Perseverance of the Saints

Perseverance of the saints is the last of the five points of Calvinism. The five points are described using the acrostic TULIP: T- Total inability/depravity; U- Unconditional election; L- Limited atonement/particular redemption; I- Irresistible grace/efficacious call of the Spirit; and P- Perseverance of the saints. Below is a definition of perseverance of the saints and, beside it, a description of the Arminian counterpoint known as falling from grace:*

Calvinism	Arminianism
Perseverance of the Saints	**Falling from Grace**
All who are chosen by God, redeemed by Christ, and given faith by the Spirit are eternally saved. They are kept in faith by the power of Almighty God and thus persevere to the end.	Those who believe and are truly saved can lose their salvation by failing to keep up their faith, etc. All Arminians have not been agreed on this point; some have held that believers are eternally secure in Christ - that once a sinner is regenerated, he can never be lost.

Key similarities:

- Both Calvinists and Arminians approach this subject with a view toward individuals who are truly saved, not merely those who profess faith in Christ.
- Calvinists and Arminians agree that Christians do sin, some grievously.
- They also agree that rebellious children of God are subject to divine discipline, including illness and death (1 Cor. 11:27-30), and that all believers will give an account one day at the judgment seat of Christ (Rom. 14:10; 1 Cor. 3:11-15; 2 Cor. 5:10).

Key differences:

- Calvinism emphasizes the power and purpose of God in keeping the elect saved, while Arminianism counters that free human beings may, through deliberate sin or willful neglect, forfeit the gift of eternal life.
- Calvinism stresses that the elect were secure before they were born, having been chosen and predestined by God in eternity past. Arminianism suggests that the elect are truly secure only at death, having completed a faithful Christian life. [While Arminians may agree that the elect were secure at the time God chose them, they would say it is because God *foreknew* they would persevere and thus were elected and predestined. In addition, many Arminians would argue that believers can know they are secure in their relationship with Christ as long as they continue to believe and/or are faithful to the Lord.]

* From *The Five Points of CALVINISM - Defined, Defended, Documented* by David N. Steele and Curtis Thomas.

(Over)

What is perseverance of the saints?

The Baptist Faith & Message states: "All true believers endure to the end. Those whom God has accepted in Christ, and sanctified by His Spirit, will never fall away from the state of grace, but shall persevere to the end. Believers may fall into sin through neglect and temptation, whereby they grieve the Spirit, impair their graces and comforts, and bring reproach on the cause of Christ and temporal judgments on themselves; yet they shall be kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation."

The Westminster Confession of Faith puts it this way:
"I. They whom God hath accepted in his Beloved, effectually called and sanctified by his Spirit, can neither totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace; but shall certainly persevere therein to the end, and be eternally saved.

"II. This perseverance of the saints depends, not upon their own free-will, but upon the immutability of the decree of election, flowing from the free and unchangeable love of God the Father; upon the efficacy of the merit and intercession of Jesus Christ; the abiding of the Spirit and of the seed of God within them; and the nature of the covenant of grace; from all which ariseth also the certainty and infallibility thereof.

"III. Nevertheless they may, through the temptations of Satan and of the world, the prevalancy of corruption remaining in them, and the neglect of the means of their perseverance, fall into grievous sins; and for a time continue therein: whereby they incur God's displeasure, and grieve his Holy Spirit; come to be deprived of some measure of their graces and comforts; have their hearts hardened, and their consciences wounded; hurt … others, and bring temporal judgments upon themselves."

On the one hand, Scripture gives ample assurance that the saved are secure in Christ (see, for example, John 10:28-29; Eph. 4:30; 1 Peter 1:3-5; 1 John 5:13). At the same time, believers are warned to be steadfast, faithful, and Christlike in word and deed, or risk temporal judgment and the loss of rewards in eternity (1 Cor. 3:11-15, 11:27-30; Philippians 2:12-13). While believers will continue to sin, and may fall into seasons of grievous sin, God will enable them to persevere. In fact, God's Word declares that the indwelling Holy Spirit will produce change in believers' lives (2 Cor. 5:17). They will keep His commandments (1 John 2:3-5), love other believers (1 John 2:9-11, 3:14) and do right things (1 John 2:29, 3:9).

But is it possible that the doctrine of eternal security is little more than a license to live like the devil? On the other hand, if believers *can* fall from a state of grace, can they ever be saved again? Can believers – whether Arminians or Calvinists – know for sure they are God's children? If so, how can they know? What types of sins, and how many of these sins, put believers at risk of losing their salvation? Finally, if salvation can be lost, exactly what is lost – regeneration, justification, sanctification, or glorification? We will explore these questions in the weeks ahead.

Next Week: The Doctrine of Divine Election (Part 1)

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