

CHAPTER 51

CHRISTIAN PERSEVERANCE

(~~SMILES~~ **HEBREWS 10:23, 24**)

The verses which are now to be before us are a continuation of those which we pondered in our last article, the whole forming a practical application to the doctrine which the apostle had been expounding in the body of this Epistle. In verses 17-21 a summary is given of the inestimable blessings and privileges which Christ has secured for His people, namely, their sins and iniquities being blotted out from before the face of the Judge of all (verses 17, 18), the title to approach unto God as acceptable worshippers (verses 19-21), the Divine provision for their spiritual maintenance: a great Priest over the house of God (verse 21). Then, in verses 22-24 the duties and responsibilities of Christians are briefly epitomized, and that, in such terms as we may the better perceive the intimate connection between the results secured by the great Oblation and the corresponding obligations on its beneficiaries.

The passage we are now engaged with is a hortatory one. As we pointed out in our last, the method which is generally followed by the Holy Spirit is to first display the riches of Divine grace, and then to set forth the response which becomes its objects. So it is here. All that is found in verses 22-24 looks back to and derives its force from the “therefore” at the beginning of verse 19. There is a threefold privilege named: Divine grace has given freedom unto all Christians to approach the heavenly mercy-seat (verse 19); it has bestowed this title through Christ’s having “consecrated” for them the way into God’s presence (verse 20); and this blessing is permanent, because there abides a great Priest to mediate for them (verse 21). Agreeing thereto, there is a threefold responsibility resting upon the saint, set forth thus: “let us draw near” (verse 22), “let us hold fast the profession of our faith” (verse 23), “let us consider one another to provoke unto love” (verse 24).

The first part of this threefold exhortation matches the first blessing named in the preceding verses: because the all-sufficient sacrifice of Christ has

made a perfect and effectual atonement for all the sins of His people, (thereby removing the one great legal barrier which excluded them from the presence of the thrice Holy One), let them freely draw near unto their reconciled God, without fear or doubting. The second part of this exhortation agrees with the second great blessing specified: since Christ has “consecrated for us” a new and living way in which to walk, having left us an example that we should follow His steps, “let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering.” The third member of the composite exhortation corresponds to the third privilege enumerated: since we have a great Priest over the house of God, “let us consider one another to provoke unto love and good works,” and thus conduct ourselves becomingly as in His house.

The order in the three parts of this exhortation calls for our closest attention. The first, treats of our relation to God: the worshipping of Him in spirit and in truth, and in order to do this, the maintaining of a good conscience and the separating of ourselves from all that pollutes. The second, deals with our conduct before men in the world: the refusal to be poisoned by their unbelief and lawlessness, and this by a steady perseverance in the path of duty. The third, defines our responsibility toward fellow-Christians: the mortifying of a selfish spirit, by keeping steadily in view the highest welfare of our brethren and sisters, seeking to encourage them by a godly example, and thus stirring them up unto holy diligence and zeal both God-ward and man-ward. Thus we may see how very comprehensive is the scope of this exhortation, and admire its beautiful arrangement. How much we often miss through failing to carefully note the *connection* of Scripture!

“Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering: For He is faithful that promised” (verse 23).

There is some uncertainty as to the Greek here: some manuscripts having “faith” others “hope”; both the R.V. and Bag. Inter. have “the confession of our (the) hope.” It seems to us that the A.V. is to be preferred, for while it is true that if we adopt the alternative, we then have “faith” verse 22, “hope” in verse 23, and “love” in verse 24, yet this is more than offset by the weighty fact that *perseverance in the faith* is the theme which is steadily followed by the apostle not only throughout the remainder of this 10th chapter, but also throughout the 11th. We shall therefore adhere to

our present version, excepting that “confession” is preferable to “profession.”

“Let us hold fast the profession of faith without wavering.” The duty here pressed is the same as that which the apostle has spoken of in each parenthesis in his argument (compare ^{<S013>}Hebrews 2:13; 3:6 to ^{<S012>}Hebrews 4:12; 5:11 to 6:20): the doctrinal section giving force and power unto it. “Faith is here taken in both the principal acceptations of it, namely, that faith whereby we believe, and the faith or doctrine which we do believe. Of both which we make the same profession: of one, as the inward principle; of the other, as the outward rule. This solemn profession of our faith is two-fold: initial, and by the way of continuation in all the acts and duties required thereunto. The first is a solemn giving up of ourselves unto Christ, in a professed subjection unto the Gospel, and the ordinances of Divine worship therein contained” (John Owen).

