

Perseverance of the Saints

Disputants: David Landon and Keith Sharp

Propositions

Resolved: The Scriptures teach that it is possible for a child of God to be lost.

Affirmed: _____ (Keith Sharp, Church of Christ)

Denied: _____ (David Landon, Reformed
Presbyterian Church)

Resolved: The Scriptures teach that it is impossible for a child of God to be lost.

Affirmed: _____ (David Landon, Reformed Presbyterian
Church)

Denied: _____ (Keith Sharp, Church of Christ)

Affirmative

Keith Sharp

Thanks to my friend David Landon for engaging in this debate, our fifth on Calvinism.

Proposition: Resolved: The Scriptures teach that it is possible for a child of God to be lost. Definitions: "The Scriptures": the 66 inspired, biblical books (2 Timothy 3:16-17), "teach": "cause to know," "possible": "falling within the bounds of what may be done," "child of God": one who has come to God through obedient faith and is justified and saved (Galatians 3:8,26-27; Ephesians 2:8), "lost": condemned and destined to spend eternity in hell (Matthew 16:26; 10:28).

The proposition does not impugn the power, love, or grace of God. God has the "power" to keep the saved in a saved condition (2 Timothy 1:12). No outside force can separate us from His love and grace (Romans 8:31-39).

Rather, I affirm human free will. The alien sinner may freely choose to come to God through Christ and be saved, and the child of God may freely choose to leave Christ and be lost.

Nor does my proposition cause the faithful Christian to live in doubt and fear. Rather, it gives much greater consolation than Calvinism. I have confidence in my salvation (1 John 5:13). I believe that God has granted all men the power to choose life or death (Deuteronomy 30:11-20). As long as I continue to choose life by faithfully obeying Christ, my salvation is secure. The Calvinist can never know with certainty he is one of God's elect and believes there is nothing he can do about it. Thus, he must live his entire life in fear and doubt.

The possibility of the apostasy of a child of God is taught from Genesis to Revelation by many warnings against falling, by examples of those who did fall, by teaching how to prevent falling, by instructing what to do if we fall, and by parable.

Old Testament

Warning

Old Testament Israelites were children of God (Deuteronomy 14:1). Moses cautioned them, "beware, lest you forget the Lord who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage." (Deuteronomy 6:12) He warned them of the consequences of forgetting the Lord:

Then it shall be, if you by any means forget the Lord your God, and follow other gods, and serve them and worship them, I testify

against you this day that you shall surely perish. (Deuteronomy 8:19)

Their apostasy would bring about, not only national defeat, but also individual spiritual ruin (Ezekiel 18:4,24). And Old Testament Israel is an example of the same danger for us (1 Corinthians 10:1-13; Hebrews 3 - 4).

Example

Saul, king of Israel, was a child of God but was lost. The Lord anointed Saul (1 Samuel 9:15-17; 10:1). As a young man, Saul was very humble (1 Samuel 9:21; 10:20-22). The Spirit of the Lord came upon him, turned him into another man, and gave him a new heart (1 Samuel 10:6-10). God was with him (1 Samuel 10:7), and he prophesied among the prophets (1 Samuel 10:10-12). But Saul sinned by usurping the priestly duty to offer sacrifice to the Lord (1 Samuel 13:8-14). He further transgressed by failing to obey all the Lord's command (1 Samuel 15:11). When the prophet Samuel rebuked him, he was stubborn and rebellious (1 Samuel 15:19-23). Thus, the Lord rejected him (1 Samuel 15:23). "[T]he Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and a distressing spirit from the Lord troubled him." (1 Samuel 16:14) The Lord departed from Him and became his enemy (1 Samuel 28:16). He finally committed suicide (1 Samuel 31:4-6). "So Saul died for his unfaithfulness which he had committed against the Lord..." (1 Chronicles 10:13)

Prevention

Moses instructed Israel how to keep from falling.

See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil, in that I command you today to love the Lord your God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments, His statutes, and His judgments, that you may live and multiply; and the Lord your God will bless you in the land which you go to possess. (Deuteronomy 30:15-16)

Why tell Israel how to avoid a danger they did not face?

Solution

He informed them what to do if they fell.

Now it shall come to pass, when all these things come upon you, the blessing and the curse which I have set before you, and you call them to mind among all the nations where the Lord your God drives you, and you return to the Lord your God and obey His voice, according to all that I command you today, you and your

children, with all your heart and with all your soul, that the Lord your God will bring you back from captivity, and have compassion on you, and gather you again from all the nations where the Lord your God has scattered you. (Deuteronomy 30:1-3)

Why tell Israel how to be saved from a condition they could not be in? Parable

Isaiah taught Israel through parable the danger of falling. He declared, the "vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel." (Isaiah 5:7) The Lord "expected" His vineyard "to bring forth good grapes, [b]ut it brought forth wild grapes." (Isaiah 5:2) He warned, "I will lay it waste...." (Isaiah 5:6) Unless Israelites could be lost, what is the meaning of the parable?

