

SINS OF THE SAINTS



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SINS OF THE SAINTS

IN every believer there remains the liability to sin. The new birth is not, as so many suppose, a change of heart, nor the removal of the carnal nature, but is the reception of an entirely new nature. The new birth is neither the elimination nor the transformation of the old nature, but is the communication and impartation of a new nature, a spiritual nature, the Divine nature. In every born again person there are two natures—the old and the new—the flesh and the spirit—which the Apostle Paul tells us are contrary in disposition, continually warring against each other. As then the old, carnal nature, remains in the believer as long as he continues in this body, there is always a possibility of him sinning.

While this is true, yet the believer is responsible not to sin. The death of Christ annulled it. The Cross has freed us from the dominion of sin. Once we were its slaves, but now it has no right to control us. The Word of God forbids it: “Awake to righteousness and sin not” (1Co 15:34). “As he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation” (1Pe 1:15). The indwelling Holy Spirit condemns it. Our bodies are His temples, and it is our bounden duty to exclude everything which would in anywise defile them. The grace of God repudiates¹ it. The promise of our Lord is, “My grace is sufficient for thee.” The resources of Deity are held at our disposal. All power is ours if we will appropriate it. No believer is obliged to sin, and there is no legitimate excuse for the indulgence of it. But the fact remains that all believers do sin. “For there is not a just man on earth that doeth good, and sinneth not” (Ecc 7:20). Every believer sins every day of his life, sins both negatively and positively. By this we do not mean that he violates the laws of the State, or that he deliberately breaks one of the Ten Commandments. We mean, that all come short of the standard of holiness revealed in God’s Word. The thought of foolishness is sin (Pro 24:9). Anxiety and worry are sinful, because forbidden by the Scripture. Covetousness is sinful, pride is sinful, sloth is sinful, yet who can plead guiltless? “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (1Jo 1:8).

While it is true that every believer sins, sins daily, insomuch that he fails to measure up to the standard of holiness revealed in God’s Word and fails to perfectly follow the “example” left us by the Lord Jesus Christ, yet, we would insist upon the fact that there is a fundamental difference in this respect between the believer and the unbeliever. The unbeliever is “the servant (slave) of sin” (Joh 8:34), but the be-

¹ **repudiates** – casts off or disowns publicly.

liever has been “made free”—delivered from the power of sin (Joh 8:36). Furthermore; we read, “Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him. Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous. He that committeth sin is of the devil” (1Jo 3:6-8). Now these verses do not teach that the daily walk of a believer is sinless, but they do teach that such an one will not practice sin. The tense of the verb in these verses must be carefully noted. It is the perfect which is here employed: “he that committeth sin”—commits and continues committing is the force of the word: he that makes a regular practice of committing sin. Observe it does not say, “He that sins is of the devil,” but he that sins and goes on sinning. In the same way “he that doeth [practices] righteousness is righteous.” The apostle is referring to the general course and tenor of our lives. He is speaking of that which is our habit. Let the Christian’s life be summed up as a whole and though like David he may wander from the path of rectitude,² yet shall he return thereto; though like Peter he may fail in the hour of testing, yet shall he repent of his failure; though like Paul he may sin with his lips (Act 23:3-5), yet shall he confess his wrong-doing; and it will be seen that his complete record can be characterized and summarized only as one that “doeth righteousness.”

Ere proceeding to the details of our theme, we must in faithfulness state the issue clearly. Reader, if you love sin you are no child of God, for God is holy. If you are living to please self and are enjoying the pleasures of sin, you are no Christian, for a Christian is one who denies himself, takes up his cross and follows Christ; a Christian is one who is subject to the lordship of Christ, and no man can serve two masters. If when you succumb to temptation you are not cut to the heart, if the fact that you have offended against the Lord God is not followed by genuine contrition and repentance, it is proof you have never been born again; for when a real believer sins he “grieves” the Spirit within him, and the Spirit will cause him to grieve over his wrong-doing. If you are not “fleeing youthful lusts” (2Ti 2:22), if you are not buffet- ing your body to “keep it under” (1Co 9:27), if you are not “yielding yourself unto God” (Rom 6:13), you have no ground for concluding that you are a member of the household of faith.

1. The One Overtaken in a Fault

But what of the one who is “overtaken in a fault” (Gal 6:1)? What of the one who really and daily endeavors with all his might to please God and glorify Christ, who actually does seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness (Mat 6:33), but who, nevertheless, is conscious that he offends in many things (Jam 3:2)—what are the consequences of such sins in the believer?

