

**THE FINAL PERSEVERANCE OF BELIEVERS
IN CHRIST JESUS
NO. 388-B**

***BY THE REV. WILLIAM O'NEILL,*
MINISTER OF NEW BROAD STREET CHAPEL, LONDON.**

My dear Brethren and Friends. Most unexpectedly did the kind invitation of my esteemed Brother, Mr. Spurgeon, come to me to take part in the present service of this beautiful house. And after I had engaged to come I sincerely wished that I had not. I felt, however, that it would not be proper to retire from the engagement but seek to meet it in a becoming spirit, both towards God's Truth and God's people. I will now try to do this. I utter here, of course, my own sentiments. As I am not responsible for anything that has been or may be said by another speaker, so I alone am responsible for what I shall say.

And though I am not the delegate or representative of any church, denomination, or community, I doubt not that my declaration of faith on the matter in hand will be, in all substantial points, that of a very large number who love Jesus and are living in His service. That I desire to believe what the Bible teaches, and that I am sincere in my convictions I *know* to be true. But that there are thousands of excellent Christians on the other side admits of no doubt, and should not be questioned by anyone. Of their deep sincerity, love to God and His Gospel, zeal and devotedness in holy things, self-denying labors in the Divine service, and the cultivation and manifestation of Christian graces I would and do speak with the most earnest approval.

I give them as much credit for sincerity as I claim for myself. And I do this not as a favor, but as a piece of simple justice. Yet we differ—differ as to what the Sacred Oracles teach on the doctrine now before us. It is competent and right for all men to examine, each one for himself which of our opinions is that which is taught in the Bible, for certainly *both* are *not* taught there.

The question—Is it possible for sincere Christians, truly regenerated persons, to be finally separated from Jesus, to lose the favor of God their Father, and be eternally shut out from His smile and Home? This is one of no small moment. It involves issues of the most momentous nature, and cannot but be unspeakably interesting to every believer in Christ. We say with unfaltering tongue, that of all the dead, everyone who was ever renewed in heart is now in Heaven. And that reconciliation with God on earth, through Christ Jesus, will, in every case end in the everlasting salvation of the soul.

If God, then, had told us that all who are here now are His regenerated people, (would that they were!) we should believe that when the roll of the finally-saved shall be called everyone of us would answer to that call by saying, "Here am I, Lord. Your right arm, and the effectual operation of Your Spirit and grace has done it all, and now I am to be forever happy, forever sinless, forever safe." It is hardly necessary to say that we believe this view of the case to be in entire harmony with the teaching of God's Book. To the Law and to the testimony, if we, or others speak not on this and on all other matters according to that Word, it is because there is no light in us or in them (Isa. 8:20).

Having called public attention to this doctrine lately in a small book, "UNCHANGING LOVE," all the texts that are usually quoted in opposition to the doctrine now noticed are passed under calm review. I have sought to obey the Master's command—"Search the Scriptures"—I will now, with your kind permission, direct attention to a few portions of the Divine Word that we believe fully establish the doctrine of the saints' final preservation and perseverance. On each of those texts my words must be few as the time allotted to me is short.

Hear, then, the Holy Spirit's teaching when speaking by the Prophet Samuel—"For the LORD will not forsake His people for His great name's sake; because it has pleased the LORD to make you His people" (1 Sam. 12:22). This, we think, is conclusive. What Christian does not know, and knowing, does not mourn over the untrustworthiness of his own heart? And feeling fully assured that it is impossible for him to vanquish "the world, the flesh, and the devil," how welcome to his heart is the declaration, "The LORD will not forsake His people."

No. He thought proper to renew their hearts, to quicken them into spiritual life, and He will mercifully continue to carry on His good work in their souls till it shall be perfected in Glory. The reason why, "He will not forsake His people" is stated here most explicitly—just as much so as is the declaration of His unchangeable love. It is not that they were less

sinful by nature or practice than others. Or because of any moral qualities that were found in them—but “because it pleased the LORD to make them His people.”