New Testament

Warnings

In 1 Corinthians 10:1-13 Paul uses the example of Old Testament Israel to warn Christians of the danger of falling. Five times he reminds us that "all" Israel received spiritual blessings, and those blessings were from Christ. (verses 1-3). "But with most of them God was not well pleased, for their bodies were scattered in the wilderness." (verse 5) The apostle specified five ways in which they fell (verses 6-10). 603,548 wilderness graves are mute yet powerful arguments for the possibility of apostasy (Numbers 1:45-46; 32:11-12).

Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. (verses 11-12)

One cannot fall unless he once stood. Why warn of a nonexistent danger?

Example

Judas Iscariot was a disciple and apostle of Christ (Matthew 10:1-4; Acts 1:17), appointed an apostle by Jesus Himself (Mark 3:14-19). He was sent by the Lord to preach (Matthew 10:5-7), had the Spirit of God (Matthew 10:19-20), and was empowered to cast out demons (Matthew 10:8; cf. 12:26). The Father gave him to Christ (John 17:12). But Judas became a devil (John 6:70), Satan entered him (John 13:27), and he betrayed the Lord (Matthew 26:14-16, 47-49). He "by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place." (Acts 1:25) His place was not paradise! He was "the son of perdition." ("destruction"; Arndt & Gingrich. 102) (John 17:12) "It would have been good for that man if he had not been born." (Matthew 26:24) Judas was a child of God and is lost.

Prevention

"For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live." (Romans 8:13) The apostle addresses "saints" (Romans 1:7), "brethren" (Romans 8:12), "children of God" (verse 16), and "heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ." (verse 17) To live, children of God must "put to death the deeds of the body." If we "live according to the flesh" we "will die." Living "according to the flesh" is the result of being "carnally minded." (verses 5-8) Some "saints" in Corinth were indeed "carnal and behaving like mere men...." (1 Corinthians 1:2; 3:1-4) For children of God to live, we must "put to death the deeds of the body." Some children of God are carnal. Therefore, some children of God die.

Solution

Simon the sorcerer heard Philip preach Christ, the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ (Acts 8:5,12). He believed and was baptized, just as the other Samaritans (verses 12-13). He did what Jesus said to do to be saved (Mark 16:15-16). But he sinned by trying to buy the power to impart the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:14-19). Thus, he was about to "perish" (verse 20), his heart was "not right in the sight of God" (verse 21), and he was "poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity." (verse 23) Peter commanded him, "Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you." (verse 22) Simon did fall and was told what to do about it.

Parable

Christ is the true vine, and His disciples are the branches (John 15:1,5). Branches in Christ that do not bear fruit will be taken away, cast out, thrown away, and burned (John 15:2,6). Conclusion

Without doubt, The Scriptures teach that it is possible for a child of God to be lost.

Work Cited

Arndt, W.F. and F.W. Gingrich, **A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament.**

Negative

David Landon

Could God create a rock so big that He wouldn't be able to lift it? The answer is no; God cannot create a rock He cannot lift. In other words, if He can build it, He can lift it. And yet, according to Keith, God has created something He cannot

move,- man's free will. Keith writes that "No outside force can separate us from His love and grace (Romans 8:31-39)." By limiting God's control over things that separate us to outside forces, Keith imagines he preserves free will's sovereignty. But the apostle writes with broad strokes in this text, telling us in verse 39, that no created thing shall separate us from God's love. I would ask Keith, is free will a created, or an uncreated thing? If created, then it is under God's sovereignty according to our text. If uncreated, then it is equal with God. Indeed, sovereign over God, if the words I quoted from Keith in our last debate are to be believed, "You must allow the Spirit of God to lead you through the word of God," (from the tract. You must be born again, emphasis added), God Himself cannot know if He will be successful in saving, or in preserving. His people. Free will is sovereign, and although God can see it in its effects. He cannot tell how it will work, "from where it cometh, and where it goeth." More could be said about free will, but I leave it for a future debate.

There are several fundamental distinctions that must be kept in mind in order to a proper understanding of the doctrine of perseverance.

1. The church, visible and invisible. Keith blurs this distinction by writing, "Old Testament Israelites were children of God." Had Keith written, "Some Old Testament Israelites were children of God," he would have been correct, but then, he could not have demonstrated the apostasy of the saints; in this case true Israelites, for, as Paul tells us in Romans 9:6-8, "they are not all Israel, who are of Israel." Again, "They who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God." In Romans 11 Paul seems to take up Keith's position, "Israel hath not obtained that which he seeketh for," but then he immediately adds, "but the election hath obtained it." God has always preserved His people. His elect, the true Israel.