² **rectitude** – conduct according to moral principles.

He does not cease to be God's child.

A child of God is one who has been begotten by the Holy Spirit and made a partaker of the divine nature. The new birth is very much more than an external reformation, it is an internal regeneration. The new birth does not mean turning over a new leaf, but is the beginning of a new life. Now in the very nature of the case, one who has been born again cannot be unborn. We have been born again of “incorruptible seed” (1Pe 1:23). Can that which is incorruptible die? Impossible (Eph 2:5). Can those who have been spiritually resurrected be destroyed? Impossible. The new birth is a new creation (2Co 5:17, R.V.). Can that which has been created be un-created? Impossible. “I know that, whatsoever God doeth, it shall be forever: nothing can be put to it, nor anything taken from it: and God doeth it that men should fear before him” (Ecc 3:14).

He does not forfeit eternal life.

When the believer sins he does not forfeit eternal life, and why? Because it is a gift—a free gift from God. “The free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom 6:23, R.V.). He could do nothing to merit this gift (if he could, it would cease to be a gift: in such a case it would be a reward), consequently, he can do nothing to demerit it. Moreover, the gift which God bestows upon the believer is eternal life. This needs to be stressed. God gave to Adam a probationary life: it was his so long as he obeyed God’s command and refused to eat of the forbidden fruit. God gave to Israel in Canaan a conditional life: their continued tenure of Palestine was made contingent³ upon their compliance with the divine Decalogue and their abstinence from idolatry. But to the believer in Christ, God gives neither a probationary nor a conditional life, but eternal life. And, “The gifts and calling of God are without repentance” (Rom 11:29). To say that eternal life may end is a contradiction in terms.

He does not lose the Holy Spirit.

David prayed, “Take not thy Holy Spirit from me.” (Psa 51:11), but this was under the dispensation⁴ of law. In contrast thereto, under the dispensation of grace, the promise of the Saviour is, “And he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you forever” (Joh 14:16). The believer may and does, “grieve” the Holy Spirit, but he cannot drive Him away. And for this reason, the Holy Spirit takes up His abode in the believer not on account of any personal fitness He finds in him, but on the ground of the finished work of Christ, and nothing can disturb that. Therefore we read, “And grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption” (Eph 4:30), that is, until the day when we shall be glorified in spirit, and soul, and body.

³ **contingent** – dependent (on or upon something uncertain); conditional.

⁴ **dispensation** – the ordering of events under divine authority.

A striking demonstration and confirmation of this fact is seen in the case of the Corinthian saints. Due allowance must be made for the fact that they had only just emerged from an idolatrous and licentious⁵ heathendom, yet when this is said, it remains that these Corinthians were guilty of the most awful sins. They were schismatics;⁶ brother went to law against brother; and what was worse, some had profaned the table of the Lord, having turned the supper into a drunken revel. And yet to this very Church, while admonishing the same, the apostle says, “Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?” (1Co 3:16). In spite of their sins then, the Corinthian saints had not lost the Holy Spirit!

He does not become unfit for heaven.

The moment we believe, we are fitted and qualified to enter the presence of the thrice holy God. “Giving thanks unto the Father which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light” (Col 1:12). This meetness or fitness is not in ourselves but in Christ. Consequently, this fitness is perfect and immutable: “For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified” (Heb 10:14). Our fitness for heaven depends not in any wise on our service, our works, our obedience, or our faithfulness, but solely upon the finished work of the Lord Jesus for us. The Apostle Paul was as much ready for heaven the moment he was born again as he was at the close of his life of devoted allegiance to his Master. The fitness of the prodigal⁷ son to a seat at the father’s table consisted in the robe of righteousness with which he was typically⁸ clothed. The saints which John saw in the heavenly temple of the King, has washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. It is the precious blood, and that alone, which gives title to a mansion in the Father’s house. In short, we partake of the incorruptible inheritance solely through grace, hence our personal unworthiness cannot unfit us for it. If sinning unfitted the believer for heaven, then none would ever get there, “For in many things we all offend” (Jam 3:2, R.V.). But let it not be supposed that a man may live as he pleases, live a life of open sin, and that even he may console himself that when he dies he shall go to heaven. If you are a child of God your daily walk will evidence it. If you are really a Christian your life will demonstrate it, and if your life does not so demonstrate it then you are not entitled to bear the name of a follower of the Lord Jesus. If you are one of His “sheep,” you will follow the Shepherd, not the “desires of the flesh” or the ways of the world. You will “hear” (not disregard) the “voice” of Christ.