Hear another portion—God, speaking by his Prophet Isaiah says—“Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yes, they may forget, yet will I not forget you. Behold, I have graven you upon the palms of My hands” (Isa. 49:15, 16). This we regard as a most interesting as well as a most consolatory portion of Scripture. “Zion said, the LORD has forsaken me, and my LORD has forgotten me.” This was not only an error in creed—it was also a dishonorable estimate of the Divine character, and to it the Gracious One replies in these words—“Can a woman forget her sucking child that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yes, they may forget, yet will not I forget you.”

The affection of a right-minded mother for her tender and helpless offspring is one of the strongest that is experienced by human beings. But, though strong, very strong, it may, alas, give way. It is, at best, only a creature’s love, and therefore changeable. While that love which is exercised by God towards His believing children is, like Himself, unchangeable. These words prove, and were designed to prove most conclusively, that the love of the Divine Father towards His adopted sons and daughters is not a fluctuating or changing thing. What other, or what lower interpretation can we put upon the words, “YET WILL NOT I FORGET YOU”? And not forgetting them is, in this case, equivalent to His continuing to care for, to keep, and tenderly regard them.

Hear God again speaking by the same Prophet—“For a small moment have I forsaken you. But with great mercies will I gather you. In a little wrath I hid My face from you for a moment. But with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on you, says the LORD your Redeemer. For this is as the waters of Noah unto Me: for as I have sworn that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth; so have I sworn that I would not be wrath with you, nor rebuke you. For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed. But My kindness shall not depart from you, neither shall the covenant of My peace be removed, says the LORD that has mercy on you.”

These words deserve to hold a prominent place among those which God has spoken for the comfort and joy of His people. Their obvious design is to sustain believers under the chastening hand of God and to do this by considerations drawn from His own character, and not from anything in themselves. Vain, Brethren, is it to trust, or put confidence in our own false hearts. They are weak as helpless infancy. To lean on them will only be evidence of our folly and of our sin. We are not to find consolation in our gifts, in our graces, in our labors, in our resolutions, or in our experience.

Nor, by the grace of God, will we do so—but when chastised by the ever-loving and good Father—when smarting under His parental and deserved stripes—we may feast our souls on His blessed Words—Words that fire those souls with confidence, hope, and love. “In a little wrath I hid My face from you for a moment. But with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on you. For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed. But My kindness shall not depart from you, neither shall the covenant of My peace be removed, says the LORD that has mercy on you.”

Such, brethren, are GOD’S utterances! These are the words of One who is unchangeable in affection—of One who says, Oh, blessed be His adorable name for that saying—“For I am the LORD, I change not; therefore you sons of Jacob are not consumed” (Mal. 3:6). I name another passage—“For there shall arise,” says Jesus, “false Christs, and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders; insomuch, that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect” (Matt. 24:24). The plain and obvious meaning of this latter clause is that it is not possible to deceive or allure to their final ruin, the adopted sons and daughters of God—those whom He has chosen to be His.

Nothing less, we believe, was intended by the Gracious Speaker, and we see not how any other meaning can be consistently given to the language which He here uses. The words, “If it were possible,” only say, in another form, “*It is not possible.*” I now name such texts as connect faith, or believing in Christ, with salvation, of which the following are a few—“God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” “Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that hears My word, and believes on Him that sent Me, has everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation, but is passed from death unto life.”

“And this is the will of Him that sent Me, that everyone which sees the Son, and believes on Him, may have everlasting life. Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that believes on Me has everlasting life. I am the living bread which came down from Heaven: if any man eat of this bread he shall live forever.” “The Gospel is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believes.” (John 3:16; 5:24; 6:47, 50, 51, 57; Rom. 1:16). The plain teaching of these, and many similar pas-

sages, is that every believer in Jesus *has everlasting life*. They teach this or they teach nothing. If this is not their meaning, what is?

But, can that which is everlasting cease to be? Can it come to an end? No words can more plainly assert than these do, that *whosoever* believes in Jesus SHALL NOT COME INTO CONDEMNATION. That all believers in Him shall enjoy “everlasting life.” We take these gracious assurances as proving to the fullest extent the doctrine for which we plead. If the belief of the Gospel is not followed in every instance by eternal blessedness, what did Paul mean when he said, “The Gospel is the power of God unto salvation to *everyone* that believes”? (Rom. 1:16). If, at the last day, a single one be unsaved of those who had believed the Gospel, who had been united to Christ by faith in His name—the Apostle’s words must needs be false—his teaching is not true. This, at least, is our opinion. No amount of adverse criticism can set aside the evidence that such verses as these furnish in support of the blessed doctrine which we now defend.

