

PERSEVERANCE WITHOUT PRESUMPTION NO. 1056

A SERMON
DELIVERED ON THURSDAY EVENING, MARCH 7, 1872,
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

*“I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.”
John 10:28.*

THOSE of you who were present last Thursday evening will remember that I spoke then upon the necessity of “holding fast the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end” [Sermon #1042, “A PERSUASIVE TO STEADFASTNESS”], and I showed you that it is only by continuing in the faith with which we began that we are proven to be partakers of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, let us speak as plainly as we may, we are always liable to be misunderstood. The most eager hearer may easily confound his thoughts with our words, and so attribute notions to us that spring up spontaneously in his own mind. Thus, I met this week with an earnest anxious inquirer who thought I had meant that though a man should be a believer in Jesus Christ, yet after all he might perish. I dare say some expressions I used led him to think so. Had he been long a hearer here, he would not have imagined that I could give utterance to such a statement, for all of you who hear me continually know that, if there is one doctrine I have preached more than another, it is the doctrine of the perseverance of the Saints even to the end. What I intended to say—and I do not wonder that he did not quite understand me—was this, that the believer must always be a believer, having begun in that confidence, he must continue in that confidence, the alternative would be that he draws back unto perdition, in which case he would perish as an unbeliever, and then the inference would be that the faith he seemed to have was a fiction, that the confidence he seemed to enjoy was a bubble, that he really never did believe to the saving of his soul.

This is a fair argument, based on the operation of the Spirit of God, it is in no sense a condition dependent on the good behavior of men. The one way by which a soul is saved is by that soul’s abiding in Christ, if it did not abide in Christ, it would be cast forth as a branch and be withered. But then, we know that they who are grafted into Christ will abide in Christ. We reason in the manner of the apostle Paul who, when he had spoken of the danger that some were in that, having begun well, they should end badly—after being enlightened and tasting the good Word of God and the powers of the world to come, they should turn aside, he adds, “But beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak.” The question, however, having been mooted, it occurs to me that it may not be unprofitable if I state briefly—not by way of controversy, but simply for the sake of instruction—the doctrine of the security of the believer in Christ, the certainty of the believer’s perseverance even to the end, and of his entrance into eternal rest. This text at once suggests itself to me—“I give unto my sheep eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand.”

The three clauses of this sentence represent to us three gracious securities. Here is *a divine gift*—“I give unto them eternal life,” *a divine promise*, far-reaching and wide—“they shall never perish,” and *a divine holdfast*—“neither shall any pluck them out of my hand.”

I. First, then, observe THE DIVINE GIFT—“I give unto them eternal life.”

Eternal life comes to every man who has it as a matter of gift. He did not possess it when he first entered into the world. He was born of the first Adam, and born to die. He did not educe it or evolve it

from himself by some mysterious processes. It is not a home growth, a product of the soil of humanity, it is a gift.

Nor is eternal life bestowed as a reward for service done. It could not be, for it is a pre-requisite to the doing of service. The term “gift” shuts out all idea of debt. If it be of gift, or of grace, then it is no more of debt or of reward. Wherever eternal life is implanted in any person’s soul, it is the free gift of the Lord Jesus Christ, not deserved but bestowed on the unworthy. Hence we see no reason why it should be revoked from the person who has received it. For, suppose there are certain disqualifications in the man who has participated in the gift, yet they cannot otherwise operate to his prejudice in enjoying the boon than they would have operated to his ever receiving it, if they had been taken into account at all.

The thing does not come to him because of any worthiness in him, but comes as a gratuity. There is no reason why it should not continue, since it has come into existence, or why the present tense, as we have it here, should not always be a present fact. “I give”—I continue to give—“to them eternal life.” That cannot be affected by an unworthiness subsequently discovered, because God knows the end from the beginning. When He bestowed eternal life upon the man who has it, He knew right well every imperfection and failing that would occur in that man. These demerits, had they been reasons at all, would have been a cause for the not giving, rather than for giving, and then taking away again.

But it is inconsistent with the gifts of God for them ever to be disannulled. We have it laid down as a rule of the kingdom of which there is no violation, that “the gifts and calling of God are without repentance.” He does not rescind in that which He has conferred of His own good will. It is not according to the royal nature of the Lord our God to bestow a gift of grace upon a soul, and then afterwards to withdraw it—to lift up a man from his natural degradation and set him among princes by endowing him with a life eternal, and then to cast him down from his high estate by dis-endowing him of all the infinite benefits He has conferred.