⁵ **licentious** – morally unrestrained.

⁶ **schismatics** – those causing or trying to cause a split or division in a church.

⁷ **prodigal** – exceedingly or recklessly wasteful.

⁸ **typically** – a representative example.

He does not eternally perish.

There is no need to argue this. From what has been said above, it follows, that no saint of God through sinning can finally be lost. Backslide he may, but perish he shall not. No backsliding saint of God ever perished. Noah was a backslider—he became intoxicated. Abraham was a backslider—he went down to Egypt in unbelief, and while there told a lie. Jacob was a backslider—he deliberately deceived his father. Moses was a backslider—in his anger, he disobeyed God. David was a backslider—he committed adultery. Peter was a backslider—he denied his Lord. But not one of them perished. Each was able to say with the psalmist, “He restoreth my soul” (Psa 23:3). Yes, mark they were “restored.” They did not continue in their wickedness. No; they repented and turned to God.

2. What If It Were Possible for a True Believer to Be Eternally Lost?

There are those who teach that it is possible for a born again person to be eternally lost. But surely all such must fail to realize the corollaries⁹ of their teaching. The eternal security of the believer is something more than a theological quibble, it is a vital part of the saints. The final preservation of the saints is something more than a subject for religious controversy, it is a divinely revealed truth for the establishing of the heart in grace. What we are now contending for is something more than a tenet of Calvinism, it is that which is bound up with the honor of God, the efficacy of the blood of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit. We now desire to call attention to some of the fearful evils which are involved in the denial of this truth.

If, through sinning, a believer perished—What?

Then the promises of God would be valueless.

Again and again God has promised in His Word that whosoever believeth in His Son shall not perish but have everlasting life. If then I have believed in the Lord Jesus and yet should perish, then what?

The Lord Jesus said, “All that the Father giveth me shall come to me and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out” (Joh 6:37). Our Lord was not here giving an invitation to sinners, nor affirming that He never turns away one who comes to Him (which of course is true and taught elsewhere), but He is declaring that He never expels (casts out) any sinner whom He has received. The next verse proves this—“And this is the Father’s will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day” (Joh 6:39). If then the Father has given me to Christ, and in consequence I have “come” to Him, and He has promised that He will “in no wise” (under no circumstances) “cast me out” and

⁹ **corollaries** – those things that follow as a normal result.

that He will “lose nothing” of the “all” which the Father has given Him, and yet I should be eternally lost—then what? Of what value is His promise?

Again, we read, “Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will finish it [marginal rendering] until the day of Jesus Christ” (Phi 1:6). If then God has begun a good work in me and that work is not “finished” and in consequence I am lost—then what? It is not sufficient to say that God is willing to do His part providing I do mine: that God is hindered from finishing His work through my sinful conduct. No such alternative as this was present before the apostle’s mind. He interposed no ifs or buts or perhapses, but declared: “Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.” If then God has promised to do this and He fails to fulfill it—then what? We reply, then, in such a case, God’s Word would be like fallen man’s—unreliable and untrustworthy; and, in such an event, we should no longer have any sure foundation for our faith or anchorage for our souls. But perish such a thought. Let God be true and every man a liar.

If, through sinning, a believer perished—What?

Then the whole plan of salvation would be overthrown.

If, as a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, my going to heaven is contingent upon my continued faithfulness and obedience (instead of my faithfulness and obedience being rendered out of love and gratitude because Christ has saved me); if through my failure to remain faithful and obedient I am eternally lost, then my salvation is made to depend upon my works, which flatly contradicts Titus 3:5—“Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us.”

Further; if my ultimate salvation is determined by my obedience and faithfulness then I earn and merit it, and therefore, salvation is a reward, a prize won by my endeavors. But that flatly contradicts Ephesians 2:8-9—“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.” Again, if my salvation is due in part to my obedience and good works, and heaven is a reward for my diligence, then God is robbed of at least a part of His glory, for in that case we could not cry, “Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy, and for thy truth’s sake” (Psa 115:1).

Once more; if my salvation turns upon me holding out faithful to the end and if through failure to do so I should be lost, then I cannot know for certain whether I shall spend eternity in heaven or hell until I come to die. I cannot now “rejoice” because my name is written in heaven (Luk 10:20) and thus salvation would be a future prospect instead of a present enjoyment.

