have experienced in my own checkered history. The Lord put and held my soul in life during the many buffetings I have passed through. He did not suffer the waters to completely submerge me but kept my head above them. Give me an audience, ye fellow pilgrims, while I recount to you the wonder workings of the God of all grace with me. Let me review the whole of my wilderness journey and tell of God’s failing not to show Himself strong on my behalf: “*I cried unto Him. . . blessed be God who hath not turned away my prayer nor His mercy from me*” (verse 20).

Ah, could not each child of God emulate the Psalmist in that.

We are greatly interested and delighted when we read or hear of how different ones were brought out of darkness into God's marvellous light. We marvel at and admire the variety of the means and methods employed by Him in convicting of sin and discovering Christ to different ones. We are awed and rejoiced when we learn of how some notorious rebel was brought to the foot of the Cross. But equally interesting, equally wonderful, equally blessed is the story of each Christian's life after conversion. If the mature believer looks back at the whole of his journey and reviews all God's gracious dealings with him, what a tale he could unfold! Let him describe the strange twistings and windings of his path, all ordered by infinite Wisdom, as he now perceives. Let him tell of the tempests and tossings through which his frail craft has come and how often the Lord said to the winds and waves "be still." Let him narrate the providential help which came when he was in sore straits, the deliverances from temptation when he was almost overcome, the recoveries from backslidings, the revivings after deadness of heart, the comfortings in sorrow, the upliftings when borne down by difficulties and discouragements, the answers to prayer when things appeared hopeless, the patience which has borne with dullness, the grace with unbelief, the joys of communion with the Lord when cut off from public means of grace. What a series of miracles the Christian has experienced.

The saint is indeed a marvel of marvels: without strength yet continuing to plod along his uphill course. Think of a tree flourishing in the midst of a sandy desert, where there is neither soil nor water; imagine a house suspended in mid-air, with no visible means of support above or below; conceive of a man living week after week and year after year in a morgue, yet maintaining his vigour; suppose a lone lamb secure in the midst of hungry wolves, or a maid keeping her garments white as she ploughs her way through deep mud and mire, and in such figures you have an image of the Christian life. The new nature is kept alive between the very jaws of death. Health of soul is preserved while breathing a fetid atmosphere and surrounded by those with the most

contagious and fatal diseases. It is like a defenceless dove successfully eluding droves of hawks bent on her destruction. It is like a man subsisting on a barren wilderness where there is neither food nor drink. It is like a traveller on some icy summit, with unfathomable precipices on either side, where a false step means certain destruction. O the wonder of Christian perseverance in the face of such handicaps and obstacles.

1. This is seen in the character of those who are chosen by God. We would naturally conclude that if He determined to have a people in this world through whom He would show forth His praises, that He will select the most promising and excellent: those of strong intellectual power, those of noble birth, those of sweet disposition, those of outstanding moral character. But His ways are different from ours. He singles out the most unlikely and unworthy ones to be the vessels of mercy. Thus it was in the Old Testament era. Why were the Hebrews taken to be the most favoured of all nations? Had they a stronger natural claim than others? Assuredly not. The Egyptians were a more intelligent race, as the monuments of their industry attest to this day. The Chaldeans were more ancient, more numerous, more civilized, and albeit exerted a much greater influence on the rest of the world. Was it then because the Israelites were more spiritual, more likely to prove amenable to the Divine government? No, for ere they set foot upon Canaan it was expressly declared unto them *“Understand therefore that the Lord thy God giveth thee not this good land to possess it for thy righteousness, for thou art a stiffnecked people”* (Deut. 9:6).

It is the same thing in the New Testament dispensation. *“For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise, and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, and things which are not to bring to nought things that are”* (1 Cor. 1:26-28). How remarkable is this: the ones chosen to successfully resist Satan,

overcome the world, persevere in the difficult path of faith and obedience and finally win through to Heaven, are the feeble, the weak, the base, the despised, and the mere nobodies. This has ever presented a stumblingblock to the proud Pharisee: *“have any of the rulers believed on Him?”* (John 7:48). That the priests and scribes be passed by and publicans and harlots called to feast with Christ, that heavenly things should be hidden from the wise and prudent and revealed to babes, evokes the sneer of the learned *“Christianity is only suited to old women and children.”* And why is this God’s way? *“That no flesh should glory in His presence”* (1 Cor. 1:29), that the crown of honour should be placed on the head of Him who alone is entitled to wear it, that we may learn the marvel of perseverance is the result of sovereign and miraculous grace.