2. Believers, true and temporary. Keith's examples of Saul from the Old, and of Judas from the New Testament are most unfortunate. Scripture gives no indication that these two were ever anything more than temporary believers. God did not give Saul a "new heart" as Keith says, but rather, "another heart," I Samuel 10:9. Jesus did not say that Judas "became a devil," as Keith says. "Is a devil," are the words written in John 6:70. Scripture reveals that there is a great difference between true and temporary believers. The one receives common grace, the other special, Heb. 6:4-6. The one hears the outward call of the gospel, the other receives also the inner call of the Spirit, Matthew 22:14. There are many who are called by God to a particular office or ministry, and receive gifts and abilities to enable them to fulfill their calling. Saul and Judas are examples of such a call. They were but servants, and not sons of God; "And the servant abideth not in the house forever; but the Son abideth ever," John 8:35.

3. Faith, genuine and spurious. Temporary "believers" are the result of temporary faith. There are three acts present in every exercise of true, saving faith. They are knowledge, assent, and trust. An unregenerate person might have a great

knowledge of Scripture, and give assent to its propositions, and yet, for all of that, not put their trust in it. The devils themselves are said to "believe" after this manner, James 2:19. All the regenerate trust in the Lord, and will persevere,- "he that is begotten of God keepeth himself," 1 John 5:18. They who "go out" were never "of us" in the first place, 1 John 2:19.

4. Covenants, works or grace- (law and gospel). What can be more different than law and gospel; it is the difference between God saying, "do and you shall live," and, on the other hand, "live and receive strength to do." It is just the difference between the Calvinistic understanding of the covenants, and Keith's. Scripture says we "are not under the law, but under grace," Romans 6:14. Keith would argue that "not under law" means not under the law of Moses; that the phrase does not rule out our being under some supposed "law of Christ." Obedience to this "law of Christ" is essential for salvation. (For proof of this, see the book The Christian and Sin, co-edited by Keith.) This is still the law formula, "do and you shall live." To suspend salvation and final perseverance on man's strength and efforts is the essence of a covenant of works. Ever since the fall, all who have been saved have been brought in through the covenant of grace. Old Testament saints were saved by trusting in Christ, whose person and work was perfectly represented to them in the ceremonial law. The law of Moses was added to the covenant of grace with the purpose of being a schoolmaster; not as a way of salvation. Christ did not abrogate the law of Moses, Matt. 5:17,18. What has changed (since Gen.3:15) is the believers relationship to the law. We are no longer under its curse, Christ having been made a curse for us.

5. End, means, and conditions. God has absolutely promised to preserve His elect. The elect's perseverance in obedience is one of the means God uses to accomplish this end. When we speak of means and ends, we should be careful, as the 17th century Reformed theologian Francis Turretin pointed out, not to confound promises concerning the end with promises concerning the means. Promises concerning the end may be conditional, but not those concerning the means, for that would result in there being conditions of conditions, which is nonsense. It would amount to God promising perseverance to man provided he perseveres. "We say," writes Turretin, "that the promise is given to the believer that he may do his duty, not because he does it." God, then, has promised salvation to all the elect. The elect do not arrive at this end except by the God appointed means of faith, repentance, and perseverance. There is, however, no uncertainty as to whether these means will be used; God works in His people "both to will and to do of His good pleasure," Philippians 2:13.

Why then does God set forth conditions, and give threats and warnings, if in fact those things warned against can never happen to the saints? "Why," asks Keith, "warn of a nonexistent danger?" We answer, with Turretin, that "a condition puts nothing into being, but denotes only a necessary connection of the antecedent with the consequent." For instance, there is a necessary and absolute connection between a life of sin (antecedent) and final damnation (consequent). It is for this

reason that the Scriptures call us to self-examination. We see the warnings and conditions set forth in Scripture. We read also of certain professors of Christ who fell away, thus evidencing themselves to be either temporary believers or hypocrites. To the truly regenerate, these warnings and conditions become the very means that God uses to make certain the salvation of His people. In Jeremiah 32:40 God promises to put His fear into our hearts, that we will not depart from Him. But how does He do this in a way that is consistent with our free agency? In spite of false accusations, Calvinists do not represent God's dealings with man, after the manner of a robot. Rather, God works in all agents according to their nature, causally working in the physical creation, physically, and in the moral creation, morally. "I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall," etc, is cause and effect, and God's purpose is accomplished precisely by means of conditions and warnings. When His children do not heed His warnings He disciplines them, Hebrews 12. "God often writes on our heart, by putting stripes on our back," (Thomas Manton).

These distinctions completely answer Keith's paper. Warnings and conditions are exactly how we would expect God to deal with free agents. Keith's examples of the Israelites, and of Saul and Judas, are but instances where men, being the recipients of God's common grace and gifting, moved within the orbit of the visible community of God's people. They professed Christ, and from this profession apostatized. They never truly possessed Christ. Though members of the visible and outward vineyard, Isa. 5 and John 5, they never partook, by faith, of the vital sap of the vine.

We conclude that God's true children cannot lose their salvation.

Response

Keith Sharp

I appreciate Dave's willingness to defend his conviction, though I believe he is terribly mistaken.