“Let us hold fast the profession of faith without wavering.” Three questions here call for consideration, namely:

First, what is meant by “the confession of our faith?”

Second, what is signified by “holding it fast?”

Third, what is denoted by holding it fast “without wavering?” As the theme here treated of is of such vital importance, and as it is dealt with so very unsatisfactorily by many present-day preachers, we will endeavor to exercise double care as the Spirit is pleased to enable us.

The “confession of our faith” is that solemn acknowledgment which is made by a person when he publicly claims to be a Christian. It is the avowal that he has renounced the world, the flesh, and the devil, for Christ. It is the declaration that he disowns his own wisdom, righteousness and will, and receives the Lord Jesus as his Prophet, Priest and King: his Prophet to instruct him in the will of God, his Priest to meet for him the claims of God, his King to administer in and over him the government of God. It is the owning that he hates sin and desires to be delivered from its power and penalty; that he loves holiness and longs to be conformed to the image of God’s Son. It is the claiming that he has thrown down the weapons of his warfare against God, and has now completely surrendered to His just demands upon him. It is the testification that he is prepared to deny self, take up his cross daily, and follow that example which Christ has

left him as to how to *live for God in* this world. In a word, it is the publishing abroad that he has from his very heart “received Christ Jesus *the Lord*” (⁵¹⁰⁶Colossians 2:6). And let it be said plainly and emphatically, that no one acknowledging *less* than this is *scripturally* entitled to be regarded as a Christian.

“The apostle spends the whole remainder of the Epistle in the pressing and confirming of *this* exhortation, on a compliance wherewith the *eternal* condition of our souls *doth depend*. And this he doth, partly by declaring the means whereby we may be helped in the discharge of this duty; partly by denouncing the eternal ruin and sure destruction that will follow the neglect of it; and partly by encouragements from their own former experiences, and the strength of our faith; and partly by evidencing unto us, in a multitude of examples, how we may overcome the difficulty that would occur unto us in this way, with other various cogent reasonings; as we shall see, if God pleaseth, in our progress” (J. Owen).

To “*hold fast the* confession of our faith” means to continue in and press forward along the path we profess to have entered; and that, notwithstanding all the threats of persecutors, sophistical reasonings of false teachers, and allurements of the world. Your very safety depends upon this, for if you deny the faith you are “worse than an infidel” who has never professed it. God plainly warns us that if after we have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, we are again entangled therein and overcome, then,

“the latter end is worse with them than the beginning: For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them” (⁶¹²²2 Peter 2:20, 21).

It is one thing to *make* “confession of faith,” it is quite another to “hold fast” the same; multitudes do the former, exceedingly few the latter. It is easy to avow myself a Christian, but it is most difficult indeed to *live* the life of one.

Concerning the force of the Greek word rendered “hold fast,” John Owen stated that there is included in the sense of it, “First, a supposition of great difficulty, with danger and opposition against this holding the profession of

our faith. Second, the putting forth of the utmost of our strength and endeavors in the defense of it. Third, a constant perseverance in it, denoted by its being termed 'keep' in ~~4:15:2~~ 1 Corinthians 15:2: possess it with constancy." If our readers could only realize the mighty power and inveterate enmity of those enemies who are seeking to destroy them, none would deem such language too strong. Sin within is ever seeking to vanquish the Christian. The world without is constantly endeavoring to draw him away from the path of godliness. Our adversary the Devil is going about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. That wonderful allegory of Bunyan's, by no means overdrew the picture when he represented the pilgrim as being menaced by mighty giants and a dreadful Apollyon, which must either be slain by him, or himself be destroyed by them.

Sad indeed is it to witness so many young professing Christians just starting out on their arduous journey to Heaven, being told that the words "He that endureth to the end shall be saved" apply not to them, but only to the Jews; and that while unfaithfulness on their part will forfeit some "millennial" crown, yet so long as they have accepted Christ as their personal Savior, no matter how they must indulge the flesh or fraternize with the world, Heaven itself cannot be missed. Little wonder that there is now such a deplorably low standard of Christian living among those who listen to such soul-ruinous error. Not so did teachers of the past, who firmly held the eternal security of Christ's redeemed, pervert that blessed truth. No, they preserved the balance, by insisting that God only preserved His people *in the path of obedience* to Him, and that they who *forsake* that path make it evident that *they* are *not* His people, no matter what their profession, and no matter what past "experience" they had.