The very language I am using is contradictory enough of itself to refute the suggestion. To give eternal life is to give a life beyond the contingencies of this present mortal existence. “Forever” is stamped on the charter. To take it away were not consistent with the royal bounty of the King of kings, even if it were possible that such a thing could be. “I give unto them eternal life.” If He gives then, He gives with the sovereignty and generosity of a king, He gives permanently, on an enduring tenure, He gives so that He will not revoke the grant. He gives and it is theirs—it shall be theirs by divine charter forever and ever.

We may infer the certain safety of the believer, not only from the fact that this life is an absolute gift, and will not therefore be withdrawn, but from the nature of the gift, it being eternal life. “I give unto my sheep eternal life.” “Yes, but,” says somebody, “They lose it.” Then they cannot have had eternal life. It is a solecism in terms to say that a man has eternal life and yet perishes. Can death befall the immortal, or change affect the immutable, or decay corrode the imperishable? How can life be eternal if it comes to an end? How can it be possible that one shall have eternal life and yet die with sudden shock, or drop as feeble nature fails of all her functions? No! eternity is not to be measured by weeks or months or years. When Christ says eternal, He means eternal, and if I have received the gift of eternal life, it is not possible for me to sin so as to lose that spiritual life by any means whatever. “It is *eternal* life.”

We may reasonably expect the believer to hold on to the end, because the life which God has implanted within him is of that nature that it must continue to exist, must conquer all difficulties, must ripen, must perfect, must cast out sin from him, and must bring him to eternal glory. When Christ spoke by the well to the Samaritan woman, he said, “Whosoever drinks of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.” This cannot mean a transient draught that would slake the thirst for an hour or two, but it must imply such a partaking as changes a man’s actual constitution and his destiny, and become in him a never-failing wellspring. For the life which God implants in believers by regeneration is not like the life which we now possess by generation. This mortal life does pass away. It is connected with flesh

and all flesh is like grass, it withers. “That which is born of the flesh is flesh.” Not so the new life that is born of the Spirit and it is Spirit, and Spirit is not capable of destruction, it shall continue and last on world without end. The eternal life within every man who has it was begotten in him “not of the will of man, nor of flesh, nor of blood, but of God” Himself. Thanks be unto the Father, for it is of Him that we are “begotten again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.”

Tracing this implanted life to its germ, we are said to be “born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible by the word of God which lives and abides forever.” It is a holy seed. It cannot sin, for it is born of God. We are made partakers of the divine nature, and the new life within us is a divine life. It is the life of God within the soul of man. We become the twice-born, with a Life that can no more die than the life of God Himself, for it is, in fact, a spark from that great central sun, it is a new well in the soul which draws its supplies from the deep that lies under, from the inexhaustible fountain of the fullness of God. This, then, is a second reason for believing in the security and final perseverance of the believer. He has a gift from Christ, and Christ will not withdraw His gift, he has a life which is in itself immortal and eternal.

But further, this life within the believer which is a gift from Christ, is always in connection with Christ. We live because we are one with Christ, as the branch sucks its sap from the vine, so do we continue to derive our life’s blood, our life’s supplies from Christ Himself. The union between the believer and Christ is vital and to the fullest degree assuring. For what does our Lord say of it?—“Because I live, you shall live also.”

It is not a partnership which may be dissolved, or a connection which may be severed, but it is a necessity that no accident can interfere with, it is a fixed law of being—“*because* I live, you shall live also.” That the union between Christ and His people is indissoluble appears obvious from the figures which are used to illustrate it. To such an overwhelming extent do they denote that there can be no separation, that we may well say, “Who shall separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord?” Are we not married unto Christ? What metaphor could be more expressive? To estimate its value you must take the divine account of the relationship. For although weddings are secularized by our Acts of Parliament, and nuptial ties are looked upon as civil contracts, God has pronounced man and wife to be one flesh, yea, in the sight of heaven, he that is joined to a harlot is one body.

