

Baptist Distinctives Part 7 – Perseverance of Believers

We live in a day when it is unpopular to claim absolute truth about anything. Yet, there are some certainties found in God, Christ and the Bible that Baptists have unashamedly advocated since New Testament times. Not the least of these is the doctrine of the Perseverance of Believers, often called “once saved, always saved.” It is impossible to discuss all the issues related to this doctrine in this brief format, but here are the basic elements from the Bible.

1. **Jesus came to bring us “eternal” life**, not to establish a temporary or tenuous relationship (Jn 3:16; 6:54, 58; Rom 6:23; Titus 3:4-7; Heb 5:9; 9:11-12).
2. **Jesus came to save us to the “uttermost” (Heb 7:25)**, “uttermost” is *panteles*, a Greek word that means “fully,” “finally,” and “forever.”
3. **Jesus saves us and He is able to keep us** once we have been saved (Jn 10:28-29; 2 Tim 1:12; Jude 24-25).
4. **Jesus offers believers an “incorruptible inheritance”** not a salvation that is a perishable commodity (1 Pet 1:3-12).
5. **Jesus guarantees us that once we belong to him, no thing** or no one will be able to break His relationship with us (Rom 8:35-39).

This doctrine does not deny that believers still commit sins. It does declare that sin cannot rob you of your salvation (1 Jn 1:8-9). If it were possible to lose your salvation then “chastening” would be an irrelevant exercise (Heb 12:1-8). If a true believer sins, he or she is chastened as evidence they are a legitimate child of God.

This doctrine is sometimes denied because of an extreme example of a person who has “forsaken the faith.” John warned that there are some who went out from “us” but were not “of us.” (1 Jn 2:18-19). Not everyone who professes Christ is “of” Christ (Mt 7:21-23; Phil 3:17-19). Judas is a sobering example of one who walked with Christ and professed to be His disciple, but was never really a part of the body of Christ (Jn 13:27). Hence, those who are truly saved can never lose their salvation and those who are saved but forsake their faith will be severely chastened even to the loss of life (1 Cor 5:1-5).

Lamar E. Cooper, Sr.