To illustrate what we have in mind, an article appearing in a recent issue of a periodical, on the subject of the security of a Christian, begins thus: "The person who believes in the Lord Jesus Christ as the one who died for all sin on the cross, and has accepted Him as his own personal Savior, is saved. And more, can never again, under any circumstances or conditions whatsoever, no matter what he may do or not do, be lost." Such an unqualified, unguarded, unbalanced statement as that is misleading, and dangerous to the highest degree; the more so, as nothing that follows in the article in any wise modifies it. But more: stated thus, it is unscriptural. God's Word says,

“Whose house are we, *if* we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the *end*” (~~8806~~ Hebrews 3:6).

And again, “if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die” (~~4883~~ Romans 8:13); that is, die eternally, suffer the “second death,” for “life” and “death” throughout the epistle of the Romans is *eternal*.

Such a statement as the above (made thoroughly in good faith, we doubt not; yet by one who is the unwitting victim of a school of extremists) leaves completely out of sight the Christian’s *responsibility*, yea, altogether repudiates it. Side by side with the blessed truth of Divine preservation, the Scriptures uniformly put the solemn truth of Christian perseverance. Are the Lord’s people told that they are

“*Kept by the power of God through faith*” (~~6006~~ 1 Peter 1:5)?

So are they also exhorted to

“*keep try heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life*” (~~3023~~ Proverbs 4:23);

“*Keep himself unspotted from the world*” (~~3027~~ James 1:27);

“*keep yourselves from idols*” (~~6121~~ 1 John 5:21);

“*keep yourselves in the love of God*” (~~6021~~ Jude 21).

And it is not honest to quote one class of these texts and not quote, with *equal* diligence and emphasis, the other.

“Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering.” The one-sided teaching of a certain school today renders such an exhortation as this, as not only superfluous, but meaningless. If my *only* concern (as so many are now affirming) is to trust in the finished work of Christ, and rely upon the promise of God to take me to Heaven; if I have committed my soul and its eternal interests into the hands of God, so that it is now only *His* responsibility to guard and preserve me; then it is quite unnecessary to bid me guard myself. How absurd are the reasonings of men, once they depart from the Truth! As well might I argue that because I have committed my body into the hands of God, and am counting upon Him to keep me in health, that therefore no matter how I neglect the laws of health, no matter what I eat or do not eat, He will infallibly preserve me from sickness and

death. Not so; if I drink poison, I shall come to an untimely grave. Likewise, if I live after the flesh, I shall die.

The apostles believed in no *mechanical* salvation. They busied themselves in “confirming the souls of the disciples and exhorting them to *continue* in the faith” (^{<4442>}Acts 14:22). According to the lopsided logic of many teachers today, it is quite un-necessary to exhort Christians to “continue in the faith”; they *will* do so. But be not wise above what is written, and deem not yourselves to be more consistent than the apostles. They

exhorted them all that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord” (^{<4412>}Acts 11:23),

yea, “persuaded them to *continue* in the grace of God” (^{<4436>}Acts 13:43). The beloved Paul held no such views that, because his converts had been genuinely saved there was therefore no need for him to be any further concerned about their *eternal* welfare: rather did he send Timothy

“to know your faith, lest by some means the Tempter have tempted you, and our labor be in vain” (^{<5116>}1 Thessalonians 3:5).

So Peter warned the saints,

“Beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked fall from your own steadfastness” (^{<6117>}2 Peter 3:17).

Should we be asked, Then do you no longer believe in the absolute and eternal security of the saints? Our answer is, We do, as it is set forth in Holy Writ; but we most certainly do not believe in that wretched perversion of it which has now become so current and popular. The Christian preservation set forth in God’s Word is not merely a remaining on earth for some time after faith and regeneration have been produced, and then being admitted, *as a matter of course*, to Heaven, *without a regard* to the moral history of the intervening period. No, Christian perseverance is a continuing in faith and holiness, a remaining steadfast in believing and in bringing forth all the fruits of righteousness. It is persisting in that course which the *converted* one has entered: a perseverance unto the end in the exercise of faith and in the practice of godliness. Men who are influenced more by selfish considerations of their own safety and security, than they are with God’s commands and precepts, His honor and glory, are not Christians at all.

The *balance* between Divine preservation and human perseverance was well presented by John Owen when he wrote, “It is true our persistency in Christ doth not. as to the issue and event, depend absolutely on our own diligence. The unalterableness of our union with Christ, on the account of the faithfulness of the covenant of grace, is that which doth and shall eventually secure it. But yet *our own* diligent endeavor is such an *indispensable means* for that end, as that without it, it will *not* be brought about. Diligence and endeavor in this matter are like Paul’s mariners, when he was shipwrecked at Melita. God had before given him the lives of all that sailed with him in the ship (~~40724~~ Acts 27:24), and he ‘believed that it should be even as God had told him.’ So now the preservation of their lives depended absolutely on the faithfulness and power of God. *But yet*, when the mariners began to fly out of the ship, Paul tells the centurion that, unless the men stayed, they *could not* be saved (verse 31). But what need he think of ship-men, when God had promised and taken upon Himself the preservation of them all? He knew full well that *He* would preserve them; but *yet* that He would do so *by* the use of means.

