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Union with Christ and the Believer's Perseverance
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Savoy Declaration 17:2

This perseverance of the saints depends not upon their own free will, but upon the immutability of the decree of election, from the free and unchangeable love of God the Father, (2 Tim. 2:18, 19; Jer. 31:3) upon the efficacy of the merit and intercession of Jesus Christ, (Heb. 10:10, 14; 13:20, 21; 9:12-15; Rom. 8:33-39; John 17:11, 24; Luke 22:32) and union with Him, (John 17:21) the oath of God, (Heb. 6:17, 18; Ps. 89: 35, 36) the abiding of His Spirit, and the seed of God within them, (John 14:16, 17; 1 John 2:27; 3:9) and the nature of the covenant of grace: (Jer. 32:40) from all which arises also the certainty and infallibility thereof. (John 10:28; 2 Thess 3:3; 1 John 2:19)¹

John 17:21

The Savoy gives John 17:21 as a reference to our Union with Christ and 'maybe' this is the best verse to use, but the verse can be taken variously. If you notice in the footnote the Westminster Confession does not contain this phrase. It probably should and the Savoy is more

¹ The Westminster Confession of faith omits two lines that the Savoy includes. "...and union with Him, the oath of God..." It states 17:2 as "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 His Spirit, and the seed of God within them; and the nature of the covenant of grace from all which ariseth also the certainty and infallibility thereof." *England and Scotlands Covenant With their God...* (Printed by Ed Husbands, Printer to the Honorable House of Commons, 1646), 36

complete for including it. While we can certainly derive our Union with Christ from this verse, it seems that what our Lord is focused on, in John 17:21, is the union that believers have one to another, which is based on the union that the Trinity enjoys. J. C. Ryle brings this out well in his comments on this verse, "We can ask no stronger proof of the value of unity among Christians, and the sinfulness of division, than the great prominence which our Master assigns to the subject in this passage. How painfully true it is that in every age divisions have been the scandal of religion, and the weakness of the Church of Christ! How often Christians have wasted their strength in contending against their brethren, instead of contending against sin and the devil! How repeatedly they have given occasion to the world to say 'When you have settled your own internal differences we will believe!' All this, we need not doubt, the Lord Jesus foresaw with prophetic eye. It was the foresight of it which made Him pray so earnestly that believers might be 'one'"²

It seems that Ryle and others have captured the intent of this verse better, in focusing on the unity that believers have one to another, which our Lord was praying for, than the Savoy does in using it as a proof text to our Union with Christ. I suggest Eph. 2:8-10, 3:17, Col. 1:27, and 1

² J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels. For Family and Private Use.* (New York: Robert Carter and Brothers, 1873), 196-197. Calvin also understands this verse in a similar manner in his commentary and appeals to Eph. 4:3, 11-16 as the proper context for understanding what our Lord is saying here.

John 3:24, 5:20 as verses that better show the truth of our being in Christ by faith and united unto Him.³

I have three things I would like to examine in this paper. I am going to mainly skip over the wealth of doctrine that is here. We could feed on that alone for years. Rather, my topic leads me in a more personal direction. I hope to examine perseverance from the perspective of the follower of Christ. I hope to do so under three headings.

1. Temporal Perseverance
2. Eternal Perseverance
3. The Struggle in Perseverance

Preface:

As a preface I would like to begin by reading the Appendix I have attached to this paper. It is from a Charles Haddon Spurgeon sermon preached March 7, 1872. It is sermon #1056 and it is found in volume 18, page 337 of his published sermons.