Finally; to preach that a believer in Christ must hold out faithful to the end in order to be saved is to reduce the Gospel to nothing more than an offer to place the sinner on an extended probation; whereas the Lord Jesus said, “I am the Bread of Life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall

never thirst” (Joh 6:35). No; the believer does not produce the fruit of the Spirit and bring forth good works in order to be saved, but he does do them because he is saved. If there is no fruit, no good works, no letting of our light shine to the glory of God, it shows that such a one is yet in his sins.

If, through sinning, a believer perished—What?

Then the power of God is limited.

If I had a thousand dollars in bills on my person I should be afraid to carry it around and in consequence would go to the bank and there deposit it for safekeeping. In like manner I am fully conscious of the fact that I am unable to save myself, so I have committed my soul into the keeping of God. Hence it is now solely a question of God’s power. It is true that I am weak, but He is strong. It is true that the world, the flesh, and the devil, are arrayed against me; but God is for me, and “If God be for us, who can be against us” (Rom 8:31)?

Noah was warned of God that a flood would be sent to destroy the wicked. An ark was provided as a shelter from the coming of divine judgment. Into this ark Noah and his family entered. Having entered that ark the responsibility of their preservation devolved¹⁰ upon God Himself. Noah could not leave the ark for “the Lord shut him in” (Gen 7:16). The fountains of the great deep were broken, the windows of heaven were opened and the rain descended—was the Lord able to preserve those in the ark? It was solely a matter of His power. The question has only to be asked to be answered. In like manner every believer has “fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us” (Heb 6:18) and it is now a question of God’s power to keep—Is He able? The reply is: “I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day” (2Ti 1:12). And again, “Wherefore he is able also to save them for evermore (marginal rendering) that come unto God by him” (Heb 7:25). Deny the eternal security of the believer and you limit the keeping power of God. Teach that it is possible for one to be lost who has previously committed his soul into the hands of the Lord, and you deny the omnipotency of the Most High.

If, through sinning, a believer perished—What?

Then the intercession of Christ would be in vain.

Not only did the Lord Jesus Christ die on the Cross for sinners, but He now lives to make intercession for those who have fled to Him for refuge. After stating that “He [God] is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him” (Christ); the reason for this is given in the words that follow—“seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them” (Heb 7:25). After writing, “My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not,” the apostle continues, “And if any man sin,

¹⁰ **devolved** – passed on to another: said of duties, responsibilities.

we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous” (1Jo 2:1). After declaring: “It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth?” the apostle continues, “It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us” (Rom 8:33-34). The question then resolves itself to this: are the prayers of Christ on our behalf effectual? The Lord Jesus Himself answered this question when He said, “Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me. And I know that thou hearest me always” (Joh 11:41-42).

An illustration of the value of Christ’s intercession is seen in the case of Peter. Knowing that Satan desired to have him that he might sift him as wheat, He said to His follower, “I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not” (Luk 22:32). That His prayer prevailed was demonstrated in the sequel. Peter’s self-confidence failed him, his courage failed him, but his faith did not. As soon as the Lord looked upon him after his denial, he went out and “wept bitterly” (Luk 22:62) and a few weeks later we find him in the open streets of Jerusalem boldly contending for the faith. If the “effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much” (Jam 5:16), who can estimate the value of the intercession of the Righteous One?

Deny the eternal security of every believer and you repudiate the value of Christ’s present intercession. Declare that through sinning a believer may perish and you discredit the advocacy of our blessed Mediator. Teach that it is possible for a saint of God to apostatize¹¹ and you contradict the plain testimony of Scripture.

If, through sinning, a believer perished—What?

Then already the believer is robbed of his assurance.

As we have already said, if our ultimate salvation depends upon our continued faithfulness and obedience, and through failure to render these we are lost, then salvation is a future prospect and none can know whether he shall spend eternity in heaven or hell until the hour of his death. Hence assurance of a perfect salvation based upon the promises of God becomes impossible. In such a case the believer in Christ must live in daily fear lest he fail to render unto God the required obedience. No longer can he say, “We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose” (Rom 8:28), for he knows not but that he may commit some sin which shall cause all things to work together for his everlasting destruction. He is unable to say, “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 [which includes Satan], shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom 8:38-39), for some unfaithfulness on his part may separate him. In a

¹¹ **apostatize** – to abandon the faith.

word, he is robbed of all present peace and sense of security, and is in bondage to a servile¹² fear. How different is this to the teaching of the Holy Scriptures!

Much more might be written in amplification of what we have said above, but we trust we have argued at sufficient length to show something of the fearful evils which are involved in and follow from a denial of the eternal security of the believer.