If, then, in ordinary marriage divorce is possible, and alas, too common, when you come to Scripture, you find it written that He hates putting away. He has said, “I will betroth you unto me forever, I have betrothed you unto myself in righteousness and in faithfulness, and you shall know the Lord.” The marriage between our souls and Christ can never be dissolved. It were blasphemy to suppose that Christ should appeal for a divorce, or that there should be a proclamation made that He has put away that spouse whom He chose of old, for whom He has prepared the great wedding feast, and for whose eternal bliss He has gone to glory to prepare a place. No, we cannot imagine such espousals leading to a separation.

Again, are we not members of His body? Shall Christ be dismembered? shall He every now and then be losing one limb or another? Can you suppose that Christ is maimed? I scarcely like to think, much less to express the thought, of here or there an eye, or a foot, or an ear wanting to complete the perfection of His mystic person. No! it shall not be. Members of the body of Christ shall be so vitally quickened by the heart, and by Himself the head, that they shall continue to live, *because* He lives. When a man stands in water, the flood might naturally have power to drown him, but as long as his head remains above water, the stream cannot possibly drown his feet or his hands, and because Christ, the head, cannot die, cannot be destroyed, all the floods that shall come upon the members of His body shall not—*cannot*—destroy them.

Moreover, the life of the believer is constantly sustained by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. It is a matter of fact under the Gospel dispensation that not only is the Holy Ghost *with* believers but He is *in* believers. He dwells in them, He makes them His temple. The life, as we have shown you, is *sui generis*, of its own kind, immortal, it is immortal because united with an undying Christ, but it is also immortal

because supported by a Divine Spirit who cannot be overcome, who has power to meet all the mischief of false and evil spirits that aim at our destruction, and from day to day adds fresh fuel to the eternal flame of the believer's life within. Were it not for the Holy Spirit's abiding with us, we might be the subjects of some doubt, but as long as He continues to abide with us forever, we will not fear.

The first consolation that we thus draw from the text is that we are the recipients of a divine gift—"I give unto my sheep eternal life."

II. Now, secondly, we have added to this, A DIVINE PROMISE—"They shall never perish."

I am very thankful for this word because there have been some who have tried to do away with the force of the entire passage—"neither shall any pluck them out of my hand." "No," they have said, "but they may slip between the fingers, and though they cannot be plucked out, yet they may go out on their own accord," but here is a short sentence that puts all such thoughts out of the question—"they shall never perish"—in His hands or out of His hands, under any supposition whatever—"They shall never perish."

Observe that there is no restriction here, it includes all time. "They shall *never* perish." Are they young believers, their passions strong, their judgments weak? have they little knowledge, small experience, and tender faith? May they not die while yet they are lambs, and perish while they are so feeble? "They shall never perish." But, in middle life, when men too often lose the freshness of early grace, when the love of their espousals may perhaps have lost its power, may they not get worldly? May they not, somehow or other, then be led aside? "They shall never perish." "They shall never perish."

Perish they would, could worldliness destroy them, perish they would could evil utterly and entirely get the mastery of grace, but it shall not. "They shall never perish." But, may they not grow older, and yet not wiser? May they not be surprised by temptation, as so many have been in times when they have become carnally secure, because they thought their experience had made them strong? "They shall never perish"—neither if they are beginners, nor if they have all but finished their course. "They shall never perish." It shuts out all time—all reference to time, by taking the whole range of possible periods into the one word, "never." "They shall *never* perish."

No less does the sweep of the sentence include all contingencies. "They shall never perish." What, not if they are severely tempted? "They shall never perish." Not if they backslide? They shall be restored again. "They shall never perish." But, what if they continue in backsliding and die so? Ah, that they shall not do. "They shall never perish." You must not suppose that which never can occur. "They shall never perish." They shall never get into such a condition that they shall be utterly without grace, they shall never be in such a state of heart that sin shall have dominion over them—utter and entire dominion. It may come in, it may seem for a time to get the mastery, but sin shall never have dominion over them that they shall perish before the Lord. "They shall never perish."

It takes in all the flock. "They shall never perish"—that is, not one of His sheep. This is not the distinctive privilege of a few, but the common mercy of them all, none of them—not one of them—shall ever perish. If you, believer in Christ, are the most obscure of all the family, you shall never perish. If you have indeed received the inner life and true grace be in your soul, though no one knows your name, and no one lends you a helping hand, though, as a solitary pilgrim you should walk the heavenly road all alone, weak and feeble, and trembling all the way, yet you shall never perish. The promise is not to some, but to all the believing sheep of Christ! "They shall never perish."