Hear Christ again—“My sheep,” he says, “hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me: and I give unto them eternal life. And they shall never perish, neither shall anyone pluck them out of My hand. My Father who gave them Me is greater than all, and no one is able to pluck them out of My Father’s hand” (John 10:27-30). We regard this entire passage as one of the most delightful and consoling in the Scriptures. It teaches most unequivocally—in the plainest, strongest, and most conclusive terms—that Christ’s believing ones “SHALL NEVER PERISH”—that no enemy, human or hellish, shall be able to wrench them out of His or His Father’s covenanted and secure grasp.

Infinite power, no less than infinite love—both existing in their God and Savior—stand as guarantees for their security. Neither men nor demons shall be able to defeat or overturn the purpose of Divine grace concerning them! Difficulties, many and sharp may surround them, and temptations, fierce and fiery, may assault their souls—but Divine love, wisdom, grace, and power shall be ever on their side. Jesus, the “faithful and true witness,” says, “THEY SHALL NEVER PERISH.” Elsewhere He says, “Because I live, you shall live also” (John 14:19). The spiritual life of believers is in HIS keeping, and He here declares that it is as secure as His own.

If He dies, and continues not to be their “advocate with the Father” (1 John 2:1), their Intercessor “at the right hand of God” (Rom. 8:34), then may they die also, but not otherwise. In perfect keeping with his Lord’s words are those which Paul uses, when referring to the same subject. “For if,” he says, “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” (Rom. 5:10). That is, we shall be preserved in that state of reconciliation by Christ’s intercessory life at God’s right hand in Heaven. He, the God-man, lives there as Mediator for them—He holds and exercises “all power in Heaven and on earth” for the welfare and safety of His Church. And they cannot die while He lives.

The power that is to destroy the spiritual life of the weakest saint must first destroy the life of that saint’s Head. “Their life” as the Holy Spirit by Paul elsewhere teaches, “is hid with Christ in God” (Col. 3:3). Where, Brethren, could it be safer, or as safe? In whose care or keeping could it be so secure? It “is hid with Christ in God.” Not only so, but the Apostle goes on to say, “When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall you also appear with him IN GLORY.” This, to say the least of it, is a glorious statement and declaration. Can language, we ask, go beyond that which is used in these texts to guarantee the eternal salvation of every believer in Jesus? The Head and members shall never be separated. They are bound up in an inseparable and an unchanging union.

Hear a Divine lesson given in another place—“Moreover, whom He did predestinate, them He also called. And whom He called, them He also justified, and whom He justified, them He also glorified” (Rom. 8:30). When it is said, “Whom He did predestinate, them He also called,” we must interpret the word “called” to mean very much more than *invited*, for the Apostle goes on to say, “Whom He called, them He also justified.” We know that this is only true of those who believe in Jesus—who are effectually called or drawn by the combined operations of the Word and Spirit of God, into the blessed fellowship and joys of the Gospel (1 Cor. 1:9). That those, and only those, who *believe* in Christ are justified is the uniform lesson of the Divine Word (John 3:16, 36; Acts 13:39; 40; Rom. 1:16; 3:22, 28).

Let it be noted that Paul affirms three things here. The first is—“Whom He did predestinate, them He also called.” The second is—“Whom He called, them He also justified.” And the third is—“Whom He justified, them He also glorified.” What, then, does he mean by the expression “glorified”? Does he, or can he mean anything less than the enjoyment of everlasting life? We say, then, that if only a single individual out of the whole number of those who have been, or shall

be “justified” by faith in Jesus, comes short of Heaven, the declaration would not be true that, “Whom He justified, them He also glorified.”

Hear another Divine proclamation relative to the security of God’s people—“For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 8:38, 39). These, Brethren, are notes of the most triumphant character, relative to the ultimate blessedness of believers in Jesus. The terms which are here used are such as leave no doubt as to what the Holy Spirit, speaking by Paul, meant to teach. We deliberately affirm that language has no power to assert the doctrine for which we contend more conclusively than is here done. Words have no meaning, nor are they of any use in communicating thought if these words were not used by a man who believed as we do on the matter in hand. And we are entirely willing to believe or disbelieve with the Apostle Paul, neither more nor less.