Were we to close here (as, unfortunately, some do when treating of this subject) we should fail to insist upon the believer's responsibility; we should be setting a premium upon sin; we should be encouraging loose living, and be in great danger of turning the grace of God into lasciviousness.¹³ What then are the consequences of a believer's sinning? Having considered the negative side, we turn to the positive.

3. What Are the Consequences of a Believer's Sinning?

His communion with God is broken.

The first consequence of Adam's sin was a breaking of his fellowship with the Lord. When in the cool of the day Jehovah walked through the Garden, Adam sought to flee from His presence by hiding away among the trees. His conscience convicted him; he had no longer any relish for spiritual things; communion was broken. Such is always the case. How can two walk together except they be agreed? God cannot tolerate the indulgence of known sin. Once sin is allowed a place in the life, fellowship with God becomes impossible. Sometimes for days together the clouds will come in between and hide the sun from the earth. It is no longer visible: its genial warmth is no longer enjoyed, though its position in relation to the earth remains the same. Presently the dark vapor disappears, and once more King Sol gladdens the hearts of men by his welcome rays. In like manner, the sins of the believer come in between his soul and God, until the smile of His countenance is hidden, and His perfections are no longer enjoyed. Yet His relation to the believer remains unchanged. But it is not until he confesses and forsakes these sins that the cloud is removed and communion is restored.

Let no one think that the interruption of divine communion is a light matter. It is deeply serious. Not only does it mean the loss of peace and joy and the cessation of any further spiritual growth, but what is infinitely sadder, it means the grieving of the Saviour's heart. What He desires almost above everything else is fellowship with His own blood-bought people. One of the most pathetic pictures presented in the Bible is that found in Revelation 3:20—"Behold, I stand at the door, and knock; if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me." It is not here a question of salvation but of communion. "Supping"

¹² **servile** – characteristic of a slave; cringing; abject.

¹³ **lasciviousness** – characterized by lust or lewdness.

is always the symbol and expression of fellowship. It is for this the Saviour craves, and sinning denies it Him!

His joy of salvation is lost.

One of the results of David's terrible fall was the loss of his joy of God's salvation. "Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation" (Psa 51:12), was his heart-broken cry. Note, he does not say, "Restore unto me thy salvation," but "Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation." By his wicked conduct he had lost the enjoyment of it. In proportion that the believer allows sin a place in his daily life, he loses his relish for spiritual things: his love for the Word diminishes, his delight in prayer vanishes, his heart is empty and dissatisfied. Not only so, he is miserable. "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" (Rom 7:24) becomes, more and more, his plaint. When Peter had denied the Lord, we read that he went out and "wept"—wept not profusely but bitterly, showing his joyless and miserable condition.

His power for service is destroyed.

Sad, unspeakably sad, is this. Appreciation of the salvation which is ours, gratitude to the One who has done so much for us, compassion for the souls of the lost, obedience to the Saviour's commands, all demand that we should publish abroad the glad tidings of divine grace. But how can I bear the vessels of the Lord if my own hands are unclean? How can I tell others of Christ's power to deliver from sin if I am living in it myself? How can I speak of the joy of salvation if I have lost it? How can I talk of the unspeakable blessedness of walking with God if I am out of communion with Him? We cannot serve God and mammon. We cannot live a life which is displeasing to God and be used in the service of Christ.

His witness for Christ is nullified.

Believers are living epistles read and known of all men and in proportion that sin is allowed in the life we misrepresent Christ before the world. Nay more, in proportion as sin is allowed by us Christ is dishonored and put to an open shame. O that we reflected more upon this! The Church is the Body of Christ. What is a body for? My body provides me with a home in this world. My body is a medium of communication, enabling me to come into contact with other people. My body is a vehicle of transportation; it is that which carries me from one place to another. My body is the instrument and organ through which I express and reveal myself: my eyes are the windows of my soul, my language is an index to the condition of my heart, my countenance reflects my character. And all that the body is to me and does for me, the Church is to Christ and does for Christ. And what is true of the Church collectively is true of the saints individually. Every believer is a member of the Body of Christ. Yea, every believer is himself a miniature body of Christ. I am to reflect Christ, reveal Christ, communicate Christ to others. Am I doing this? Not if I am giving sin a place

in my life. Selfishness, worldliness, the lying tongue, the unforgiving spirit—were any of these seen in me I am misrepresenting Christ before the world.

His position in glory is affected.