And, beloved, it may greatly strengthen our faith and sweetly revive our spirits, if we consider how this doctrine harmonizes with other doctrines which are most surely believed among us. Christ's sheep were of old chosen of God unto salvation. But if they perished, the election of God would be frustrated. From the foundation of the world He appointed them that they should bring forth fruit unto holiness, even unto the end, and if they do not, how can His will be done on earth as it is in heaven? They were a people set apart unto Himself, that they might honor Him by good works, did they fail of this, did they fall from their blest estate, did they utterly perish, the Father's Counsel would be foiled, and that cannot be. The purpose of God secures their final perseverance. "They shall never perish."

We may rest assured that they shall be preserved because of the effectual redemption which Christ has wrought out for them. We believe, beloved, in this place (though the doctrine is very much disparaged nowadays), in an actual and literal substitutionary sacrifice.

We believe that Jesus died for His people, and—

*“Bore, that they might never bear
The Father’s righteous ire.”*

Now, if He paid their debts, they have no debts to discharge. If He has borne their punishment, they have no penalty to suffer. If He stood in their stead, justice as well as grace—justice and grace together—demand that they should be saved. Jesus Christ has offered for them atonement, and “who is he that condemns?” “It is Christ that died, yea, rather that has risen again.” “If when we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.” If He died to bear our guilt, much more, the atonement being completed, shall we enter into the fullness of rest.

If He would not lose us, viewing us as unredeemed, but came and paid the price, much less will He lose us now that He has redeemed us unto God by His blood out of every nation and people and kindred and tongue. He laid down His life for His sheep. He loved the church, and gave Himself for it, that He might present it unto Himself a glorious church, and He will effect the purpose for which He has already ventured so much, He will surely claim and as surely receive at the hand of justice the salvation of those for whom He was a vicarious victim.

Furthermore, dear friends, he who believes in Christ is justified from all things from which he could not be justified by the law of Moses. Is it according to the manner of man first to justify and afterwards to condemn? Certainly not, but if it were it is not according to the supreme equity of the Most High God. Has He pronounced a man just, just that man is. When He has declared the man’s transgressions forgiven, shall they be again reckoned to him?—again laid to his door? Is it not said that He has put away our sins like a cloud, and will He gather the cloud of yesterday again? Has He not said He has cast our sins into the depths of the sea? Shall that which JEHOVAH Himself has consigned to the oblivious ocean be washed up again as though He had only committed it to the shallows?

As far as the East is from the West, so far has He removed our transgressions from us. Our East and West are wide enough apart, but what must God’s East and West be when He looks through infinite space? He has removed those sins so far from us, that the swiftest-footed devil could not bring them back again though he had a whole eternity to perform the feat. He has put them away forever. Yea, hear what is said of the Messiah—“He has finished transgression, made an end of sin, and brought in everlasting righteousness.” If it is finished, it is finished, and if He has made an end of it, where is it? Where is it? “If it be searched for it shall not be found”—yea, it shall not be, says the Lord.

O beloved, how then shall the man who believes in Christ be condemned—condemned for the sin that has been pardoned? How shall he be cast into hell? For what? For offenses that have been borne by the Savior? How shall he be condemned whom God has justified? Give no countenance to the thought. Let nor fear nor fancy induce you to lend an ear to the suggestion. The sentence of remission once passed upon a man stands irrevocable. “It is God that justifies; who is he that condemns.”

In the believer, moreover, there is a work of God begun, which He has engaged to complete. It has never been said of God that He began to build and was not able to finish. “We are persuaded that he which has begun a good work in you will carry it on and perfect it to the day of Christ.” It has not been according to JEHOVAH’S custom to leave unfinished His works, why should He leave them unfinished? Is there a want of power? Inconceivable. Is there a want of will? We cannot imagine it, for if His will has changed, there must be some reason for the change. And if it be so, is God wiser than He was? Has he altered His plan because He has found out some error in it? If not, if infinite wisdom led Him to put His hand to it, infinite wisdom will keep His hand to the work—

*“The work which wisdom undertakes,
Eternal mercy ne’er forsakes.”*

O beloved, the very beginning of the work from God augurs that the work will be fully carried out.

