

PERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS

Jude 1-5

(NASB) "Jude, a bond-servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James, To those who are the called, beloved in God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ: ² May mercy and peace and love be multiplied to you. ³ Beloved, while I was making every effort to write to you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints. ⁴ For certain persons have crept in unnoticed, those who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation, ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ. ⁵ Now I desire to remind you, though you know all things once for all, that the Lord, after saving a people out of the land of Egypt, subsequently destroyed those who did not believe."

INTRODUCTION

A sales representative had been excited to be given a position with a top-rated company. He believed initially this made his prospects for the future rosier. But after several months of poor sales performance, he stood nervously beside his manager one day while they looked at a map on which colored pins indicated the company representative in each territory. "I'm not going to fire you, Wilson," the manager said, "but I'm loosening your pin a bit just to emphasize the insecurity of your situation."

Jude 5 sends a message to professed Christians who are failing as representatives of the Lord **Jesus Christ**, to put it mildly. **Jude 4** describes such professed Christians as "ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness," ("who change the grace of our God into a license for immorality" - NIV). **Jude 5** gives us a stark warning: Be sure the security of our sins being forgiven and of being guaranteed everlasting life in Heaven does not rest upon false presumptions about God's grace.

The traditional name for the Christian doctrine of the eternal security of the believer is the Perseverance of the Saints. This is one of the most *treasured* doctrines in all of Christianity. But it has become one of the most *trampled* upon doctrines in all of Christianity and turned into the Presumption of so-called saints. The story of the manager and sales representative illustrates both sides of this doctrine, which we'll explore under the headings, Security Based upon Presumption and Security Based upon Perseverance.

The sales manager rightly reminded his representative that his security with the company rested solely upon his ability to persevere through whatever obstacles arose to selling and to succeed in spite of them. He had no right to presume he could retain his job security without such perseverance. The perseverance of the saints means that all those who are truly born again will be kept by God's power and will persevere as Christians until the end of their lives but that *only those who persevere* until the end have been truly born again. This is the side of the doctrine of the Perseverance of the Saints that has largely been so trampled upon in our day that it has been all but obliterated in the minds of too many professed Christians. But we must clarify that our Heavenly Father does not want us to believe the security of our relationship with Him rests solely upon our ability to live up to His expectations. This is the treasured side of this doctrine. The sales representative stood alone, dependent entirely upon his own resources to persevere. As Christians, we never stand alone; we are never dependent entirely upon our own resources to persevere and to succeed.

A minister traveling across Europe shared his train compartment one day with a young man. As they began to talk, this young man professed to be a Christian. But he also confessed he felt himself so weak in his faith against certain worldly temptations that he did not think he would be able to stand as a Christian for another week. The minister took from his pocket a Bible and a penknife, and said, "Look. I will make this penknife stand up on the cover of this Bible, in spite of the rocking of the train." Thinking it was some kind of a trick, the young man said, "I am afraid it will not be very easy to do that, sir." "But I *am* doing it," said the minister. "Oh," the young man objected, "but you are holding it." The minister responded with

an assuring tone, "Why, of course I'm holding it! Did you ever hear of a penknife standing up on its end without being held up?" "I see now," replied this struggling Christian youth. "You mean that I cannot stand unless Christ holds me. Thank you for reminding me." This young man who struggled to persevere against temptations and remain faithful to **Jesus** needed to be reminded that *our* duty as His followers is to keep our hand in His hand. If we'll do our part, Christ assures us it's *His* duty to enable us to persevere.

The blessings we gain by perseverance are not fortuitous or accidental, despite what some may think. A young pastor sat in a restaurant one day eating lunch. He opened a letter from home he'd just received. As he opened it a \$50 bill fell out. He thought to himself, "Thanks, Mom, I sure needed that right now." As he finished his meal, he noticed a beggar outside on the sidewalk leaning against the light post. Thinking he could probably use the \$50 more than him, he crossed out the names on the envelope and wrote across the top in large letters, "PERSEVERE!" He put the envelope under his arm and let it drop as he walked past the man. The man picked it up, read the message, and smiled. The next day, the pastor returned to this restaurant. While he enjoyed his meal, the same man tapped him on the shoulder and handed him a big wad of bills. Surprised, the young pastor asked, "What's this for?" The man replied, "This is your half of the winnings. Persevere came in first in the fourth race at the track yesterday and paid thirty to one!"