He didn't respond to these points: (1) I have confidence in my salvation, whereas the Calvinist must live his entire life in doubt; (2) some saints in Corinth were carnal and thus spiritually dead; (3) Simon fell (Acts 8) and was told how to be restored; and (4) the Parable of the Vine and the Branches (John 15:1-8) teaches that some branches attached to the vine will be cut off, cast into the fire, and burned. Each of the latter three prove my proposition.

The issue is not divine power but divine will. God has the power to overrule human free will, but He restrains His power, invites and pleads, but does not force (Matthew 11:28-30; Revelation 3:20; 22:17).

The context of Romans 8:39 (verses 35-38) is entirely of things outside ourselves. No outside power can force the believer to leave Christ, but we can voluntarily leave him.

Calvinists imagine that affirming free will is denying divine sovereignty. Nonsense! God allows us to live as we will, but He will sovereignly judge us according to our use of that will (Galatians 6:7-8).

Divine foreknowledge is not the issue. Christ foreknew Judas would betray Him (John 6:70-71), but foreknowledge did not mean Judas had to betray Him, else God was responsible for Judas' sin. The logical consequences of Calvinism is to charge God with the responsibility for all mankind's sins.

Yes, there was an Israel (spiritual) within Israel (national). But all national Israel were God's covenant people and children (Exodus 24:6-8; Deuteronomy 14:1). Nonetheless, most of them fell in the wilderness and became our example of the danger of falling away (1 Corinthians 10:1-13).

Calvinists assume and assert that any believer who falls away wasn't a "true" believer. "If you get it, you can't lose it; if you lose it, you never had it." What's the difference between a "new heart" and "another heart"? Did the Holy Spirit give Saul an evil, unbelieving heart? If so, it's God's fault Saul was lost. God was with Saul (1 Samuel 10:7). Is God with an unregenerated child of the devil? The Father gave Judas to Christ (John 17:12). He was one of God's elect, and he is lost.

Hebrew 6:4-6 speaks of those "who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come..." That's certainly uncommon "common grace"! And they're warned about falling away (verses 6).

Matthew 22:14 doesn't mention an "inward call of the Holy Spirit."

A "son" (John 8:35) can become a slave by returning to sin (Romans 6:3-6,16).

The justified believer, in contrast with demons (James 2:19), "is justified by works, and not by faith only." (verse 24) Calvinists deny it. People who once knew, assented, and trusted can lose their faith (Hebrews 3:1,12-13).

Why didn't Dave quote all of 1 John 5:18? "We know that whoever is born of God does not sin; but he who has been born of God keeps himself, and the wicked one does not touch him." Do the elect sin? The one "born of God" is the one who "keeps himself." That's certainly not Calvinism!

Christ has a law (Galatians 6:2; 1 Corinthians 9:19-22). We are freed from sin and made children of God by obeying it through faith (Romans 8:2; 6:17-18;

Galatians 3:26-27). To be justified by the law of Moses, one must keep it sinlessly (Galatians 3:10), for its animal sacrifices cannot remove sin (Hebrews 10:4). Thus, the law which brings the curse is the law of Moses (Galatians 3:10, 16-17). The law of Christ, the gospel (Romans 1:16-17; 8:2), offers pardon from sin through the blood sacrifice of Christ (Hebrews 9:11-14; 1 John 2:1-2), when we obey the conditions of pardon (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; 8:22; 1 John 1:9). Grace came through Christ (John 1:17), by the new covenant (Hebrews 8:6-13), which took effect after His death (Hebrews 9:15-17). The law of Moses passed away when it was fulfilled (Matthew 5:17-18) in Christ (Galatians 3:19-25).

Neither Francis Turretin nor any other Reformer is the standard of truth. Calvinistic, philosophical double talk doesn't even make good nonsense. Calvinists contend God warns His children about falling, although they can't, and disciplines those who ignore the warnings against doing what they can't do! "You can, and you can't; you do, and you don't; you will, and you won't; you shall, and you sha'n't." God doesn't lie! If God warns of the danger of falling, and He does throughout Scripture, there is a danger, not of never having stood, but of falling. Calvinists need to turn from their arrogant, self-contradictory ramblings of human wisdom to simple, trusting faith in Christ and His Word (1 Corinthians 1:18-31).

Yes, Calvinism inescapably leads to the conclusion that man is robotic. Calvinists teach that the unregenerate cannot "will to any spiritual good accompanying salvation" (Westminster Confession. 11:3) and that the regenerate cannot will to do anything to lose their salvation. The unregenerate are robots of Satan, and the regenerate are robots of the Lord. No philosophical double talk will negate those facts.

Certainly God works in His elect (Philippians 2:13), but we must "work out" our "own salvation with fear and trembling." (verse 12)

God puts His fear into the heart of believers so they will not depart (Jeremiah 32:40), but they can "be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin" and develop "an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God...." (Hebrews 3:1, 12-13)

Dave confused the Parable of the Vineyard (Isaiah 5) with the Parable of the Vine and the Branches (John 15). God could not have blessed His vineyard, Israel, more (Isaiah 5:4). He expected good fruit from them (Ibid). They were His elect, but they fell.