I quote him again. Hear what he wrote to the Church at Philippi—“Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.” I well remember how greatly this passage strengthened my own soul when, in the morning of my religious life, I was passing through much mental conflict. And are not these words well-calculated to comfort the hearts of those who, through grace, have believed in the Savior? Is there any room for objecting criticism here, or is there any ambiguity in the language employed? No, there is none whatever—the Apostle was confident of this very thing. What “very thing”? Why, that wherever the Divine Spirit had commenced this “good work” of grace in the soul He would complete it!

No other power could have begun it, and no other power is competent to carry it forward to completion. That He who commences that “good work” is *able* to finish it, no professing Christian *will* deny—that He *will* finish it, this verse most clearly teaches. The Apostle Paul was “confident of THIS VERY THING.” And so are we. Let us give attention to other words of the same sacred penman. Addressing one of the primitive Churches he says—“We are bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren Beloved of the Lord, because God has from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the Truth” (2 Thess. 2:13).

This is a most important portion of Scripture in relation to the question—What is the end of election? In what does it, or is it to terminate? What does it secure? Are its subjects merely chosen to enjoy the light of the Gospel, the means of grace, and no more? Or, are they chosen to enjoy, in its full measure, everlasting life, the priceless favor and blissful fellowship of God here and forever? This question is definitely settled by the language of inspiration employed here. The Apostle declares that the choice is “to salvation”; or, in other words, which he also uses in this place, “to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

This means, of course, eternal life in Heaven, as well as all that precedes and prepares for it on earth. But how can this be realized? How can it be said they were “chosen to *salvation*,” if they may all apostatize finally from Jesus, fall out of the Divine favor, and be forever numbered with the lost? The thing is, of course, impossible. If not *saved*—fully and forever—it would not be true to say they were chosen “to salvation.”

I beg to name one passage more. Speaking of believers, a divinely inspired teacher says—“Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation” (1 Peter 1:5). Here we are distinctly taught what the Divine Being is doing and will continue to do for His believing people. The Apostle asserts that they are “kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation.” If so, nothing is more certain than that they shall reach it, and enjoy it forever. Had Peter believed that it was possible for any number of them to become outcasts from God, and die in their sins, he would never have employed the language which is found here. The declaration that believers are “kept” or garrisoned in, (for such is the meaning of the term here employed), “by the power of GOD through faith unto salvation,” settles the point with us, and leaves us nothing more to desire in the shape of statement or promise. This is, indeed, a glorious declaration. Fellow Pilgrims, let it fill you with the highest joy, as it gives you the fullest assurance that you are safe in the grasp and guardianship of Jehovah of Hosts.

We hold and teach, too, that the certain enjoyment of everlasting life inseparably connected with continued faith in the Divine testimony concerning sin, Jesus, and His salvation shall be preserved in the exercise of faith in the Redeemer until they shall enter upon the possession of the heavenly inheritance. This is clearly taught here, and nothing less.

I have now referred to a few out of the many portions of God's Word which teach the doctrine for which we contend. God's people shall be preserved, and will persevere to the end, for they were given to Christ in the Everlasting Covenant—that Covenant which is "ordered in all things and sure." The stability of that Covenant is as safe as the oath, and promise, and power of God can make it (Psalm 89:30, 34; Hebrews 6:18, 19). They are "loved by Him with an everlasting love" (Jer. 31:3). They are "chosen to salvation" (Eph. 1:4; 2 Thess. 2:13). And God, their gracious and reconciled Father, "will rest in His love" (Zeph. 3:17). Their safety, as believers in Jesus, is secured by the Word and promise of the "God that cannot lie." He has said that He will "never leave them nor forsake them" (Heb. 13:5), that they shall "never perish" (John 10:28), and that He will "confirm them unto the end" (1 Cor. 1:8).

For this purpose the ever-availing intercession of Jesus is employed. He is at the right hand of God as their Brother, Representative, and Advocate. He prays for them that their faith fail not (Luke 22:32). They are, each and all, borne on His heart and pleaded for in His gracious and ever-successful intercession. "Father," says He, "I will that they also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory" (John 17:24). Oh, what priceless joy do these words afford to the believer's heart! No weapon that is formed against them shall prosper. Their Almighty King will vanquish all their spiritual foes. He will so aid them that they shall contend victoriously against "the world, the flesh, and the devil."