There is maybe one other thought we ought to strive to obtain before we look at this topic of perseverance and our Union with Christ. We need to take this, and everything, to God's Holy Word. John Owen nails it well at the beginning of his work on Perseverance. He addresses the reader and says, "Reader, If thy enquiry be only after the *substance* of the Truth in the ensuing Treatise contended for, I desire thee not to stay

³ John Owen, being probably the principal author of the Savoy, it should surprise us not that He understands John 17:21, in his work on Perseverance, the very way the Savoy expresses it. He says it has aspects that touch on the unity within the faith, but essentially deals with our Union with Christ. John Owen, *The Doctrine of the Saints Perseverance...* (Oxford: Printed by Leon Lichfield, 1654), 195.

at all upon this *preliminary discourse*, but to proceed thither, where it is expressly handled from the Scriptures, without the intermixture of any *humane Testimonies*, or other less necessary Circumstances, wherein perhaps many of them may not be concerned, whose interest yet lies in the truth it selfe, and it is precious to their soules."⁴ Owen says it right. If we want the substance of the truth of this topic, then it is not found in papers presented or books written, but it is found completely and finally in God's precious Word.

(1) Temporal Perseverance

Every believer struggles with the new man being at war with the old man. It is a moment-by-moment struggle to put to death the deeds of the flesh and live anew unto Christ. The honest believer acknowledges the experience of three steps forward and two steps back in the progress of sanctification. At times we even might wonder if we are permanently in reverse mode. We know our total dependence upon God's sustaining grace to keep us on course all to well. Thomas Hooker speaks of this in his book "The Soules Preperation for Christ." In speaking to the issue of how a soul is prepared for Christ he says, "First, he stops the soule from going on any longer in sinne. Secondly, hee vvearieth the soule with the burden of sin. Thirdly, by hatred the soule is brought to goe avway from those carnall lusts & corruptions, vvith a secret dislike of those sinnes vvwhich he hath bin vveariied vvithall. In all these, the

⁴ Owen, *The Doctrine of the Saints Perseverance....* Preface to the Reader, no pagination.

Soule is patient (and undergoes the vvorke of humbling, and breaking,) rather than any vway active and operative.”⁵

Notice where the primacy of our perseverance is placed by Hooker. He says the foundation of our perseverance, in all three of his points comes from God. God stops the soul from sin. God makes sin a burden to the sinner. It is because of this that Hooker can say in his third point that the soul is brought to go away from sin because it wearies the soul. The foundation of our perseverance in faith comes from God as sin becomes more and more frustrating, and we look to live in a way that pleases our Lord Jesus Christ.

Perseverance is the act of walking in the new obedience that we have been given and are called unto through Christ. It is one of the ministries of the Spirit unto us that we now walk in holiness and we do so consistently. Edward Elton brings this out well in his work on Romans 7 when he says, “That new obedience and true holinesse comes from the Spirit of God, it proceeds from the Spirit of grace and sanctification; that men yeeld to the Lord new obedience and true holinesse, it is the worke of his Spirit in them; and so farre forth as men are wrought on, and

⁵ Thomas Hooker, *The Soules preparation for Christ, or a treatise of contrition* (Netherlands [for the use and benefit of the English Churches], 1638), 217. He says further, “Thus the heart is turned avway from sinne, and set against those corruptions vvhich heretofore it vvas burthened vvith; as it is vvith the vvheelles of a Clocke, vvhen the vvheelles have run wrong, before a man can set them right again, hee must stop it, and turne it to its right place, and all these are merely wrought upon the wheeles, by the hand of the workeman; for of it selfe, it hath no poise nor weight to runne right; but when the Clock-master puts to his plummets, their it is able to runne of it selfe, though the worke-mans hand be not there. So the will and affections of a man, which are the great wHEELLES of this curious clocke of the Soule, these wHEELLES doe naturally of themselves runne all hell-ward, and sin-ward, and devil-ward.”

renued by the Spirit of God, so farre they yeeld to the Lord new obedience and true holinesse, and what good soeuer is in men, and whatsoeuer comes from them, that is truly good and holy, it comes from the Spirit of God."⁶

Our temporal perseverance, by that I mean perseverance in our holy faith while we still draw breath, is tied to the God we serve. It is as the Savoy says built "upon the immutability of the decree of election." Election is established in the mind/heart of the Father, secured by the Son, and applied by the Holy Spirit. It is a Triune work. The Savoy is careful to instruct us that our perseverance foundationally "depends" on God.