The Scriptures teach that it is possible for a child of God to be lost.

Affirmative

David N. Landon

Resolved: The Scriptures teach that it is impossible for a child of God to be lost.

"Calvinism is the gospel." So said the 19th century Baptist Charles Spurgeon. If that is true we would expect the five points to be logically consistent with each other. The doctrine of perseverance follows necessarily from the first four points. It is certain that God, having elected, ransomed, and called dead sinners to himself, will finish His work. In this debate it will be demonstrated that perseverance, considered apart from the other points, is both Scriptural and reasonable.

The words *impossible* and *lost*, and the phrase *child of God* in our proposition require definition. For a source I will use the 17th chapter of the Westminster Confession (WCF) as its three sections correspond perfectly to our three terms.

1. Impossible The WCF states that those whom God has accepted in His Beloved, and effectually called, can neither totally nor finally fall from a state of grace (ch.17 sec. 1). Reformed tradition has always distinguished between a physical and moral impossibility. The saint's safety does not lie in a physical or natural impossibility of falling. If final perseverance were in any way suspended on their own strength or endeavors, none would be saved. Perseverance is (in its remote cause at least) God's work, resulting from election and regeneration. By the new birth, God's people receive a new nature, and have implanted within them a new principle of holiness enabling them to please God by a living and spiritual obedience. "Whosoever is born of God... cannot sin," 1 John 3:9. The reason given is, "because he is born of God." It is a moral impossibility for a child of God to perish.

2. Child Of God Section Two of the confession's 17th chapter gives five marks by which the children of God are distinguished from the unregenerate. This section is prefaced by a negative, "This perseverance of the saints depends not upon their own free will..." It is precisely here that most theologies place the burden of perseverance. Having decided to allow Jesus into one's heart, the same Jesus may be expelled by a subsequent act of the will. Perseverance is made almost entirely a matter of free will. Such a view represents men as making themselves to differ one from another, contrary to Scripture. Five privileges there are then, that distinguish the children of God, and tend to their preservation:

1) The decree of election, — This is said to "flow from the free and unchangeable love of God the Father." "I have loved thee with an everlasting love; therefore, with loving-kindness have I drawn thee," Jeremiah 31:3. "I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed," Malachi 3:6.

2) The merit of Christ, — It is the Reformed tradition alone, that keeps the biblical distinction between justification and sanctification. Justification is an act of God declaring us righteous, not for anything in us, but for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and received by faith. Sanctification is a work of God wherein He, by His Word and Spirit, makes us righteous. Justification is never repeated, and does not increase as the believer matures. Sanctification is a process, definitive in its beginning, increasing throughout the believer's life, and perfected at death. One believer may be more sanctified than another, but never more justified. A true believer cannot lose his salvation, because his standing before God (justification) is based upon a perfect righteousness. See Hebrews 9:12-14; 2 Corinthians 5:21.

3) The intercession of Christ, — Christ, having ascended into heaven, intercedes for His people, Romans 8:34. His request is that His sheep might be kept, and that they all would be with Him, and behold His glory, John 17:11,24.

4) The abiding of the Spirit, - The Holy Spirit abides in the people of God forever, John 14:16,17. By the operation of the Spirit, we are said to be sealed "unto the day of redemption," Eph.4:30. This perpetual indwelling of the Spirit is inconsistent with any theory of final apostasy.

5) The nature of the covenant of grace, — There was but one covenant of works, which, being established with Adam, was broken and rendered useless as to the end for which it was first made. This covenant being broken, God then made a new covenant with Adam, commonly called the covenant of grace, Gen.3:15. The contrast between these two covenants is remarkable. The first said "do and you shall live." The second said "live and you shall be enabled to do." The first brought death upon one transgression. The second was of many transgressions unto justification. The first gave no promise of perseverance. The second did, "I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me," Jer.32:40.

More could be added to these five entries; the Puritan Owen adds proofs from the nature and promises of God, and Turretin argues from the nature of the spiritual life, which, being eternal, is not subject to destruction.

3. Lost Keith and I are both agreed that "lost" means eternal separation from God. No consideration of the doctrine of perseverance would be complete however, without a discussion of the temporary faithlessness of the believer, and, on the other hand, the temporary faith of the unbeliever. Section three of the confession's 17th chapter describes the first of these. The truly regenerate may, through temptation and the "prevalency of corruption remaining within them.. .fall into grievous sins; and, for a time, continue therein." Such declensions result in hardened hearts, wounded consciences, and temporal judgments. See Ps.51; Rev.2:4; Mark 6:52. These backslidings in God's people are neither total nor final, for. He that began the work will finish it, Phil. 1:6.

There is such a thing as counterfeit faith. Temporary "believers," not having the root, "dureth" for awhile, but soon fall away, Matthew 13:20,21. That many fair professors begin well and yet perish, does nothing against God's promises that He will preserve His elect.