“If we are in Christ, God hath given us the lives of our souls, and hath taken upon Himself, in His covenant, the preservation of them. But *yet* we may say, with reference unto the *means* that He hath appointed, when storms and trials arise, *unless we use our* diligent endeavors, *we* cannot be saved. Hence are the many cautions which are given, not only in this epistle, wherein they abound, but in other places of scripture also, that we should take heed of apostasy and falling away; as ‘let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall’ (~~43012~~ 1 Corinthians 10:12), ‘Hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown’ (~~44811~~ Revelation 3:11)... consider what it is *to* ‘abide in Christ’: what watchfulness, what diligence, what endeavor, are required thereunto. Men would have it to be a plant that needs neither watering, manuring, nor pruning, but one which will thrive alone of itself. Is it any wonder if we see so many either decaying or unthrifty professors? and so many that are utterly turned off from their first engagements!” (Vol. 25, pages 171-173).

From the last two sentences quoted above, we may perceive that the same evil against which we are here contending — a *carnal* security, which Scripture nowhere warrants — had an existence in the palmy days of the Puritans. Verily there is *no* new thing under the sun! Nearly three hundred years ago that faithful teacher and prince of expositors had to protest

against the one-sided perversion of the precious truth of the Divine preservation of the saints. But no wonder: the devil plainly revealed his methods when he pressed upon Christ the Divine promise that God had given His angels charge to “bear Thee up,” but the Savior refused to recklessly ignore the requirements of self-preservation! From John Calvin’s comments upon ~~<408>~~John 8:31 we extract the following: “If, therefore, we wish that Christ should reckon us to be His disciples, we must endeavor to persevere.”

Scripture, not logic, is our rule of faith; and not one or two statements taken out of their contexts, but the whole analogy of faith. Error is truth perverted, truth distorted, truth out of proportion. To short-sighted human reason there appears to be a clash between Divine justice and Divine mercy, between God’s sovereignty and man’s responsibility, between law and grace, between faith and good works; but he who is really taught of the Spirit, is enabled to discern their perfect consistency. “As *sorrowful*, yet always *rejoicing*” (~~<4060>~~2 Corinthians 6:10) is a puzzling paradox to the carnal mind. To read that the Son makes His people “free,” and yet that He requires them to “take His *yoke*” upon them, is an enigma unto many. To “*rejoice with trembling*” (~~<4901>~~Psalm 2:11) seems a contradiction in terms to some carping minds. No less contradictory appears God’s promise to *keep* His people, and His requiring to *keep themselves* under pain of eternal damnation. Yet the last mentioned are just as *consistent* as are the other things referred to throughout this paragraph.

“For He is faithful that promised.” At first glance it is not very easy perhaps to perceive the precise relation of these words to the preceding exhortation: that they are added by way of encouragement seems fairly obvious, for the more that we spiritually ponder the veracity of the Promiser, the more will our faith be strengthened; the more we realize that we have to do with One who cannot lie, the greater confidence shall we have in His Word. Instead of being unduly occupied with the difficulties of the way, we need to look off unto Him who has so graciously given us His “exceeding great and precious promises” (~~<6004>~~2 Peter 1:4) to cheer and gladden us. Yet this hardly explains the immediate connection between the two parts of this verse, nor does it answer the question as to whether or not any *particular* promise is here in view.

“For He is faithful that promised.” Perhaps the bearing which these words have upon the preceding injunction has been brought out as well by A.

Barnes as any. “To induce them to hold fast their profession, the apostle adds this additional consideration. God, who had promised eternal life to them, was faithful to all that He had said. The argument here is,

- (1) That since *God* is so faithful to us, we ought to be faithful to Him.
- (2) The fact that *He* is faithful is an *encouragement* to us.

We are dependent on Him for grace to hold fast our profession. If He were to prove unfaithful, we should have no strength to do it. But this He never does; and we may be assured that *all* that He has promised He will perform. To the service of *such* a God, therefore, we should adhere without wavering.”