We know what perseverance really is. It's the determination never to give up in defeat. A 19th-century humorist (Josh Billings) quipped, "Consider the postage stamp; its usefulness consists in the ability to stick to one thing until it gets there." Charles Spurgeon, London's finest preacher, observed, "By perseverance the snail reached the ark." Once we realize our faith must rest entirely upon what **Jesus** did for us in dying in our place to pay the penalty due our sins, and we yield our hearts and souls to Christ as our Savior and Lord, God wants us to be confident He will neither turn us away nor allow us permanently to fall away from Him. **Jesus** assures us in **John 10:27-29** how firmly and securely God holds on to all who are truly His: "My sheep hear My voice, I know them, and they follow Me.²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they will never perish—ever! No one will snatch them out of My hand.²⁹ My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all. No one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand." An oversimplified way of stating the perseverance of the saints, the doctrine of eternal security, is, "Once saved; always saved!" But, as we will explore, there's a deadly difference between basing our security of eternal forgiveness and everlasting life with the Lord in Heaven upon presumption, instead of upon perseverance.

I. SECURITY BASED UPON PRESUMPTION

We noticed two weeks ago one of Christianity's foremost words, "grace," appears but once in this letter, in **vs. 4**, to describe: "certain persons . . . who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ." "Licentiousness" translates a Greek word meaning "to live without moral absolutes or restraints." Jude describes Christians over and over again as "beloved" of God (**vss. 1, 3, 17, and 20**), but he balances this privilege with a responsibility: "keep yourselves in the love of God" (**vs. 21**). To correct those who would pervert God's grace into a "license for immorality," Jude seeks to emphasize we are guaranteed the *blessings of God's love* only to the extent we *obey Him in love*. **Jesus** stated in **John 14:21**, "The one who has My commands and keeps them is the one who loves Me. And the one who loves Me will be loved by My Father. I also will love him and will reveal Myself to him."

Jude's readers may have been members of churches in the eastern Mediterranean world where he'd served as a missionary. Jude's opening words in **vs. 5**, "Now I desire to remind you, though you know all things *once for all*," restated for emphasis the point he'd made in **vs. 3**, where he described Christianity's essential teachings as "the faith which was *once for all* handed down to the saints." Beliefs and practices set down by **Jesus** and His Apostles are not subject to revision based upon our wishes or changing cultural standards because they are backed by Christ's unique authority as the Son of God. Nor will the true God, unlike false teachers, promote new teaching that would supersede or contradict what Christ or His apostles proclaimed as God's final words to us that are preserved in the writings that became the New Testament.

The rest of Jude's words in **vs. 5** are stark and sobering. They make clear that presumption of claiming to be a Christian without living as a Christian has no place in genuine Christian teaching: "Now I desire to remind you, though you know all things once for all, that the Lord, after saving a people out of the land of Egypt, subsequently destroyed those who did not believe."

Jude referred, of course, to the first generation of Israelites whom God had redeemed from slavery in Egypt and from service to Egypt's false gods. This occurred around 1400 B.C. At Mount Sinai, God proclaimed the conditions if the Israelites wanted to enter into a covenant of mutual love and commitment as His special, redeemed people. **Exodus 24:7** (NASB) tell us Moses, "took the book of the covenant and read it in the hearing of the people; and they said, 'All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient!'" By analogy, these Israelites were "saved." At least they professed to be. Jude used the same Greek verb for "saving" these Israelites that the angel used when speaking about Mary in **Matthew 1:21**: "She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins." Yet, only a handful or two of the more than a million adults who came out of Egypt and professed they'd entered into a saving relationship with the Lord later proved by their faithful actions they were genuinely redeemed. The rest, those who proved faithless, were among those "the Lord . . . subsequently destroyed" without ever experiencing the blessings of Canaan's Promised Land (symbolic of the promise of Heaven for Christians).

In **I Corinthians 10:1-4** (NCV), Paul makes a similar comparison to Israel's salvation from Egypt and our salvation as Christians: "Brothers and sisters, I want you to know what happened to our ancestors who followed Moses. They were all under the cloud and all went through the sea.² They were all baptized as followers of Moses in the cloud and in the sea.³ They all ate the same spiritual food,⁴ and all drank the same spiritual drink. They drank from that spiritual rock that followed them, and that rock was Christ." Paul thus equates Israel's passage beneath the pillar of cloud by which God led them from Egypt and their passage through the Red Sea with Christian baptism after their "salvation." When a rock was struck and miraculously provided the Israelites life-giving water in the desert (**Exodus 17:1-7**), Paul said this rock represented the "spiritual rock which followed them" providing protection and care throughout their wilderness journeys. Paul then declared, "and the rock was Christ."