2. This is seen in the fewness of them. There is but *“a remnant according to the election of grace”* (Rom. 11:5) even among those who bear the name of the Lord, and in comparison with the hundreds of millions in heathendom who worship false gods and the vast multitudes in Christendom who make no profession at all, the real people of God constitute such an insignificant handful as to be almost lost to view. One had naturally thought that if the Lord purposed to have a people on earth who should glorify His name that they would be conspicuous in size, commanding attention and respect. Is it not a maxim of worldly wisdom that *“there is strength in numbers”* and did not Napoleon give expression thereto in his satirical dictum *“God is always on the side of the biggest battalions?”* Ah, but here too God’s thoughts and ways are the very opposite of the world’s, for His strength is *“made perfect in weakness”* (2 Cor. 12:9) and the things which are highly esteemed among men are *“abomination in the sight of God”* (Luke 16:15). Turn, my reader, to Judges 7:2 and ponder anew the lesson Jehovah taught Gideon when He said, *“The people that are with thee are too many for Me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel vaunt themselves!”*

Not only have the Lord’s people always been in the minority but they have never included more than a fractional percentage of

earth's population. Only eight were delivered from the flood. From the days of Noah unto Moses—a period of roughly eight and a half centuries—we may count upon our fingers those recorded in Holy Writ who gave evidence of spiritual life. It requires no courage or resolution to follow the tide of popular opinion, for one is likely to encounter less opposition when he is on the side of the majority. What a miracle that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob preserved their piety in Canaan when surrounded by the heathen! The principle which we are now engaged in illustrating was emphasized by Moses when he said unto Israel *“The Lord did not set His love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye are the fewest of all people”* (Deut 7:7). It is the same in this New Testament dispensation. Near the close of Paul's life Christians were referred to as a sect *“everywhere spoken against”* (Acts 28:22). The Lord Jesus declared that His flock was a *“little”* one (Luke 12:32), which increases the wonder of its survival, and though in recent years the membership of the “churches” swelled to huge proportions, more and more it is now becoming apparent that with rare exceptions they were but nominal professors and that only a *“few”* tread that Way which leadeth unto Life (Matt. 7:14).

3. This is seen in God's leaving them in this world. We might well suppose that since the Father hath set His heart upon them He would take them Home as soon as they are brought from death unto life. Instead they are left down here, most of them for many years, in a hostile country in the Enemy's territory, for *“the whole world lieth in the Wicked one”* (1 John 5:19). And why? that they may have opportunity to manifest their love for Him, that despite ceaseless opposition and innumerable temptations to cast off their allegiance they will, by His grace, remain faithful unto death. We marvel that Noah was preserved in the ark, when the devastating flood without swept away the entire human race from the earth and when he was surrounded by all manner of wild beasts within. Why was he not torn to pieces by the lions and tigers? or poisoned by the stench from the dung of all the animals? Though he remained there no less than a year, yet at the end thereof he and all

his household stepped forth alive and well. Not less wonderful is the survival of the Christian in a world where there is nothing to help spiritually but everything to the contrary.

The believer may be compared to an individual who has thrown off allegiance to his king, has disowned his country, and refuses obedience to its laws, yet continues to dwell in the land he has renounced and hard by the sovereign he has forsworn. The grace of God has called us out of the world, but the providence of God has sent us into the world. We may therefore expect nothing but hatred and hostility from it. The world will never forgive the act by which we broke from its thralldom, renounced its sway, relinquished its pleasures and resigned its friendship. Nor can it look with complacency upon the godly, self-denying and unworldly life of the Christian, which is a constant rebuke of its own carnality and folly. First it will veil its opposition and conceal its malignity beneath smiles and flattery, seeking to win back the one it has lost. But when that effort proves unavailing it changes its course and with venomous tongue, tireless zeal and devilish tactics seeks by detraction and falsehood to wound and injure the people of God. We marvel at the three Hebrews not being destroyed in Babylon's fiery furnace, but it is not less a miracle for a believer to persevere in the path of holiness amid the contagious sinfulness, seductive allurements and relentless persecutions of an evil world.