The doctrine of adoption supplies us with yet another argument for our safety. Every man who is saved, justified, forgiven, is also adopted into the family of God. And do you think that God shifts and changes His children who are called by His own name? Do you imagine such a thing credible? Does it sound like a fact? Are you your Father’s child today, and somebody else’s child tomorrow? Is not the absurdity too obvious to need refutation? Nay, I know not whence could have come so whimsical a thought as that we should be children of God today, and by and by children of the devil, changing thus the blessed paternity which God Himself claims as to all His people.

“But, we may play the prodigal,” says one. Yes, I answer, and we may be brought back again after we have gone astray as the prodigal was. Besides, the prodigal was still a son, even when at the swine trough, and when he had wasted all his substance in riotous living, he was still beloved of the father. And because he was a son he came back again with weeping and bitterness of spirit, and found peace and pardon. Had he been no son, he might like others have spent his living with harlots, and there had been no saying, “I will arise and go unto my father,” but grace operated on his heart, he was quickened mysteriously, and he said, “I must leave this life of poverty and sin and go back to my father’s house again.” And if God’s child shall go astray, as it is possible (only God grant you and I never may), yet there is a voice that says, “Return, return you backsliding Israel. I am married unto you, says the Lord.”

Adoption is surely a grand proof that the Lord’s people shall be kept and preserved, that there shall be an unbroken family of God in heaven. He shall not have to lament that His own dear sons and daughters, begotten by His grace, have utterly perished. Jesus *shall* say, “Here am I and the children you have given me.”

III. And now, the last point is THE DIVINE HOLDFAST—“None shall pluck them out of my hand.”

Then all the saints are in Jesus’ hands. They are not only in His heart, but in His hands—just as the high priests wore the names of the twelve tribes on the breastplates, and wore them on the shoulders too. The power, as well as the affection of Christ shall preserve the people of God. They are in His hands. “All your saints are in your hands.” What a blessed place for us to be in—in the hand of Christ—always there!

But does not our Lord intimate as if to forewarn us that a great many attempts would be made to pluck us out of that hand? Satan would do it, our own base lusts would do it, the ungodly would do it. The very air is full of tempters who would if they could pluck us away from Christ. We have, therefore, cause for great watchfulness, deep humility, but also for much thankfulness that we are placed where the tempters cannot reach us, for the promise assures us that none is able to pluck us out of Christ’s hand. There is not power enough in legions of fallen spirits, if they were marshaled in battle array against one poor weak Christian, to snatch him away from Christ, yea, should they besiege him without intermission, like a vast herd of lions seeking to devour one lamb, the defense were so much stronger than the invasion, that they could not pluck even that one out of Christ’s hand.

The destroyer has never yet celebrated a triumph over the Redeemer. He is not able to hold up a single jewel of the Redeemer’s crown and say, “Aha! Aha! I stole it from Your diadem. You could not keep it!” He has no single sheep there to which he can point and say, “Ah, Shepherd of the sheep, You could not keep them all! The strong were safe enough, they helped themselves, but this poor weakling could not help itself, and You could not help it. Lo! I have borne it away from You, Your flock, which is Your pride, is not complete, You Yourself as Shepherd have a spot upon Your name, for You have lost at least this one that Your Father gave You and whom You have purchased with Your blood.” It cannot be, it *shall* not be. The powers of darkness have conspired for this and struggled for this, but they have not yet prevailed, nor shall they. “None shall pluck them out of my hand.” Oh, rest in the hand of Christ,

rest quietly, now you are there you are secure, neither shall any pluck you thence. As if He would make assurance doubly sure, and give us a very strong consolation, He added, “My Father which gave them me is greater than all, and none shall pluck them out of my Father’s hand.”

You can interpret the figure. There was Christ’s hand and His people in it, and He shall shut it fast to hold them. But then, that hand was pierced once, and so to make it doubly sure the Father clasps it with His hand, and so within a double encircling the elect of God are held and embraced. There is the pierced hand of Jesus and there is the Father’s almighty hand, so there are two hands to protect and defend them. Well may they now cheerfully defy all power terrestrial or infernal, ever to destroy them. They must, they *shall*, forever rest in perfect security beneath the guardian care of the Man Mediator, Christ the Lord, and God the everlasting and ever blessed Father, who also takes them into His sacred keeping.