We are prone to think otherwise. Something, we think, must depend upon us and it does. We must actually persevere, but if we do, and when we do, we must remember the source from which our standing firm in the faith is collected. When we start to think that the source is anything in ourselves, that comes from ourselves, we have wandered away from truth (Eph. 2:1). The Savoy is very careful to ascribe all the aspects of perseverance (what it "depends" on) to God alone. John Owen says of God's sustaining work in our lives, "He oyles the wheeles of the soules obedience, when we neither know what to do, nor how to performe what we know."⁷ This is the believer's experience. We often do not know what to do, but we are united to our Lord Jesus Christ and it is He who "oyles the wheeles" of our perseverance in obedience unto Him.

⁶ Edvvard Elton, *The Complaint of a Sanctified Sinner Answered...* (London: Printed by G. Eld, 1622), 131.

⁷ Owen, *The Doctrine of the Saints Perseverance...*, 202.

It is this union with Christ that allows the believer to press forward. The Puritan Shbastian Benefield Talks about our walking with Christ, because of our union with Christ, in our journey toward Heaven. He points out that, as we run the race that is set before us, heaven is our goal. We need to remember that, while the foundation of our perseverance is grounded in the Lord, we do actively persevere and we are called to do so. "He *runnes* in vaine (*run* he never so swiftly) that *sits him down* before he comes at the *goale*. Heaven is the *goale*, whither our *race* is intended. Begin we this *race* betimes, and *keepe we the right way*, and *make we hast too*, that if we *continue not to the end*, our portion shall be as his, whom CHRIST hath said, *the last astate of this man is worse, then the first*, Luk. 11.26."⁸

We should be careful not to judge the measure of our perseverance by the littleness of our obvious sin. It is true that as we persevere in faith that sin generally decreases, but deadness to sin does not necessarily mean true perseverance. Littleness in outward sins might be more the result of a lack of opportunity to sin than of a true mortification concerning sin. We may be ill, and have little desire for certain sins that, when we are well, we struggle to remain faithful concerning. This is not perseverance. When we become well we will gather the crumbs once again. Terrors of conscience can also influence us greatly, and because of them we sometimes cannot run to sin. This may look like perseverance and conscience can be a great aid in our perseverance, but remove the obstacle and we are drawn away. It is not the littleness of

⁸ Shbastian Benefield, *Eight Sermons Pvblikely Preached in the vniversity of Oxford...* (Oxford: Printed by Ioseph Barnes, 1618), 56.

the sin that is in focus respecting perseverance, but rather the deadly blow that Christ has given to our sins that undergirds our perseverance. Sin can seem little for a time and we can conclude we are persevering, but if obstacles are removed, faithfulness can and often does depart. It is more a matter of the heart. Has the heart been transformed? Then the life cannot be what it once was before the transformation.

(2) Eternal Perseverance⁹

No one will deny that death is a change for everyone. We are told that the day of our death is better than the day of our birth (Ecc. 7:1). It is a transformation where the struggle of perseverance is laid aside and a final, perfect perseverance is obtained. This is still done in God's grace and in His mercy. He gives us this final/eternal perseverance. He cleanses us from all remaining unrighteousness and grants us His perfect righteousness. Eternal perseverance is a promise, unto us, that is future. It is central to our hope of eternal perseverance that we have that hope grounded in the Lord who we trust and serve.

In fact our well-grounded hope in the promises of God is also tied to our perseverance in the things of God. Thomas Hooker brings this out in his work on Self-Trial and quotes Matt. 24:13, 14; Rev. 2:10; and Rev. 3:12. He says that we are to "search and try our Profession," and not deceive ourselves. It is easy to make a show for others and even our own hearts may make us believe that all is well with us, but Hooker says that we should not be sure until we have "tried" our hope. He mentions

⁹ "The Dove found no rest till she returned to the Ark. No more will the troubled soul, till it returns to Christ." Thomas Brooks, *The Unsearchable Riches of Christ* (London: Printed by John Hancock, 1657), 288 marginal note.