4. This is seen in the old nature being left in the saint. Since God is pleased to leave His people in this howling wilderness for a season, where everything seems to be dead against them, surely He will rid them of that which is most of all calculated to lead to their fatal undoing. If He requires them to be "*holy in all manner of conversation*" (1 Pet. 1:15), will He not purge them of all inward corruptions? If the sons of God are to be "*without rebuke in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation,*" among whom they are to "*shine as lights in the world*" (Phil. 2:15), will He not remove all darkness from their understanding? And again we are made to realize how worthless is all human reasoning upon spiritual matters. Indwelling sin remains in the believer: the flesh



is neither eradicated nor transformed. But how can we expect those with a sink of iniquity still within them to maintain a godly walk? Ah, therein we are brought to see again the marvel of the saint's perseverance. If a lorry has to pass down a street where the buildings on either side are burning fiercely, would it not greatly augment the wonder of its journeying through successfully when we learned that the lorry was laden with barrels of gunpowder and dynamite?

This is precisely the case of the believer: there is that in him which is responsive to the evil without him. The world and his heart are in a confederacy against the good of his soul, so that he can neither eat nor drink, work nor sleep in safety because of enemies without and treacherous lusts within. For a holy angel to dwell here would involve him in no danger, for in freedom from all inward corruptions there would be nothing in him to which the allurements of the world could appeal. But the Christian has a stack of dry tinder ready to ignite as soon as the sparks of temptation alight thereon. O the policy and power, the strength and prevalency, the nearness and treachery of indwelling sin. It is something which cleaves to all the faculties: not only in us but part and parcel of us. It dwells there (Rom. 7:17) ever seeking our overthrow. Such is our native depravity that it is capable of transmuting blessings into cursings, making things lawful into snares and entangling us with everything we meet with. Ah, my reader, if it was a miracle when Elisha caused iron to swim (2 Kings 2), not less so is it when our affections are set upon things above and our minds stayed on Jehovah.

5. This is seen in grace's dwelling place. In what uncongenial and inimical surroundings is the new nature set—in the depraved soul of a fallen creature. Not only is there nothing in man capable of nourishing the principle of holiness but everything which is directly opposed thereto: "*the flesh lusteth against the spirit*" (Gal. 5:17). Birds do not fly beneath the waves nor will fish live on dry ground because they are out of their native element: then what a wonder it is for grace to be preserved and grow in a heart which by nature is desperately wicked. Would

trees grow if their seeds were planted in salt: why then should communicated grace take root and bring forth the fruit of the Spirit when planted in the midst of corruption? That is truly a miracle of Divine horticulture: a miracle which is far too little attended unto and admired. Well may each believer exclaim "*I am a wonder to many*" (Psa. 71:7) not failing to add "*but Thou art my refuge.*" The Christian is a mystery to himself, an enigma to the unregenerate, who cannot understand his denying himself the things they delight in and finding pleasure in what they loath: but he is a "wonder," a prodigy of grace, unto his brethren and sisters in Christ.

The miracle of the survival of the principle of grace in a human soul will be the more manifest if we contrast the present case of the believer with that of Adam in the day of this pristine purity. Grace was connatural with our first parents when their Maker pronounced them "very good;" if then they so quickly lost their grace when it was placed in a pure soil, what a wonder it is that it should be preserved in a heart which is essentially evil! When the Son of God became incarnate Herod moved the whole country in a determined attempt to slay Him: and when Christ comes into the heart the whole soul rises up in opposition against Him. The carnal mind, the lusts of the flesh, an intractable will, are all antagonistic to every breathing after holiness. The preservation of grace in the saint is more remarkable than for one to succeed in carrying an unprotected but lighted candle across an open moor in a boisterous wind. Yea, as the Puritans were wont to say, it is as though a fire were kept burning year after year in the midst of the ocean. Grace is not only preserved but maintains its purity amid indwelling sin: as gold cannot be altered in its nature by the dross or transmuted into the rubbish amid which it lies, neither can the new nature be defiled by the mass of corruption wherein it dwells.