In addition to the above scriptures, the following verses may be cited, as evidence that God preserves the souls of His people.

Isaiah 54:10 The steadfast love of God will not depart from His people. The reason for this is found in verse 17, "...their righteousness is from me, saith the Lord." Matt.18:12-14 Jesus, the good shepherd, will always find His lost sheep.

John 5:24 The believer has eternal life. Compare with John 6:47. The believer, at the point of conversion, has already passed from death to life.

John 10:27-30 "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me." No one is able to snatch a believer out of the Father's hand. Christ Himself says of these sheep that, "they shall never perish," vs. 28. These verses are not spoken of false sheep, or of wolves in sheep's clothing, but of true sheep, of those who hear the voice of Christ, and who follow Him.

Romans 8:1 There is no condemnation to those in Christ. This entire 8th chapter of Romans is one sustained defense of the doctrine of the saint's perseverance.

Romans 8:29,30 The "golden chain" of predestination ends with glorification. The apostle's conclusion, given in verse 31, says it all,- "If God be for us, who can be against us?"

Romans 8:33-39 Nothing shall be able to separate us from the love of God. There is nothing subjective in this entire passage. Not a word about man's responsibility to keep himself. It is God who justifies, Christ who died, Christ who is raised, and who intercedes.

Ephesians 1:13,14 The sealing of the Spirit is the "guarantee of our inheritance."

1 John 5:4 Whoever is born of God overcomes the world.

Questions for Keith:

1. Is it possible for a true Christian to fall from grace, or from a state of justification, before death, and, if so, can such an one be converted again?
2. Can a person be born again more than once?
3. There are clear promises in Scripture that God will preserve His people. If these promises are conditional, what are the conditions?

4. How can a Christian ever know if he or she is believing or obeying enough to remain in a state of salvation? What happens to assurance of salvation?

This, then, is the sum of what we believe on this doctrine. All the elect do, by the grace of God, persevere. The decree of election, the merit and intercession of Christ, the abiding of the Spirit, the covenant promises of God, and, finally, the very nature of eternal life, together ensure the salvation of all for whom Christ died. The falls and backslidings of God's people are neither total nor final. Final apostasy is evidence that there was never genuine faith present. The faith of God's elect is a persevering, and a works producing faith. The Scriptures teach that it is impossible for a child of God to be lost.

Negative

Keith Sharp

All the passages my friend employs to defend the Calvinistic doctrine "that it is impossible for a child of God to be lost" pertain to God's part in our salvation. If these passages truly uphold his position, we have no part in our own salvation. Calvinists contend there's nothing the lost can do to be justified and nothing a believer can do to be lost. God must unconditionally elect one to salvation, miraculously regenerate him, and supernaturally give him faith. His obedience is not in order to salvation but because of it. Human free will has nothing to do with it; it is all of God. If that's not an affirmation of unconditional salvation and a denial of human free will, what would be?!

Answers to Dave's questions: (1) yes and yes. God has two laws of pardon, one for the alien sinner (one who has never come to Christ, cf. Ephesians 2:11-12) and one for the child of God who sins. The alien sinner must hear (Romans 10:8-17), believe (John 20:30-31), repent (Acts 3:19), confess his faith (Romans 10:8-10), and be baptized (Acts 2:38). The erring child of God must repent, confess his sin, and pray for forgiveness (Acts 8:22; 1 John 1:9). (2) No. (3) "[H]e who endures to the end will be saved." (Matthew 10:22; 24:13; Mark 13:13) (4) We have the witness of the two spirits (Romans 8:16-17). The Holy Spirit "bears witness with" our spirits (verse 16). The Spirit of God testifies what we must do to be saved (e.g., Acts 2:37-40). If our spirits honestly testify we have done this (Acts 2:41), we know we're saved, and we have peace and joy (Philippians 4:1-7; 1 Peter 1:3-9). Calvinists can never know if they are true believers or only "counterfeit," and they can't do anything about it, for they don't believe in free will. Thus, they must constantly live in doubt and fear.

1 John 3:9 doesn't say one born of God "cannot perish"; it says he "cannot sin." If "cannot" here means "impossible," then it is impossible for a child of God to sin. Yet Calvinists concede, "The truly regenerate may...fall into grievous sins." John

taught children of God how to be forgiven of sins (1 John 1:7 - 2:2). If a mother tells her child, "You cannot go into the street," she isn't telling him it's impossible. She's forbidding him to do so. Why forbid the impossible?

My friend has repeatedly misused 1 Corinthians 4:7 to teach that men do not make themselves differ from one another spiritually, and I have just as often answered him. 1 Corinthians 4:7 forbids division among brethren. All receive our knowledge of truth from the same source. Four kinds of soils represent four kinds of human hearts, and three kinds will not be saved (Matthew 13:1-23, *et al*). There are differences in people which either contribute to or hinder their salvation (Acts 17:10-12). But since all have sinned (Romans 3:23) and thus deserve death (Romans 6:23), salvation is by grace and none can earn salvation (Ephesians 2:8-10).