Naomie's two daughter-in-laws in Ruth. They both said that they would accompany Naomie, but Orpah was easy to convince to go back. Hooker says there are many Orpahs that seem to go with Christ for a time, but "give over in the mid-way." He suggests that their examples should be "admonitions to us."¹⁰

Eternal perseverance is nothing that we purely take for granted simply because of the promises of God in Scripture. So many "good, professing" followers of Christ bail on Christ along the road to the Celestial City. We have to get there. It is what the saints long for, hope for, and one day will experience. Thomas Brooks references Basil in the following, "Basil speaketh of some Martyrs that were cast out all night naked in a cold frosty time, and were to be burned the next day, how they comforted themselves in this manner; *the winter is sharp, but Paradise is sweet*; here we shiver for cold, but the bosome of *Abraham* will make amends for all."¹¹ In many respects that is how we ought to feel every day. Today is sharp as I struggle with sin, but there is a rest that a-waits. There comes, and comes soon, a time when the struggle will be over and I will be with Christ, and I will be like Christ. The hope of final perseverance should be at the forefront of all our struggle in perseverance. Again, it is because of our Union with Christ that this is true. One day perseverance will no longer be an issue or a struggle. It will be complete and we will persevere in our re-newed, re-created resurrection bodies.

¹⁰ T[homas] H[ooker], *The Christians Twvo Chiefe Lessons, Viz. Selfe-Deniall and Selfe-Tryall* (London: Printed by T. B. for P. Stephens and C. Meredith, 1640), 245-246.

¹¹ Thomas Brooks in a dedicatory "To my worthy and beloved Friends Mr. John Russel, and Mrs. Martha his Wife. And to Mr. Thomas Randoll; all happiness in this world, and that which is to come." (London: Printed for John Hancock, 1673), no pagination, but it is the third page.

(3) The Struggle in Perseverance

We all know that to persevere in our walk with Christ is difficult.

Richard Sibbs brings this out in the form of an objection in his book on the souls conflict with itself and victory over itself by faith.

"Ob(jection) (say some) I shall never hold out, as good give over at first as at last, I find such strong inclinations to sinne in me, and such weaknesse to resist temptation, that I feare I shall but shame the cause; I shall one day perish by the hand of Satan, strengthening my corruption.

Why art thou thus troubled: *Trust in God*, Grace will be above Nature, God above the devil, the Spirit above the flesh. Be strong in the Lord, the battell is his, and the victory ours before hand. If we fought in our own cause and strength and with our weapons, it were something: but as we fight in the power of God, so are we *kept by that mighty power through faith unto salvation*. It lyes upon the faithfulness of Christ, to put us into that possession of glory which he hath purchased for us: therefore charge the soule to make use of the promises, and rely upon God for perfecting the good worke that he hath begun in thee.

Corruptions be strong, but stronger is he that is in us, then that corruption that is in us. When we are weake in our own sense, then are we strong in *him*, who perfecteth strength in our weakenesse felt and acknowledged. Our corruptions are Gods enemies as well as ours, and

therefore in trusting to *him*, and fighting against them, we may be sure he will take our part against them.”¹²

I have divided this section on our struggle in perseverance into two parts. The first is particular perseverance. What I have in mind is our perseverance over an individual sin. This is the perseverance that we know from our experience with besetting sins, or sins which we find ourselves, in particular, prone to embrace. I am distinguishing this from what I am calling regular perseverance. By regular perseverance I have in mind the over-arching faithfulness unto Christ that we should all strive unto. My experience is that these work out variously in my life. They are certainly tied together, but they are not the same. My struggle in one specific area is different than my general struggle to simply persevere in Christ.