6. This is seen in their exposure to Satan's attacks. If there were no Devil at all it would be a miracle that any believer should persevere in the path of obedience while living in such a world as this. Surrounded as he is by the ungodly, ever seeking to allure him into their own sinful ways, carrying within him lusts which

are in full accord with the evil around him, it is a wonder of wonders that he should remain steadfast. But over and above that, he is called upon to resist the arch-enemy of God, the mightiest of all His creatures, who is filled with enmity against him and bent upon his destruction. We are plainly warned *“your adversary the Devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about seeking whom he may devour”* (1 Pet. 5:8): how then shall feeble lambs hope to successfully resist him! We are told that when the woman brought forth the *“man-child who was to rule all nations”* that, the red dragon *“stood before the woman which was ready to be delivered for to devour her child”* (Rev. 12:4). As the dragon acted thus toward the Head Himself so does he still seek to vent his malice upon the members of His mystical body.

Who is capable of estimating the power of Satan and the hosts of evil spirits he commands. And who can adequately describe the weakness and frailty of those called upon to withstand his attacks. If Adam in paradise with no lust within to entice and no world under the curse all around him, fell under the very first assault of Satan upon him, who are we to engage him in conflict. Fallen man could as well move a mountain with his finger as overcome the Prince of this world. Nevertheless of renewed men it is written *“For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against wicked spirits in the heavenlies”* (Eph. 6:12). Satan with all his wisdom, his power, his myrmidons are marshalled and exerted in tremendous opposition to the interests of the children of God, as the histories of Job, of David (1 Chron. 21:1), of Joshua, (Zech. 3:1), of Peter (Luke 22:31), and of Paul (1 Thess. 2:15) clearly show. We have often marvelled at the deliverance of Daniel while spending a night in the lions’ den, no less a miracle is the Christian’s preservation from the continuous attacks of Satan and all his demons. *“They overcame Him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony”* (Rev. 12:11).

7. This is seen in the renunciations they are required to make. *“If any come to Me and hate not his father and mother, and wife*

*and children, and brethren and sisters, yea and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. And whosoever doth not bear his cross and come after Me, he cannot be My disciple. So likewise whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be My disciple*” Who can be expected to accept Christian discipleship on such exacting terms as these! No wonder that man of all shades of theological opinion have invented terms which are easier and pleasanter to the flesh, yet such are only blind leaders of the blind. Christ will receive none who refuse His yoke. God will not own as His people those who refuse to give Him their hearts. Sin must be hated, lusts must be mortified, the world must be renounced. A Christian is one who repudiates his own wisdom, strength and righteousness. A Christian is one who holds himself and all that he hath at the disposal of the Lord. As Abram at the call of God turned his back on the old manner of life, so those who are his believing children are made willing to sacrifice all their temporal interests, counting not their lives dear unto themselves. What a marvel is this that grace enables its possessor to pluck out right eyes and cut off right hands, yea which empowers timid women and children to go to the stake rather than apostatize.

8. This is seen in the Way they are required to walk in. It is a “narrow” way, for it is shut in on either side by the Divine commandments, which forbid all that is contrary to the Divine will. It is the way of “holiness,” without which no man shall see the Lord. It is the way of obedience, of complete and continuous subjection to the Lord, wherein my own will is set aside. It is a difficult way, hard to find and harder still to traverse, for the whole of it is uphill. It is a lonely way, for there are but few upon it. It is therefore a way which is entirely contrary to flesh and blood, which presents no attraction to fallen human nature. Yet it is the only way which leadeth unto life. That narrow way of self-abnegation is the one which Christ trod and sufficient for the disciple to be as his Master. He has left us an example that we should follow His steps, so that there is no following of Christ without walking in the way He went, and that way was one of sacrifice, of bearing reproach, of enduring suffering. “*Whosoever*

*will save his life (for himself) shall lose it, and whosoever will lose his life for My sake shall find it*" (Matt. 16:25). No cross, no crown. What a marvel it is for any sinful creature to voluntarily choose such a path, to accept the cross as the dominant principle of his life.