A place in glory is due solely to the grace of God, but the believer's position in glory is determined by his works, service, obedience as a believer. Every act performed in the name of Christ, every service which was constrained by the love of Christ, every thing done for the glory of Christ, will in the coming day, receive its due reward. In proportion as we have failed to use our talents in the service of our Master, and instead, have indulged in self-pleasing and carnal gratification, we shall be losers in the world to come. We sometimes sing—"Will there be any stars in my crown?" It might be well for us to inquire whether we shall have any crown at all. There are crowns referred to in the New Testament, and each is a reward. If there has been no daily taking up of the cross there will be no eternal wearing of the crown.

In the next world, believers will no more be all on one common level than they are now. The Lord Jesus said, "But many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first" (Mat 19:30). "There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars: for one star differeth from another star in glory: so also is the resurrection of the dead" (1Co 15:41-42). In proportion as we now enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season shall we be losers in the next world.

The figure which our Lord used at the close of the Sermon on the Mount—the building of a house—is amplified by the apostle in 1 Corinthians 3:11-15: "For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire." Every Christian is a builder. The foundation upon which he builds is Christ Himself. The materials he uses are the deeds and acts of his every-day life. The testing of our handiwork will take place at the second coming of Christ. The works which will be destroyed are those that were wrought in the energy of the flesh. The works which abide and receive a reward were those that were energized by the Holy Spirit and done out of loving gratitude to Christ. There will be a class who will "suffer loss" (of reward), whose works will be burned up, but who will be saved "yet so as by fire." We have a striking and solemn illustration of this class in the case of Lot. Lot was a "righteous" man (2Pe 2:6-7). But his life did not count for God. Self filled his horizon. He was a worldling, occupied solely with the things of time and sense. Instead of living as a stranger and pilgrim on earth, he went and dwelt in the wicked city of Sodom. The time came when God determined to destroy this sink of iniquity. Because Lot was one of His children God sent an angel and delivered him. But all

Lot's possessions perished, were burned up in Sodom. Personally, he was saved, but he "suffered loss." So will it be in the future. Lot was a pattern case. Those who are putting into their life nothing but wood, hay, stubble—dead works—will be the losers throughout eternity.

His conduct will bring chastisement from the Lord.

God is holy and sin must be punished. The sins of the believer must receive "a just recompense of reward" (Heb 2:2) equally as much as the sins of the unbeliever. The difference between them is not in the fact of punishment but in the time of punishment. The sins of the unbeliever will be punished in the world to come: the sins of the believer are punished in this world, here and now. Such was the experience of Jacob, of Moses, of David. They were chastised severely.

This is a scripture which very clearly sets forth the consequence of a believer's sinning—"If his children forsake my law, and walk not in my judgments; if they break my statutes, and keep not my commandments; then will I visit their transgression with stripes. Nevertheless my loving kindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail" (Psa 89:30-33). If God's children walk disorderly and disobediently they are not cast off or disinherited, but they are chastised with the rod of divine justice. If we sin we shall suffer—suffer in our bodies, in our souls, in our circumstances.

His physical life is endangered.

But suppose the Divine chastisement does not have the desired effect, then what? Suppose that instead of the transgressor humbling himself beneath the mighty hand of God, he hardens his heart? Suppose that instead of confessing and forsaking his sins he deliberately continues therein? In that case God will remove him by the stroke of death. In the first part of this article, we referred to the fact that the Corinthian believers, though guilty of the most awful sins, yet, were still indwelt by the Holy Spirit. But mark now the other side. Referring to other desecration¹⁴ of the Lord's Table the apostle says, "For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep [had died]" (1Co 11:30). Dealing with the same solemn subject the Lord Jesus said, "Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away" (Joh 15:2). That is, removeth it from the earth. The believer is to be a fruit-bearer, but if he fails to fulfill the purpose of his calling then God will not permit him to cumber the ground.

It is to this the Apostle John refers when he says: "There is a sin unto death" (1Jo 5:16). This is physical death, and the sin referred to is committed by a believer—see context. We understand this Scripture to mean—there is a limit to God's forbearance: after the believer has reached a certain point, he then "sins unto death." We

¹⁴ **desecration** – treat as unholy, as not sacred.

have an illustration of this in the case of Moses. For his sin of striking the rock, the Lord cut him off out of the land of the living, refusing to allow him to enter Canaan. But that he was not lost is proven by the fact that he appeared with Elijah on the Mount of Transfiguration. For a Christian to continue in known sin, and especially to remain unaffected by the chastening of the Lord, is to endanger and imperil his life.

Hear now the conclusion of the whole matter: “Be not deceived; God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting” (Gal 6:7-8). May the Lord give both writer and reader a greater hatred of sin, a greater fear of displeasing Him, a greater desire to cleave to Him more closely.