a. Particular Perseverance

It is in our daily walk of attitudes, tone, deep sighs, inward anger, or outward bursts that we often find ourselves to be less than persevering. Perseverance, for the believer, is the daily task of sanctification – continued over time. We fight against our corruptions and look for winning streaks against sin. In many respects it is much like this. We struggle with our inward corruptions and count the days (or hours) where we have persevered in a particular area. I am calling this

¹² Richard Sibbs, *The Soules Conflict with it selfe, and Victory over it selfe by Faith...* (London: Printed for R. D., fourth edition, 1651) 349-350.

particular perseverance and distinguishing this from regular perseverance.¹³

Particular perseverance is the battle we wage with a single sin. It is related to general or regular perseverance but it is more specific. This is the fight over a besetting sin. As said, this unmask itself variously in each of us. Are we quick to get angry or lose our head? Particular perseverance addresses our struggle in that one area. How are we doing today in the sin we yielded unto yesterday or 45 minutes ago? Are we building a new track record of perseverance? Are we seeing growth in this area (baby steps)?

This is the microcosm of perseverance. It is the narrow, precise, exact aspect of walking in Union with Christ. Using the example of anger, which William Perkins uses in his work on *Cases of Conscience*, What are we to do when we are overtaken by anger? Perkin's advice on this can easily be applied generally to any sin that we are struggling with, "But what if wee bee ouertaken with anger. What must we then do? *Ans.* If thou fall into it through infirmity, yet remember thy selfe, let not the Sun go down vpon thy wrath, *Eph. 4.16*, Cosider with thine own heart, that anger is as a poison: if a man drinks poison, he must not suffer it to rest, and flow into the body & veines, but with all speede must purge it out: and so must anger be dealt withall, whensoever we are ouertaken with it."¹⁴ When we are dealing with a particular sin we take Perkins' advice

¹³ "When we run after Christ, he doth not run from us, yet many times when we run from Christ, he runs after us." Robert Port, *Spiritual Flowers for Saints and Sinners*. (London: Printed by G. Dawson, 1655), 108.

¹⁴ William Perkins, *The Whole Treatise of the Cases of Conscience...* (London, Printed by Iohn Legatt, Printer to the Vniuersitie of Cambridge, 1617), 125.

and purge it out as if it were poison. We will all agree that this is easier to resolve than to carry out, but it is good advice for those who seek to persevere and have victory over a besetting sin: Treat it like poison.

As Sibbs has said above, our corruptions are strong. It should be no surprise that it is also here that we trust in and rest in the finished work of our Lord Jesus Christ. He gives us the strength to carry on when all we really want to do is crawl in a reflective hole because of our shame. It is here where I would remind us of our Union with Christ.¹⁵ In our daily struggle with sins, that often overwhelm us, often seeming as if they have come out of nowhere, and we wonder how quickly we have lost tone, or spoken an unkind word – just when things were going so well – it is here that the believer clings to Christ and carries on, resolvedly, that sin will not be master over us, because we are not under law but under grace (Romans 6:14).

b. Regular/General Perseverance

We take this general perseverance as the telecosm of our experience. It is the whole picture and it encompasses the whole of our Christian perseverance. It should seem no surprise that this also is closely related to our relation to Christ and our union with Him. John Cotton says that the believer “hath a certaine kinde of priviledge of peace in his soule,

¹⁵ “...their souls walk by these two principles firmly rooted in them both, that all good that is to be done, must and doth come from Christ, and him alone; and that if any good be done by them, it is wrought by him alone, breathing after nothing more then to know him in the power of his resurrection: And having walkt thus in self-emptinesse and dependance upon Christ, when once their union with him comes to be cleared up unto them, they then acknowledge as they, *Esay 26* (verse 12) *That he alone hath wrought all their works in them...*” Thomas Goodvvin, *The Tryall of A Christians Growth* (London:Printed by M. Flesher, 1641), 45.

and of freeness and readinesse to every Christian duty..."¹⁶ This is what I have in mind with the word telecosm. It is the pervasive nature of our commitment to follow the Lord steadfastly. It is, as the word implies, an infinity of faithfulness. We are free and ready to persevere in all things because of the "Great love with which He loved us," Eph. 2:4.