9. This is seen in the frailty of the Christian. We would naturally think that since God requires His people to overcome such formidable obstacles, perform such difficult tasks and wrestle with such enemies, He would make them strong and powerful. Surely if they are to maintain their piety in a world like this, discharge duties which are contrary to flesh and blood, resist the Devil and all his hosts, the Lord will make each of His saints as mighty spiritually as Samson was physically. If one of them shall chase a thousand and two of them put ten thousand to flight must it not be because of their superior might. How shall they endure opposition, overcome temptations, be fruitful unto every good work unless they be endued with abundant grace. But here again the Lord's thoughts are the very opposite of ours. His people are so frail and helpless in themselves that He declares "*without Me ye can do nothing*" and sooner or later each of them is made to realize this for himself. Apart from the Lord the believer is as weak as water. Power for the conflict lies not in himself, but in Another: "*be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might*" (Eph. 6:10). Peter thought he was strong enough in himself to overcome temptation, but he soon discovered that though the spirit was willing the flesh was weak.

But is there not such a thing as growing in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord? Certainly there is, but such progress is of a very different nature from what many imagine. Growth in grace is a deepening realization of where our strength, our wisdom, the supply for every need is to be found. Growing in grace is not an increasing self-sufficiency but an increasing dependency upon God. Those who are spiritually the strongest are they who know most of their own weakness. It is the empty vessel which God fills. "*He giveth power to the faint, and to them that have no might (of their own) He increaseth strength*" (Isa. 40:29). Surely none of

us can hope to attain a higher measure than that of the most favoured of the apostles: yet he acknowledged "*when lam weak then am I strong*" (2 Cor. 12:10). Here then is truly a miracle: that one who is compassed with infirmity, who is not sufficient of himself to think any thing as of himself (2 Cor. 3:5)—and therefore still less able to do anything good—who has "no might" of his own, who is utterly helpless in himself, should nevertheless fight a good fight, finish the course and keep the faith. "*God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty.*"

10. This is seen in the fruits which the Christian bears. We have already called attention to the survival of the principle of grace despite the uncongenial soil in which it is placed and the foul atmosphere of this world where it grows, and equally wonderful is that which issues from it. This line of thought might be extended considerably, but space requires us to abbreviate. What a marvel that the Christian's faith should be preserved amid so many trials and buffetings, betrayals by false brethren, and even the hidings of God's face: that notwithstanding the most painful crosses and losses it affirms "yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil." Not only have God's saints remained steadfast under persecution, but after being "beaten" they rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for the "name of Jesus" (Acts 5:40, 41), while others "*took joyfully the spoiling of their goods*" (Heb. 10:34). What a marvellous fruit is this, to "*glory in tribulation*" (Rom. 5:3), to "*sing praise unto God*" (Acts 16:25) while lying in a dungeon with backs bleeding. Such fruits are not the products of nature. To hope against hope (Rom. 4:18), to acknowledge "*it is good for me that I have been afflicted*" (Psa. 119:71), to cry "*Lord, lay not this sin to their charge*" (Acts 7:60) while being stoned to death, are the fruits of Divine grace.

11. This is seen in their submission under and triumph of faith over the severest chastisements. It is natural to murmur when everything appears to go wrong and the face of Providence wears a dark frown, but it is supernatural to meekly submit and say "the

will of the Lord be done.” When “fire from the Lord” went out and devoured Nadab and Abihu because of their presumptuous conduct, so far from their father making an angry outburst at the severity of their punishment we are told that he “*held his peace*” (Lev. 10:3). When the awful tidings was broken to the aged Eli that both of his wayward sons were to be smitten by Divine judgment on the same day, he quietly acquiesced saying “*It is the Lord: let Him do what seemeth Him good*” (1 Sam. 3:18). When Job’s sons and daughters were suddenly stricken with death and his flocks and herds carried away by thieves, he exclaimed “*The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord*” (1:21), and when his own body was smitten with “sore boils from the sole of his foot unto his crown,” so far from losing all confidence in God and apostatizing he declared “*though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him*” (Job 13:15).