Salvation is not entirely or even "almost entirely" a matter of free will. Salvation is of God (Romans 8:29-30), but whoever wills may come (Revelation 22:17). If I were drowning, Dave threw me a line, and I, by faith in Dave, grabbed the line, would I save myself, or would Dave save me? Would I have anything to brag about, or would my rescue be by Dave's love and grace?

God is unchangeable (Jeremiah 31:3; Malachi 3:6), but He changes His action toward men as they either repent of or turn to sin (Ezekiel chapter 18).

When the Spirit "washed" and "justified" us, He also "sanctified" us (1 Corinthians 6:11). "Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar?" (James 2:21) This was not justification before men, for the only other human present was Isaac, and he was the unwitting sacrifice! (Genesis 22:5-8) The subject of James 2:14-26 is salvation (verse 14). At this time, Abraham had been a child of God many years, but his obedient act of faith caused him to be justified. Calvinists are wrong on both points. There is no justification apart from sanctification, and justification is not a once for all time act.

Scripture nowhere teaches that "the righteousness of Christ," i.e., his sinless life, is "imputed to us." Rather, "faith is accounted for righteousness." (Romans 4:5) If 2 Corinthians 5:21 means God gives us credit for the righteous life of Christ, why doesn't 1 Corinthians 1:30 mean He gives us credit for the Jesus' wisdom? Hebrews 9:12-14 teaches we are made righteous by the perfect sacrifice of Christ, not by His perfect life. It's not an outward coverup; it's an inward cleansing. We don't become "whitewashed tombs" (sinful lives covered by the mantle of the righteous life of Christ) (Matthew 23:27). Rather, the blood of Christ cleanses the "conscience from dead works to serve the living God." (Hebrews 9:14)

For Christ to intercede for us, we must confess our sins (1 John 1:9 - 2:2). Christ interceded for Judas (John 17:11-12), but Judas is lost (Mark 14:21; Acts 1:24-25).

John 14:16-17 is not a promise to all Christians but to the apostles (John 13:1-4, 21-30; cf. Mark 14:17-21; John 14:16-18) and pertained to the apostolic work of inspiration (John 14:26), testimony (John 15:26-27), and revelation (John 16:13-15). Even for them, the abiding presence of the Spirit of truth was conditional. They, as we, had to "bear fruit" and "abide in" the Vine (John 15:1-8).

The "seal" of God (Ephesians 1:13; 4:30) is His stamp of ownership. While the Holy Spirit remained with the Ephesians, He was the guarantee of their inheritance (verse 14). But the Holy Spirit can be quenched (1 Thessalonians 5:19). If children of God turn to sin or unbelief, God casts them away and takes His Holy Spirit from them (Psalm 51:11).

The Scriptures do not call God's law to Adam a covenant, and Genesis 3:15 was a promise of a covenant to come thousands of years after the promise. The covenant of works was the Mosaic law to national Israel (Romans 2:17-25; 3:27-28). It was replaced by the new covenant (Hebrews 8:4-13), which offers perfect cleansing from sin (Hebrews 9:13-14) conditioned upon the obedience of faith (Hebrews 10:19-25). Christians who willfully leave Christ face "a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries." (Hebrews 10:26-31)

The Lord's everlasting blessing of His people (Isaiah 54:10,17; Jeremiah 32:40) depends upon their obedience (Isaiah 55:1-3).

Neither Psalm 51 nor Mark 6:52 touch the issue. The church at Ephesus had "left" their "first love" (Revelation 2:4), and Christ warned them, "Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place--unless you repent." (verse 5)

Calvinistic arguments on "temporary" and "counterfeit" believers is double talk! If they believed then quit believing, they lost their faith! But Calvinists contend this is impossible. There are some "who believe for a while and in time of temptation fall away." (Luke 8:13; Matthew 13:20-21; cf. 1 Timothy 1:18-20; 4:1; 5:8,11-12; 6:20-21; 2 Timothy 2:17-18; Hebrews 3:1-15)

I have no doubt God will finish His work (Philippians 1:6), but we also have work (Philippians 2:12-13). Not all Christians finish their work (Revelation 3:1-2).

Jesus' sheep (Matthew 18:12-14; John 10:27-30) are those who hear His voice and follow Him (John 10:27). If they quit hearing and following, they cease being His sheep.

The child of God has eternal life "in hope" rather than in actual present possession (Titus 1:2; Romans 8:24-25). Faith is the basis of hope (Hebrews 11:1), and, since we can lose our faith (Hebrews 3:12), we can lose our hope.

"There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1), "who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit." (verse 4) The beautiful promises of Romans 8 (cf. verses 29-30,33-39) are for those "who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit." Calvinists admit children of God can walk according to the flesh. If they do, they are condemned (Romans 8:13).