4. Preservation and Perseverance

Benefits of the truth of divine preservation

The precious truth of divine preservation is designed for the deepening of the Christian’s gratitude. It makes known to him the fullness of that grace which God bestows upon His people. It declares that He who has begun a good work in them, will continue and complete it (Phil 1:6). It assures us that nothing shall ever separate them from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus their Lord (Rom 8:35-39). It reveals the blessed fact that the power of God is engaged to protect them from evil and deliver them from their foes: God “hath raised up an horn of salvation for us...that we should be saved from our enemies” (Luk 1:69, 71). What a song of thanksgiving should this raise in the hearts of the redeemed!

Again, this blessed truth of the saints’ security is intended as a divine tonic for our drooping spirits. Fighting the good fight of faith, yet how often the battle seems to be going against us! Were it not for the comforting assurance of God’s promises we might well be in doubt as to the ultimate issue. Living in a hostile world, Satan and his hosts seeking to bring about our destruction, having no might of our own, despair would fill our hearts were God to leave us to ourselves. But blessed be His name, He does not. His ear is open to our cries, His arm ever ready to defend us. “The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them” (Psa 34:7).

A dangerous doctrine

Now like every other truth revealed in Scripture, the divine preservation of the saints is capable of being perverted and “wrested” to men’s destruction (2Pe 3:16). Religious hypocrites, empty professors, baptized worldlings, make a wrong use of it whereby the truth of God is dishonored. They draw from it a peace and joy to which they are not entitled. They assume, without warrant, that they are saved, and though

they have none of the marks of regeneration and bear no spiritual fruit, nevertheless they persuade themselves that God will carry them through to heaven. Satan has deceived them into thinking that some time in the past, years ago, they believed in Christ, and discovering that the Bible teaches “once saved, always saved,” they go on in a carnal confidence from which the great majority are never aroused until they awake in hell.

Because this blessed truth of God’s preservation of His children has been so perverted by multitudes who are not His children, not a few have concluded it is a “dangerous doctrine,” and that it is better for the pulpit to be silent thereon. But this is a pitting of their worthless reason against the infinite wisdom of God. He has published it plainly enough in His Word, and so should His servants. Moreover, to follow such a course would be withholding from the children part of their necessary “bread”. The abuse of a doctrine is no proof that it is a harmful one. If all men were gluttons, that would be no argument for my declining to eat any food, but it would be a caution for me to use it temperately.

Divine preservation and human perseverance

God Himself has safeguarded the truth of divine preservation by inseparably linking it with the complimentary truth of human perseverance. Nowhere has God promised to preserve anybody while he is following a course of self-will and self-pleasing. It is not in the path of fleshly indulgence and conformity to this world, but in the highway of holiness that His protecting grace is found. If I deliberately drink poison no praying will deliver me from its deadly effects. If I neglect the means of grace then my soul will starve. If I presume upon God’s goodness and expect Him to shield me when I deliberately run into the place of temptation, then I shall be justly left to reap as I have sown. The little word “if” is often used as the Spirit’s sentinel to protect this precious truth. “If ye continue in my word then are ye my disciples indeed” (Joh 8:31). “We are made partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end” (Heb 3:14). “If ye do these things, ye shall never fall” (2Pe. 1:10). “If that which ye have heard from the beginning remain in you, ye also shall continue in the Son, and in the Father” (1Jo 2:24). It is not these things which conduct us into Christ, but they evidence that we are in Him. It is because there is a spurious faith, a false profession, an imitation of God’s work of grace, that the Spirit so often emphasizes the fact it is only as we press forward along the narrow way of practical godliness that our perseverance proves our faith to be genuine.

Walking in obedience to God’s commands and precepts is no meritorious condition of earning salvation, but it is the proof that we are saved. Bringing forth fruit to the glory of God does not unite us to the true Vine, but makes it manifest that we are united to Him. Denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, mortifying our members which are upon the earth, taking up the cross and following Christ, do not secure a title to heaven, but show that we are journeying heavenward. A steady perseverance

in the use of the divine means of grace, in running the race that is set before us, and in pressing onwards to a closer walk with Christ, are the evidences that we are blest with persevering grace, and “are not of them who draw back unto perdition, but of them that believe to the saving of the soul” (Heb 10:39).