We are to flee from specific sins and cling to the Spirit (Eph. 6:18). The partial decays of grace do come in the lives of the saints. If left to ourselves we would assuredly fall from grace. We are exhorted to watchfulness and steadfastness (1 Cor. 15:58), and it is necessary that a saint finally persevere because a saint falling from a gracious state is inconsistent with the Scriptures. John Brown (of Haddington) brings this out in saying that the ultimate fall of a believer from a state of grace is, "inconsistent with the unchangeable love, the justice, the wisdom, and faithfulness of God; inconsistent with his unchangeable purposes, promises, covenant, and oath; inconsistent with the honour of the Father, who chooses them to eternal life; gives them to Christ for his reward; establishes them in the faith, and keeps them from evil; inconsistent with the honour of the Son, as their purchaser, advocate, builder, shepherd, husband, life, and as one in body and spirit with them; inconsistent with the honour of the Holy Ghost, who is in them a perpetual inhabitant, worker, comforter, fountain springing up to

¹⁶ John Cotton, *Christ the Fountaine of Life...* (London: Printed by Robert Ibbitson, 1651), 69.

everlasting life, seal of redemption, and earnest of glory, (yea, dwells in them, works in them, and comforts them.)”¹⁷

The point that Brown is making is that our perseverance is tied to God. It is, in fact, tied to the Triune-God. It is inconsistent with the electing love of God that a true believer not persevere. The believer will persevere because God has put His Spirit in our hearts. He has newly created us with a new disposition. It is to God’s honor that His children do persevere. We have been united to Christ, we cannot but finally persevere.

Thomas Jacomb talks about the stability, and our fixedness in the state of grace. As we have been united to Christ, so must we inevitably persevere in our faith. It is this union upon which all depends. “Are you in Christ Jesus? Here is comfort as to your perseverance, stability, and fixedness in the state of grace. This, upon which all depends, a child of God may be fully assured of; for will Christ lose a member, a part of himself? Shall one united to him finally and totally fall away from him?

¹⁷ John Brown (of Haddington), *Brown’s Dictionary of the Holy Bible*. (Glasgow: Printed and published by D. MacKenzie, 1836), 414. The part in () at the end was added in the 1847 edition, page 717. He gives the following passages to back up the above quote: Job 17:2; Psalm 2:8, 102:28, 125:2; Prov. 4:18, 10:25; Isa. 44:10, 53:10, 54:8-10, 59:20, 21; Jer. 32:39, 42; Hos. 2:19, 20; Matt. 16:18, 24:24; Luke 22:32; John 4:14, 6:27, 35, 39, 40, 54-58; 10:10, 28, 29; 13:1; 14:16, 17, 19, 17:6, 12, 15, 20, 24; Acts 13:48; Rom. 5:21, 8:28-39, 9:23, 11:29; 1 Cor. 1:8, 9, 6:15-19, 10:13; 2 Cor. 1:21, 22, 3:3; Gal. 2:20; Eph. 1:13, 14, 4:30, 5:25-30; Phil. 1:6, 51:13 (I think he means 2:13); Col. 3:3; 1 Thess. 5:8, 9, 23, 24; 2 Thess. 3:3; 2 Tim. 2:19; Tit. 2:14; Heb. 3:3, 6:17-19; 1 Pet. 1:5, 2:19; 1 John 2:18, 3:9.