The child of God overcomes the world through faith (1 John 5:4). Since the child of God can lose his faith (Hebrews 3:12), he can lose His victory.

Calvinists believe that a lost sinner cannot do anything to be saved, a child of God cannot do anything to be lost, and if a believer becomes an unbeliever, he never really was a believer to begin with. If you haven't got it, you can't get it; if you get it, you can't lose it; if you lose it, you never had it. Such is the nonsense of human philosophy rather than the truth of divine Scripture.

Response

David N. Landon

Keith's position seems to be that God has promised to preserve us, provided we persevere. (See his answer to my third question.) It should be obvious that this view renders the promises of God nugatory. But do Calvinists maintain, as Keith supposes, that "we have no part in our own salvation?" When Keith says that I quoted only verses that "pertain to God's part in our salvation," he is conveniently forgetting Jeremiah 32:40. God puts His fear in our hearts that we will not depart from Him; that is, that we will endure to the end in obedience and holiness. Calvinists do not ignore the conditions and warnings of Scripture. We say that the covenant of grace in general, and this verse in particular, give an interpretive key for a true understanding of all the texts that have to do with this subject. God's part in salvation secures and guarantees that we will do our part.

Keith's position that salvation can be lost is due, in large part, to his denial of temporary or counterfeit faith. It cannot be denied that James 2:19 speaks of a species of faith (described by the word "believe") that is yet not a saving faith. Not only that, but there have always been many in Keith's own tradition who have admitted the possibility of spurious faith. Jack Cottrell, writing on the role of faith in conversion, gives trust, along with knowledge and assent, as an essential element in saving faith. When these are present, obedience will follow. (Cottrell in *Evangelicalism & The Stone-Campbell Movement*, p72.)

Concerning assurance of salvation,-- "Calvinists," writes Keith, "can never know if they are true believers..." This is a remarkable assertion in view of the fact that the great Christian classics on the doctrine of assurance were Calvinistic. Witness, for example, Jonathan Edward's *Essay on Religious Affections*. The wonder rather, is that those who suspend salvation on their own doing and enduring, can yet find assurance. That they are freely willing to obey today, is no assurance that they will be thus willing tomorrow. We know who we have believed, and are persuaded that He is able to keep that which we have committed unto Him, 2 Timothy 1:12.

What then of free will, "Calvinists," writes Keith, "don't believe in free will;" and must men be shut up to the mercies of a sovereign God? (Read again the last paragraph in Keith's negative.) Calvinists, it must be confessed, do not believe in Keith's understanding of free will. That we have a Biblical view of free will and human liberty will appear in our next debate. But does the sovereignty of God take away from man's freedom? My concern in this debate is with a different question,- what are the implications of placing sovereignty in the will of man? For it is certain there must be a sovereign, and if it is not God, then it is the will. One implication was noted by the Synod of Dordrecht in its rejection of errors under the fifth head of doctrine (perseverance). The synod rejected the error of those who teach, that regardless of all that God has done to preserve the faith of His people, it yet "depends on the pleasure of the will whether it [faith] will persevere or not. For this idea contains an outspoken Pelagianism, and while it would make men free, it makes them robbers of God's honor..."

Keith of course would reject this notion. He protests in his negative that salvation is not [entirely] "a matter of free will." Then follows his illustration, where he is drowning and I throw a line. This illustration clearly contrasts two ways of salvation and as this debate concludes the series on the distinctive doctrines of Calvinism, it may be useful to examine it more closely. The illustration itself is a variation of Keith's *man at the bottom of Mt. Washington* (see atonement debate) and we may return the same twofold answer:

1. Set the case as it truly is,- not Keith only, but all men are drowning, and a line is extended to all men. We teach that all men are dead in sin, that the atonement is a sufficient remedy for the sins of all men, and that all men are commanded to repent. Will Keith tell us why only some men grab the line? He has told us that there "are differences in people ... which contribute to ... their salvation." Why then, do only some grab the line? Are these men smarter? Is their perception of the danger clearer, their trust in the line stronger? Why, of several men reading an account of these things) do only some believe? What answer can Keith give that does not make man his own saviour?

2. The Pharisee and the publican, Luke 18. The fault with the Pharisee was not in his recognition that he differed from other men, nor in his giving God thanks. It was, after all, a Calvinist, who, upon seeing a man in the gutter, said "There but

for the grace of God. go I." The things by which he differed from other men were self-produced. What if our Pharisee were an evangelical, and put his trust, not in tithing and fasting, but, rather, in his faith in Christ? Is this statement, "I thank thee that I am not as other men. I have faith in Christ," any improvement over what we find in Luke 18?

Here then are two systems of salvation. The Reformed faith admits that salvation depends (in a sense) on free will and obedience. But ultimately, and decisively, it depends on the distinguishing mercy and favor of God. All other systems admit, with Keith, that salvation (in a sense), "is of God." But it is free will that is ultimate and decisive in making men to differ.

We conclude; salvation is of God. He that is born of God will persevere.