Do I hear anyone object, saying, “Well, but if this is true, then may not a man live as he likes?” Sir, how can you ask that question? What do you mean by it? Do you mean, may a man live in sin? I have been trying to show that if a man is one of Christ’s sheep, he cannot perish, by which I mean, he cannot live in sin, for that is to perish. When I maintain that he cannot live in sin as he did, and cease to be a gracious man, do you ask me whether he will not henceforth sin willfully because he is saved from his sins? You must surely misunderstand me. “But, may not a man fall?”

Now I have these checks taken from me, I may grow wanton.” What checks? What checks? If I lay it down that a man who is enlisted as a soldier is always a soldier, how can you tell me I have taken away some checks? I see not how that can be. I have rather implied a great many strong incentives to virtue than offered a single pretext for vice. Certainly he is not to lay down his soldiership because he is enlisted for life in the service of his Lord. If he ever did lay it down, he never could take it up again. Could these fall away, it were impossible again to renew them to repentance.

If God’s work did fail, if Christ’s atoning blood did fall short of its aim, there would remain no hope for them. The ground on which the dew that moistens the flowers descends, when it yields nothing but thorns and briars, is given up as worthless. Were a man in some fit of enthusiasm to profess that he believed the Gospel, and then take a fit of libertinism and plunge into dissipation, you would all know what to think of his sincerity. When the guilt of sin is removed, the love of sin is purged out of the heart, and when the Spirit of holiness is given, the love of holiness is infused into the heart.

The man who truly believes begins a life of holiness, and from that life of holiness he will never utterly depart. I grant you he may be overtaken in a fault, he may be surprised with a temptation, he may stumble through weakness, or through lack of watchfulness, but he will be led back again into repentance, he shall not be allowed to perish. The life that is in him is immortal, a holy incorruptible seed, and it will continue to develop in spite of sultry heat or biting frost, blight or mildew, till it blooms in the perfection of life above.

Says one, “Ah, sir, I hold no argument about your doctrine, my fear is for myself, I do not think I should live as I now do if I were not afraid of falling away.” Is not that a suitable fear for the child of the bondwoman—“Unless I do so and so I shall be sent into the wilderness with my mother Hagar.” Very likely you will. But I know this. I am the child of the free woman, that is Sarah, and I know my father will never send His child into the wilderness. What then, shall His attachment provoke my alienation? Shall I act shame because He appoints me to honor? Nay, nay, but because He loves me so, I will love Him in return. I pray Him to forgive my offenses, but I will seek to do all that is possible to show that I realize the greatness of His love, and desire to make some poor return for it as best I can.

“Well, but,” says somebody, “are we not admonished with warnings against falling away?” Certainly, and they are the most terrible that language can describe. Undoubtedly the Scripture paints the pilgrim’s path as full of peril. It is not by creature strength that we can hold our own. Could the precious blood lose its virtue, did the blessed Spirit withdraw His influence, were the timely succor withheld, we have no resource. For all manner of sin there is a remedy, believe in Christ as a Savior, but for apostasy there is no cure. If you trample on the one sacrifice, no second sacrifice will ever be offered. There is but one new birth. Regeneration is once and once only.

“But why these warnings,” say you, “if it cannot happen?” Remember God does not deal with His people as if they were blocks of wood or iron cast and run into a mold. We are beings with a will and a judgment, and God deals with us in that way. Now, if I have poison in my house, and it should be needful for some reason or other that poison should be there, I do not intend that my children should ever have that poison or take it. Suppose me to be omnipotent and that I have power to prevent their taking it, yet I do not lock it up and put it where they could not possibly get it. I put it where they can get it if they like, and it will kill them if they do get it, but I tell them they must not take it, I describe to them the results that will follow, and I have such a loving power over my children’s hearts—(suppose it to be so)—that they do not disobey me so as to take this poison. Though it be there and devils come into the house and tempt them to take it, yet they will not take it but put it from them. I should thus be making an exhibition to those who looked on, of the love to me that was in my children’s hearts, and also of my power over my children’s hearts, though I did not violate their wills, and did not make it impossible for them to destroy themselves.