12. This is seen in their perseverance in piety when deprived of all public means of grace. When the under-shepherds are taken away what shall the poor sheep do? When corporate testimony breaks down what will become of the individual? When Zion is made desolate and the Lord’s people are carried captives into a strange land, will they not pine away? True this is an exceptional state of affairs, yet at various stages of history it has pleased God to deprive numbers of His people of all the external means of grace and preserve them as isolated units. It was thus at a very early stage. Behold Abraham, the father of the faithful, dwelling alone amid the heathen, yet maintaining communion with the Lord. Behold Daniel in Babylon, in the face of deadly peril, preserving his piety. Some of us used to sing as children “Dare to be a Daniel, dare to stand alone, dare to have a purpose true, and dare to make it known.” Is not our own lot cast in a day when not a few of the scattered children of God have to lament “*I am as a sparrow alone upon the housetop*” (Psa.102:7)! Even so, as God miraculously sustained Elijah in the solitudes of Cherith so He will preserve each of them.

13. This is seen in their deliverance from apostasy. What numbers have been fatally deceived by Romanism. What

multitudes of the outer-court worshippers have been stumbled by the multiplication of sects in Protestantism, each claiming to take the Scriptures for their guide yet often differing on the most fundamental truths. What crowds have been attracted by the false prophets and heretical teachers, especially in America, during the past century. But though the real children of God may have been bewildered yet it drove them to search His Word more closely for themselves, for they know not the voice of strangers (John 10:5). In our own day, because iniquity or lawlessness abounds the love of many has waxed cold and tens of thousands who a little time ago appeared to “run well” have gone right back into the world. Yet there is still a remnant who cleave unto the Lord, and the very fewness of their numbers emphasizes the marvel of their preservation. It is a miracle of grace that any “hold fast the confidence and rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end,” never more so than in this dark day.

What an amazing thing it was that Jonah should be cast overboard into the sea, without a lifebelt and with no boat to rescue him, and yet that he was not drowned. Still more remarkable that he should be swallowed by a whale and remain alive in its belly for three days and nights. Most wonderful of all that the whale disgorged the prophet not in the ocean, but vomited him out on the land. So amazing is this that it has been made the favourite subject of jest by infidels. Yet it presents no difficulty to the Christian, who knows that “with God all things are possible.” We not only believe the authenticity of this miracle but have long been convinced it is a designed type not only of the resurrection of the Redeemer but of the preservation of the redeemed. The case of Jonah not only adumbrates a backsliding believer, but an extreme case of backsliding at that: showing that when a saint yields to self-will and forsakes the way of obedience, though he will be severely chastened yet the arm of the Lord will reach after and restore him to the paths of righteousness.

14. This is seen in God’s manifold workings in and for them. This necessarily follows from all that has been said under the preceding heads. The perseverance of saints must be the



consequence of the Divine preservation of them: since believers have no spiritual wisdom and no spiritual strength of their own, God must work in them both to will and to do of His good pleasure. His preventing grace: as the martyr observed a murderer on his way to the gallows he exclaimed “there goes John Bradford but for the grace of God.” From how many temptations and sins on which their hearts were set are Christians delivered, as David from slaying Nabal. Protecting grace: “*mercy shall compass him about*” as a shield (Psa. 32:10). Quickening grace, whereby the principle of holiness is enlivened: “*the inward man is renewed day by day*” (2 Cor. 4:16). Confirming grace, whereby we are kept from being tossed to and fro: “*Now He which stablisheth us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, is God*” (2 Cor. 1:21 and compare with 2 Thess. 2:17). Fructifying grace: “*From Me is thy fruit found*” (Hos. 14:8). Maturing grace: “*make you perfect in every good work to do His will*” (Heb. 13:22). These and other operations of Divine grace are all summed up in that acknowledgement “*Thou also hast wrought all our works in us*” (Isa. 26:12) to which every saint freely ascribes and which alone explains the marvel of his perseverance.

The second of seven booklets.