If we compare ^{<S001>}Hebrews 4:1 and ^{<S065>}Hebrews 6:15 light is cast upon *what* specific “promise” is here contemplated. In the former we read, “Let us therefore fear, lest a promise being left of entering into His rest, any of you should seem to come short of it”; in the latter we are told, “And so, after he (Abraham) had patiently endured (persevered) he obtained the promise.” It is to be most particularly noted that all through this epistle “salvation” is viewed as a *future* thing. *This* is an aspect of salvation (a vitally important one too) which is mostly omitted from present-day preaching and teaching. In the Hebrews (as likewise in the epistles of Peter) the saints are contemplated as being yet in the wilderness, which is the place of testing and of danger. It is only those who diligently heed the solemn warning of ^{<S012>}Hebrews 3:12 who win through,

“Take heed brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God.”

“And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works” (verse 24).

The opening “And” serves two purposes: it is a plain indication that the contents of this verse are closely related to what has just been before us; it is a pointed intimation that we ought to be as considerate and careful about the spiritual edification of other saints as we are of our own. Thus there are two things here which claim our consideration: the precise nature of the duty enjoined, and the connection between it and the exhortation of verse 23.

“And let us consider one another.” There are no fewer than eleven Greek words used in the N.T. which are all rendered by our one English term “consider”: four of them being simple verbs, and seven of them compounds for the purpose of particular emphasis. The first signifies the serious observing of a matter: ^{<4156>}Acts 15:6; the second a careful deliberation: ^{<8004>}Hebrews 7:4; the third, to narrowly spy or investigate as a watchman: ^{<8001>}Galatians 6:1; the fourth, to turn a matter over in the mind: ^{<8007>}2 Timothy 2:7. The first simple verb is compounded in ^{<4121>}Acts 12:12 and means to seriously consult with one’s self about a matter. The second simple verb is compounded in ^{<8007>}Hebrews 13:7, and means to diligently review a thing. The fourth simple verb is compounded in ^{<4106>}Acts 11:6, and means to thoroughly weigh a matter so as to come to a full knowledge of it: this is the one used in our present text. In ^{<4062>}Mark 6:52 is a different compound: the disciples failed to compare things together. In ^{<8028>}Hebrews 12:3 another compound signifies to reckon up — *all* that Christ suffered. In ^{<8153>}John 11:50 is a similar compound: to reckon thoroughly. In ^{<4068>}Matthew 6:28 “consider the lilies” means to learn thoroughly so as to be instructed thereby. The practical lesson to be learned from all this is, that the things of God call for our utmost attention.

“And let us consider one another:” let us diligently bear in mind and continually have in view the good of our fellow-pilgrims. The term “consider” is very emphatic, being the same as in ^{<8001>}Hebrews 3:1, where we are bidden to “Consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession Christ Jesus.” Here it signifies a conscientious care and circumspection over the spiritual estate and welfare of other Christians. They are brethren and sisters in Christ, members of the same family: a tie far nearer and dearer than any earthly one unites you to them and them to you. “Consider” not only their blessed relation to you, but also their circumstances, their trials, their temptations, their infirmities, their needs. Seek grace to be of service, of help, of blessing to them. Remember that they have their conflicts too, their discouragements, their falls:

“Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down and the feeble knees” (^{<8021>}Hebrews 12:12).

“And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works.” Here is expressed the chief design or end of our consideration for one another: it is to provoke or stir up unto the performance of duties; to strengthen zeal, to inflame affections, to excite unto godly living. We are to

provoke one another by means of a godly example, by suitable exhortations, by unselfish acts of kindness. We are to fire one another “unto love,” which is not a mere sentiment or natural affability, but a holy principle of action, which seeks the highest good of its object. Christian love is righteous, and never winks at sin; it is faithful, which shrinks not from warning or rebuking where such is necessary. “And good works” is to be the issue, the fruit, of godly love. “And this is love, that we walk after His commandments” (2 John 6).

The relation between this exhortation in verse 24 and the one in verse 23 is very intimate. Love and good works are both the effects and evidences of the sincere confession of saving faith, and therefore a diligent attendance unto them is an essential means of constancy in our confession. Christian perseverance is nothing less than a continuance in practical godliness, in the path of obedience to Christ and love unto His brethren. Therefore are we called upon to watch over one another with a view to steadfastness in the faith and fruitfulness in our lives. No Christian liveth unto himself (~~14:7~~ Romans 14:7): each one of us is either a help or a hindrance, a blessing or a curse unto those we associate with. *Which* is it? The Lord stir up both writer and reader to a more unselfish and loving concern for the spiritual good of those who are fellow-members of the same Body.