Now, it is so here. Sin is permitted to be in the world—I do not know why—and God does not render it impossible for a man to go and commit any sin. The man might, he would, unless God’s grace prevented, but God’s grace is not mechanical in its action, it is not like a fetter, or a chain, it is not (as I have heard some say) dragging people to heaven by their ears. No, it is a mighty force, an omnipotent power, but quite consistent with free agency, it never operates contrary to the laws of mind, and God is glorified in this, that though His children be thus tempted, they do not run into fatal soul-destroying sin, they do not go into such apostasy from Him as would be final and prove altogether destructive. They are kept by His gracious power—kept as men—drawn, but with cords of love—bound, but with the bands of a man.

Do you object that “good men do fall?” Good men do not fall so as to perish. Good men do fall, for they are men. The old nature is in them. But the truly gracious man with all his sins repents, still believes, and with broken bones goes back to his Lord, and proves himself to be still a child. The sheep may fall into a ditch, it will not roll in the mire as a hog would if it fell there. A sheep even when it falls into a ditch proves that it is a sheep still. There is a difference in the nature of it. When I have seen a child of God fall into sin, I have known that if he were a child of God he would hate himself for it, he would grieve over it, and could not be at peace and ease in it.

Do you tell me of a Christian who lived in sin and seemed very happy? Be sure that he was not a Christian but a pretender. He who can continue in sin and delight in it is no child of God. He that can go day after day into vice, or can tolerate in himself any known sin, has a spot which is not the spot of God’s children. He has a mark upon him which never was yet and never shall be upon a truly quickened child of God. Be you holy, for I am holy, is the voice which sounds in the saint’s ear, and if he does not always obey it as he should, this is the complaining of his soul, and it makes him go weeping and lamenting before his God. But still, in the main it ever shall be, the righteous shall hold on his way, and he that has clean hands shall wax stronger and stronger.

I have one word for any here who are unconverted, but would desire salvation. Do you know, dear friends that one of the great leading thoughts of my young life, the master thought that brought me to the Savior, was belief in the doctrine of final perseverance? Perhaps you wonder how that could be, but so it was. I saw while yet I was a lad many promising boys and lads who made total shipwreck early in their lives by falling into gross vices. I felt in my soul a loathing of the sins which I heard they had committed. I had been kept from them by divine counsels, by gracious interpositions, by parental teaching, and by pious example.

Still I feared lest the sins into which these young men had fallen might master me. Such knowledge as I had of the depravity of my own heart led me to distrust myself. I was convinced that unless I was converted, born again, and received the new life, I had no safeguard. Whatever good resolutions I might make, the probabilities were they would be good for nothing when temptation assailed me, I might be like those of whom it has been said, “They see the devil’s hook and yet cannot help nibbling at his bait.”

But, that I should morally disgrace myself as some had done whom I had known and heard of, was a hazard from the very thought of which I shrunk with horror. When I heard and read with wondering eyes that whosoever believed in Christ Jesus should be saved, the truth came to my heart with a welcome I cannot describe to you. The doctrine that He would keep the feet of His saints had a charm indeed for me. I thought, “Then if I go to Jesus and get from Him a new heart and a right spirit, I shall be secured against these temptations into which others have fallen, I shall be preserved by Him.” I do not say that drove me to Christ, a sense of sin did that, but it attracted me to Him. It was one of the beauties of His face that ravished me, that He was a faithful keeper of all souls that were committed to Him, that He was able and willing to take the young man and make him cleanse his way and keep him even to the end. O young people, there is no life assurance like a believing in Jesus Christ—

*“Grace shall preserve your following years,
And make your virtues strong.”*

I do not preach to you, tonight, a sandy foundation that will give way under your feet, but a rock to which you may continually retreat, in which you may always dwell secure. I do not present to you a salvation that may fail you under some stress of temptation, but a salvation that is strong, having in it “the sure mercies of David.” He that believes and is baptized shall be saved—saved from sinning, from the guilt as well as the punishment of sin, and brought to heaven holy and meet for the inheritance of the saints. God grant you to be believers in Christ. Amen, and amen!

Taken from The C. H. Spurgeon Collection, Version 1.0, Ages Software. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.