They shall be more than conquerors through Him that loved them (Rom. 8:37). They shall be the saved of His right arm, and the everlasting monuments and trophies of His grace, love, and power. They are "sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise which is *the earnest* of their inheritance, until the redemption of the purchased possession" (2 Cor. 1:21, 22; Eph. 1:13,14). Having received the "earnest," the pledge which guarantees the fulfillment of their Heavenly Father's Covenant to save them, they are perfectly and forever secure.

We build our faith in this doctrine on God's plain teaching. We extort no meaning from His word which cannot be found there by the simple and ordinary reader of it. We take its statements in their plain grammatical sense, just as they would be interpreted by any unprejudiced expounder of language. We should be content to abide by the interpretation of them which would be given by any man—infidel or other—who felt no interest in our controversy, and who was entirely careless relative to our differences of opinion. One unequivocal passage teaching this doctrine would be, or should be, sufficient to establish it, and to bring out opinions into harmony with Divine teaching.

But we are not confined to one, or five, or ten—we have line upon line, promise upon promise, assurance upon assurance, and declaration upon declaration to this effect, so that we would ask—"If the doctrine is not taught in the portions of Scripture that I have named, what is taught in them? What is their import? What do they teach? Or what language or terms would be thought sufficient to teach it?" It is our firm conviction that no doctrine of religion is more clearly taught in the Bible than is this. It is expressed as plainly as words can possibly do it. And are we, with these inspired declarations before us, to suppose it possible for wicked men or demons to say, when pointing to numbers of the lost—"The Most High began to build up His kingdom in their souls, but He was not able to finish it! He quickened them into spiritual life—renewed, pardoned, justified, and sanctified them. But now they are torn from His grasp, His enemies were able—contrary to the words of Jesus (John 10:28)—'to pluck them out of His hand,' *and they have done it?*"

This would, indeed, make short work of many plain and positive declarations found in the Bible—it would prove, beyond a doubt that its promises, and assurances, and declarations are of very little value. Let me, before I close say—and say with the fullest emphasis possible—that we believe as firmly as any man living, as firmly as we believe any Truth taught in the Bible, that, "without holiness no man shall see the Lord" (Heb. 12:14). We know no other evidence of being in Christ, or of being a Christian, than that which is furnished by a life and behavior becoming the Gospel. And though holiness is not the cause of God's first or continued love to His people, it is the effect and fruit of that love, and a main part of the salvation which is in Christ Jesus—that salvation to which they are chosen (Eph. 1:4) and he who is satisfying himself with the notion that he is safe for eternity while he is living in any known sin, is turning the grace of our God into licentiousness, and is a deadly enemy of the Cross of Christ.

The blessed doctrine which the Bible teaches, and in which we glory, is the doctrine of the *saint's* final perseverance, and that doctrine was never designed to comfort any man who is not living a life of faith in the Son of God, intensely anxious to please God in all things, and to be the holy and happy subject of that mind which was in Jesus.

Very interesting, then, is the question, when asked in no wrong spirit—Are there few that are saved? If God does not hold up His people, if He does not keep them by His grace and power, they will be very few indeed—a child may count them, and, in fact, have none, not one, to count. But let no man charge our views with being “narrow” or “embracing only a few,” or contemplating the eternal salvation of “a very limited number” of our race, for, according to the view which we hold and teach, they will be a numberless number. We believe, and our hearts swell with high and holy joy in believing, that *every* child of man who loved God—*every one* of Adam’s race who was renewed in heart—*all* who were ever on the Lord’s side—will be found among the saved. Not one will be lost. Not one will be missed from the eternal banquet. Not one will be outside the gates of the holy city, All, all shall be there, and there forever, and ever, and ever!

***“The soul that on Jesus has leaned for repose,
He will not, He cannot, give up to His foes;
That soul, though all Hell should endeavor to shake,
He’ll never! no, never! no, never forsake!”***

Adapted from *The C.H. Spurgeon Collection*, Version 1.0, Ages Software, 1.800.297.4307