We need to be on our guard against a one-sided view of salvation. While it be true that one who is born of the Spirit has been saved, it is equally true that, from another standpoint, his salvation is yet future: see Romans 13:11; Hebrews 9:28; 1 Peter 1:5. The Christian has been saved from the penalty of sin, but he is now being saved from the power and pollution of sin. He has been “delivered from the wrath to come” (1Th 1:10), but he now needs delivering from the assaults of Satan, from the temptations of an enticing world, from the solicitations of the “flesh” which still dwells within him. The Christian is yet in the place of danger. Not yet has he entered his eternal rest; so far from it, he is called upon to “fight the good fight of faith” (1Ti 6:12) and to take unto him “the whole armour of God” (Eph 6:11).

It is the fact that the Christian is yet in the place of danger which gives force to the warnings of Scripture. These are as necessary to him as are the promises and precepts. There are certain danger signals the Spirit has set up, and which it is the part of wisdom to heed. “For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die” (Rom 8:13): here we learn what would be the inevitable end were a certain line of conduct persisted in. Such a word as this can only be disregarded at our imminent peril. Carnal presumption may ignore and defy it, but the righteous will heed it. Though every true saint has the infallible assurance that “The Lord will perfect that which concerneth me”, nevertheless he at once adds, “forsake not the works of thine own hands” (Psa 138:8).

God’s promises are the foundation of our prayers, being the ground upon which faith rests. But these promises were never designed to render the means of grace needless. Rather are they given to stir us up to make diligent use of them, but a corrupt heart turns even the grace of God into lasciviousness, nor will any legal terrors prevent this. The thunders and lightnings, and the earthquake which shook Mount Sinai, greatly terrified Israel, yet a few days later we find them dancing merrily around the golden calf. Such is fallen human nature: almost killed with fear at some awful providence, yet laughing at that fear as soon as the shock is over. Nothing but the grace of God can set the heart right and keep it settled.

The doctrine of divine preservation affords a stable prop to upright hearts, yet it lends no wanton cloak to corrupt hearts. It brings a cordial to revive the faint, but has a guard to check the froward.¹⁵ That guard, as we have seen, is the qualifying “if” to “present you holy and unblamable and unreprouable in his sight, if ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel” (Col 1:22-23). When Christ says that He gives unto His sheep “eternal life, and that they shall never perish” (Joh 10:28), He affirms their everlasting security. But when

¹⁵ **froward** – stubbornly willful; contrary.

the Holy spirit announces that it is through “faith and patience” that we “inherit the promises” (Heb 6:12), we are thereby taught that actual perseverance in the way of faith and holiness must be our evidence that we are of His sheep. A belief in the doctrine of divine preservation is worthless and useless if it be unaccompanied with the grace of perseverance. The doctrine of divine preservation provides no shelter to either laziness or licentiousness. If preservation is promised to the saints, then I must be found pressing forward along the path of duty, using the means of grace or else the doctrine will condemn me. Christians are exhorted to make their “calling and election sure” (2Pe 1:10), and this, not by taking anything for granted, but by using “all diligence” so as to be assured by adding unto faith, courage, knowledge, self-control, patience, godliness, brotherly-kindness, love. We are to prove our grace by a growth in grace. We are to evidence that we are good-ground hearers by bringing forth fruit. There is real need for such exhortations as the above: appearance of grace and faith are often found, which sparkle and flash for a time, like meteors in the sky, and then vanish away.

There are some who, like the foolish virgins, bear a lighted lamp and keep up a Christian profession, and yet have no oil in their vessels—no grace in their hearts. There are stony-ground hearers who receive the Word with eagerness, yea with joy, and yet have no root in themselves. There are some of whom God gives an-other heart, as He did to Saul (1Sa 10:9), but not a new heart; and such may prophesy for a season, as Saul did, and taste the joy which prophets taste, and yet be rejected from the kingdom as Saul was. “Many be called, but few chosen” (Mat 20:16).

No dependence can be placed upon a past experience, nor a present reformation of life, nor upon short-lived impressions either of sorrow or joy; a steady and continuous growth in grace and in the (experimental) knowledge of the Lord Jesus must be sought as the crowning evidence of regeneration. But may not a real Christian backslide and then be restored? Yes, he may, but not without a deep and bitter repentance for his fall. “And it come to pass, when he heareth the words of this curse, that he bless himself in his heart, saying, I shall have peace, though I walk in the imagination of mine heart, to add drunkenness to thirst. The Lord will not spare him, but then the anger of the Lord and his jealousy shall smoke against that man, and all the curses that are written in this book shall lie upon him” (Deu 29:19-20). On the other hand, “whoso confesseth and forsaketh his sins shall have mercy” (Pro 28:13). ❧