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THOUGHTS ON PERSEVERANCE

By Augustus Toplady (abridged)

Many of God's dear people are frequently afraid that on account of their own weakness and the power of their spiritual enemies, they shall at length make shipwreck of faith, and totally fall away. Yet perhaps none stand more sure and safe than those who think they cannot stand at all: for "Happy is the man who feareth always" (Prov 28.14). Happy the soul that is possessed of that holy fear which drives him to the Lord, keeps him vile in his own eyes, and causeth him to be ever dependent upon the word and promise of a faithful God, and makes him rejoice with trembling, and trembling with hope.

But we are assured from the oracles of unerring truth, "that the righteous should hold on his way; and he that hath clean hands," he (whose actions are pure in consequence of his heart being purified by faith) "shall be stronger and stronger," (Job 17.9). As this doctrine is a source of comfort and support to the children of God, I shall humbly offer some arguments to prove it, which have been matter of serious meditation, and, I trust, of consolation to my own mind.

1. The economy of the covenant of grace.

The covenant is said to be "ordered in all things, and sure," (2 Sam. 23.5). This the holy Psalmist triumphed in, even in the prospect of death; this enabled him to look the king of terrors in the face with composure and serenity; this emboldened him to play on the hole of the asp, and to put his hand on the cockatrice den, (Isa. 11.8). Feeling his mortal powers decay, he rejoiced in the approaching prospect of that glory to which by virtue of this well ordered covenant he possessed a valid and unalienable right.

All believers have one and the same title to glory; all are equally interested in the blessings of the covenant; and it being sure, it follows that none of those whom God deals with, in a covenant way, can finally perish, or it could not be termed well-ordered, or sure....

2. The death of Christ

The death of Christ is another argument to prove this point. Christ is the head of his church under the covenant of grace, as Adam was of all mankind under the covenant of works; as such he graciously undertook for all his people, and by his active and passive obedience, he fully satisfied the law and justice of God on their behalf, and opened a new and living way for their return to God here by faith, hereafter by sweet and blessed fruition. Nor did he die for all; for there were some when he died suffering in their own persons the vengeance of eternal fire, (Jude, verse. 7)... It would be blasphemy to say he died for these who were then in torment: this is the natural product of Arminianism.

Those he represented in his obedience unto death, are his brethren, the members of his body mystical, and he tasted death for every one of them. Hence we are warranted to conclude every one of his brethren or people shall be saved. To say, all may be saved, is in effect to affirm that none shall: a thing that only may be, may surely not be; and if there is but a peradventure for our salvation, it is easy to prove no soul ever can be saved. Our Saviour says, "All that the Father hath given me, shall come to me; and him that cometh, I will in no wise cast out, but will raise him up at the last day." (John 6. 37- 44) In which words is contained. 1. the doctrine of election; 2. of faith; 3. of glorification in order to which, perseverance is absolutely necessary, and must be implied. When we consider Christ to be God, he must know for whom he suffered; and if we also consider the greatness, merits and efficacy of his sufferings, he could not undergo all in vain: but it would (with

reverence I speak it) be in vain, if those he died for were finally to miscarry.

3. The work of the Spirit

When the Spirit begins, he carries on his work in the hearts of his people till they are made meet for the inheritance prepared for them above; for he has engaged in covenant to bow the wills, to regulate the powers, and sanctify the affections of all the elect; to lead, guide, strengthen, and direct them through this wilderness; and he never leaves the subjects of his grace till he puts them into the arms of the Redeemer in glory. To this purpose Christ speaks, (John 4.14.) “Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him, shall never thirst. But the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up (bubbling) into everlasting life.”..... Those that are established and anointed, and have the sealing and earnest of the Spirit, cannot fall away. This is again mentioned in Ephes. 1.13, 14.

4. God’s faithfulness and immutability

We may argue from God’s faithfulness and immutability. That immutability is an essential attribute of God, the Scriptures abundantly assert. (Mal. 3. 6.)...

God having bestowed his grace upon his people, he never takes it from them: his unchangeableness will not admit of it: “The gifts and callings of God are without repentance.” (Rom. 11.19) “If when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.” (Rom. 5.10) If when we were strangers and enemies to God, and the way of salvation revealed in the gospel, his grace reached us and proved victorious in subjecting us to his will; much more, being made willing to love, follow, and obey him, we shall be saved and preserved to his kingdom of glory. Saving grace is the free gift of God; and he gave it to remain and abide for ever, (Eccl. 3.14) This is his gracious promise in Isaiah 54.8-10. “With everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord thy Redeemer. The mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee,” &c. So says Christ, (John 9.28), speaking of his sheep,..... The saints therefore shall be brought off more than conquerors; for God hath said, “I will never, never leave thee: no, no, I will never forsake thee,” (for thus that precious promise should be rendered) (Heb. 13.5) Add to this,

5. The testimony of God’s people in all ages of the Church.

“Look at the generations of old, and see, did any ever trust in God and was confounded?” (Ecclesiasticus 2.10) or “when were the righteous cast off?” (Job 4.7). “The Lord will not cast off his people.” (Ps 94.14, Lam 3.31) To this truth they are now enabled at times to bear their joint testimony. Bucer, a little before his death, spoke thus to Bradford ...: “My heart and my flesh faileth; but God is the strength my heart, and my portion for ever!” (Ps. 73.26) How triumphant is the apostle’s strain, (Rom. 8.38,39)... The testimony of glorified spirits above, as it bears weight in it, so it corroborates this truth. Their song is, “Faithful and true,” (Rev 19.11) This is proved likewise.

6. And lastly, from the intercession of Christ.

“I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not,” says our Saviour to Peter, (Luke 22.32), and we know his prayer was heard; though his faith failed as to the exercise of it, yet the root and habit of it remained, and accordingly sprung forth, revived, and grew so strong, that Peter afterwards was emboldened to suffer and to die for his Lord.

Our Lord began the prayer upon earth which he now offers in heaven for his people: “Keep through thy own name those whom thou hast given me,” (John 17.11.24) he prays (or rather demands, as the purchase of his death) saying, “Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am” on which ground we may conclude that all Christ died for shall possess that crown of glory that fadeth not away, it being impossible that Jesus should intercede in vain. This is the foundation of the apostle’s challenge, “Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that

died, yea, rather that is risen again, who also maketh intercession for us,” (Rom. 8.34). May all God's people, who have their faces Zion-ward, take encouragement from these things to go forward in the name and strength of the God of their salvation, till they arrive in the mansions of bliss and endless felicity.

This text is slightly abridged as indicated. The full version will be posted on www.churchsociety.org in due course.