No, that shall not be. So long as the union is firm and indissoluble, do not fear."¹⁸

Where does this regular/general perseverance lead? Where is it headed? You might be familiar with the "Marrow of Modern Divinity," written by Edward Fisher, but made famous by the 12 Marrow Men in Scotland and the notes to the book by one of them, Thomas Boston. It is a dialogue between four individuals: Evangelista (a minister of the Gospel), Nomista (a legalist), Antinomist (an antinomian), and Neophytus (a young Christian). Towards the end of the book Evangelista tells us where our perseverance is headed and it is a fitting thought to end with,

"...like a Load-stone this love of his shall draw the soule in pure desire to him again, and then as the *hart panteth after the rivers of water* (Psal. 42:1), *so will your souls pant after God* (Cant. 25), yea, then will your souls be so ravished with desire, and so sick of love, that it will bee manifest by your *seeking him whom your soul loveth* (Cant. 3:1), and so shall your soule come to have a reall rest in God, and according to the measure of your faith, be filled with joy unspeakable and glorious; and how can it bee otherwise, when your soul shall really communicate with God, and by faith have a true taste, and by the Spirit have a sure earnest of all heavenly preferments, having, as it were, one foot in heaven, whilst you live upon earth, O then what an Eucharisticall love will arise from your thankfull heart! Extending it selfe, first towards God, and then towards man for Gods sake, because his everlasting love in his Christ is

¹⁸ Thomas Jacomb, *Sermons on the Eighth Chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, (Verses 1-4)*. (Edinburgh: James Nichol, 1868), 59.

made known to your soule, so that then according to the measure of your faith, you shall not need to frame and force your selfe to love, and doe good duties, but being so assured of Gods love to you in his C H R I S T, your soule will stand bound ever more to love God, and according the meaire thereof you will stand bound to the keeping of all his Commandements, and this love of God in the heart will cut down self love, so that now you will be for God, and it will be you meat and drinke to doe his will whilst you live on earth, and much more when you come to heaven, the place of perfect and everlasting rest whither our Lord JESUS CHRIST bring us all in his due time, Amen."¹⁹

¹⁹ E. F. *The Marrow of Modern Divinity* (London: Printed by R. Leybourn, 1646), 242-243.

Appendix

Those of you who were present last Thursday evening (Sermon #1042) will remember that I spoke then upon the necessity of "holding fast the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end," and I showed you that it is only by continuing in the faith with which we began that we are proved to be partakers of the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, let us speak as plainly as we may, we are always liable to be misunderstood. The most eager hearer may easily confound his thoughts with our words, and so attribute notions to us that spring up spontaneously in his own mind. Thus, I met this week with an earnest anxious enquirer who thought I had meant that though a man should be a believer in Jesus Christ, yet after all he might perish. I dare say some expressions I used led him to think so. Had he been long a hearer here, he would not have imagined that I could give utterance to such a statement; for all of you who hear me continually know that, if there is one doctrine I have preached more than another, it is the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints even to the end. What I intended to say – I do not wonder that he did not quite understand me – was this: that the believer must always be a believer; having began in that confidence, he must continue in that confidence; the alternative would be that he draw back unto perdition, in which case he would perish as an unbeliever; and then the inference would be that the faith he seemed to have was a fiction, that the confidence he seemed to enjoy was a bubble, that he really never did believe to the saving of his soul.

This is a fair argument, based on the operation of the Spirit of God; it is in no sense a condition dependent on the good behaviour of men. The one way by which a soul is save is by that soul's abiding in Christ; if it did not abide in Christ, it would be cast forth as a branch and be withered. But, then, we know that they who are grafted into Christ will abide in Christ. We reason in the manner of the apostle Paul who, when he had spoken of the danger that some were in that, having begun well, they should end badly – after being enlightened and tasting the good word of God and the powers of the world to come, they should turn aside, he adds, "But beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak." (Heb. 6:9)

The question, however, having been mooted, it occurs to me that it may not be unprofitable if I state briefly – not by way of controversy, but simply for the sake of instruction – the doctrine of the security of the believer in Christ, the certainty of the believer's perseverance even to the end, and of his entrance into eternal rest. This text at once suggests itself to me – "I give unto my sheep eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand." (John 10:28)