Some early Greek manuscripts of **Jude 5** actually insert "Jesus" or "Christ" for "Lord." New Testament writers rarely used the Greek word *kurios* ("the Lord") to refer to God, except in quotations from the Old Testament. *Kurios* was reserved almost exclusively for **Jesus Christ**, as in **Jude 4, 17, 21, and 25**. Thus, Jude likely had the pre-incarnate Son of God in mind in as "the Lord" who, "after saving a people out of the land of Egypt, subsequently destroyed those who did not believe." "Destroyed" is drawn from the same Greek word translated "perish" in **John 3:16**, and "believe" is the same Greek word found in **John 3:16**. The conclusion Jude wants us to draw should be clear. No person in the Christian community can presume upon God's grace. A shallow decision to follow **Jesus**, even if followed by baptism, does not by itself guarantee we will not still "perish." We must still persevere by demonstrating we truly "believe," that we have truly entrusted ourselves to **Jesus** as "our only Master and Lord" by our faithful obedience.

Some of you may be thinking, "But our relationship with the Lord is much more secure today than it was for Old Testament believers. It was easier for them to fall away from the Lord than it is for us. They were not 'born again' with a new nature by God's Spirit (**II Corinthians 5:17**), indwelt permanently by God's Spirit (**Galatians 4:6**), and baptized into Christ's body (**I Corinthians 12:13**), as we are." True, but everything said today about false security of being a Christian that is based more upon presumption than reality is being drawn from the New Testament. When writing to the church in Corinth, where many professed Christians did not practice the saving relationship with **Jesus** they professed, Paul challenged them to, "Test yourselves *to see* if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you—unless indeed you fail the test?" (**II Corinthians 13:5**, NASB).

Mere *profession* of a saving relationship with **Jesus Christ** cannot assure us that our sins are forgiven and that we have a reservation in Heaven. Continued *possession* of a repentant heart that is committed to follow **Jesus Christ** as Lord is our best assurance of forgiveness and eternal life. The preaching and writing ministry of Vance Havner, of Jugtown, NC, spanned 70 years. In 1973, the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association named him "Preacher of the Year." Vance Havner had a way of making big points with a few words, as when he stated, "A wife who is 85% faithful to her husband is not faithful at all. There is no such thing as part-time loyalty to Jesus Christ." The Apostle John may have had such thoughts in mind when writing **I John 2:3-4** about 50 years after Christ's resurrection. John warned us not to base our assumptions that we are savingly united to Jesus upon presumptions. "We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands. The man who says, 'I know him,' but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him."

Next week, we will continue to explore the crucial difference between basing our eternal security upon the Presumption of so-called Saints instead of the faithful Perseverance of true Saints.

CONCLUSION

Years ago, a United Press International story described how officials had discovered the firefighting equipment in a hospital of a Midwestern city had never been connected. For 35 years, the medical staff and patients had presumed they had security against a major fire. They had complete confidence that in case of a fire emergency, the overhead sprinklers would rain water down upon the flames. They also believed the large fire hoses in every wing could be counted upon to extinguish a more localized blaze. What is even more remarkable is that fire inspectors year-after-year certified the firefighting system as operational. Everyone blissfully assumed someone else was making sure the system was in fine running order—inspectors, hospital maintenance, and staff. Finally, a more careful inspection discovered the pipe that led from the hospital that was supposed to be attached to the water main extended a mere four feet underground and then stopped. The contractor who'd installed the system had never returned to finish the job!

If you'd been a patient or worker in the hospital during those 35 years and had questioned the safety of the people and facility, most people would have thought you worried needlessly. The more you asked questions about whether you could count upon security against a fire, the more irritating the staff and management would have found you. Had a serious fire broken out, it would have been discovered you were right to raise such questions about the firefighting system, but not before the hospital suffered vast damages. It would also have been tragically too late for the people who may have perished in the fire. Why would these terrible losses have happened? Because of the absolute confidence countless people had for 35 years in a system that only appeared to provide them security, but didn't.

"Eternal fire" (**Matthew 25:41**) is part of God's judgment upon all who refuse to bow in humble repentance to **Jesus** as Lord to receive His gracious gift of forgiveness and eternal life. How tragic, then, for people to blissfully assume they need not fear the risk of the fires of God's judgment, only to discover too late they were never truly savingly connected to **Jesus Christ**. They only *appeared* to be connected. May our security be based upon our continued *possession* in the present of a repentant heart committed to follow **Jesus Christ** as Lord, rather than merely upon our *profession* of a commitment to follow **Jesus** in the past. Our eternal security is based upon the Perseverance of the Saints; not upon the Presumption of would-be saints!