

PERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS PART TWO

Jude 4-5, 20-21

(NASB) "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. ²⁰ But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, ²¹ keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting anxiously for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to eternal life."

INTRODUCTION

There's an unusual tale behind one of the 19th-century's richest gold mines. A man got gold fever. He set out for a likely area, staked a claim, and started digging. After much hard work, he found a vein of rich ore. He covered up his find to return home to raise the money for the machinery needed to bring the ore to the surface. He came back to the site with his nephew, R. U. Harby, as his partner, to make their fortune. Things started well. Before long, they had enough gold to clear their debts. Visions of great wealth then danced before their eyes! But their gold vein played out. They kept on digging for a year, but finding no more traces of gold, they finally quit in frustration. They sold their claim and mining machinery worth \$2.5 million in today's dollars to a junk man for about \$6,000 in today's money. After they went home in disappointment, the junk man called in a mining engineer. He calculated another vein of gold might be just three feet from where Harby and his uncle had stopped digging. The junk man found it. This vein proved to be much larger and richer and the junk man went on to make millions from this mine. Harby returned home, paid back everyone who loaned him money, to his credit, and determined to benefit from his mistake in giving up too soon. He went on to become a phenomenally wealthy insurance salesman. He'd learned the lesson that you need to persevere through difficulties and stay focused if you are to become successful.

Last week, we began to look at the Christian doctrine of the Perseverance of the Saints; better known as the eternal security of the believer. This is one of the most *treasured* and one of the most *trampled* upon doctrines in all of Christianity. The Perseverance of the Saints can be turned into the Presumption of so-called Saints. We will review some of what was said last week about Security Based upon Presumption. We've probably all learned by now we can get ourselves into trouble by "presumption"; if we "assume something as fact without sufficient evidence," or if we "claim a benefit without any true right to do so." A middle-aged farmer longed for years to be a preacher but lacked assurance this was God's will. One day while working in the field, he stopped to rest under a tree. As he gazed at the sky, clouds seemed to form into the letters P and C. After a few moments thought, he realized "PC" could stand for "Preach Christ!" He jumped up, sold his farm, and went out to preach Christ; convinced this was what God was leading him to do. Regrettably, he turned out to be a miserable preacher. After one of his sermons, a neighbor turned to his wife and whispered in her ear, "I'm not so sure that God wasn't just trying to tell him to 'Plant Corn!'"

I. SECURITY BASED UPON PRESUMPTION

It's previously been pointed out that Jude, one of **Jesus'** half-brothers, deliberately chose to exclude almost totally one of Christianity's main words from his letter because of how it was being abused. This word is "grace." The only time Jude mentions it is in **vs. 4**, to warn of people who profess in various ways to be Christians, yet they "turn the grace of our God into licentiousness." Such people demonstrate they are not truly godly but "ungodly." The NIV for **vs. 4** declares such "ungodly people" "pervert the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord."

I want to place two thoughts side-by-side in your mind. First, as I affirmed last week, I thoroughly believe "once saved, always saved," which is the simplified way the doctrine of eternal security is often expressed. In **John 5:24** (NLT), **Jesus** assures us, "I tell you the truth, those who listen to My message and

believe in God who sent Me have eternal life. They will never be condemned for their sins, but they have already passed from death into life." John the Apostle recorded these words in his Gospel account of our Lord's life. In **I John 5:13** of John's first letter to early believers, he made it crystal clear how confident we can be that we "will never be condemned for" our "sins": "These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may *know* that you have eternal life" (emphasis added).

It is *not* presumption to take God at His word. We *can* have security about spending eternity with Him if we comply with God's *conditions* of this security. But it *is* presumption to claim such security if we "turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ." "Master," in **vs. 4**, refers to a "despot"; one who exercises the absolute authority of a king. **Mark 10:17-22** (NIV) says, "As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. 'Good teacher,' he asked, 'what must I do to inherit eternal life?'" Parallel accounts in **Matthew 19:16-22** and **Luke 18:18-23** supply biographical data that allow us to call this man "the rich young ruler." After he attests he has "'kept since . . . a boy'" "the commandments" **Jesus** quoted to him, **vs. 21** says, "Jesus looked at him and loved him." Yet, when he refused to enthrone **Jesus** in his heart by giving Him control of his wealth, which **Jesus** insisted was a necessary condition for *him* to gain eternal life, **Jesus** allowed this young man to walk away from Him "stunned at this demand" (**Mark 10:22**) and "extremely sad" (**Luke 18:23**); without any security of eternal life. Salvation is always a matter of meeting the conditions the Lord specifies. **Jesus'** words of **Matthew 16:26** (NASB) may haunt this rich young ruler for eternity: "'For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?'"

The second thought to place in your mind is that it has never been determined how long a person may give every appearance of being a Christian and yet perish eternally as a person who only fooled himself or herself this was true. Tragically, such people learn at the end they played a cruel trick on themselves. New Zealand police ticketed Ivan Segedin 32 times over 5 years for failing to use his seatbelt. This was costing him big money, but Segedin refused to buckle up. He believed seat belts were too much of a hassle. Finally, instead of obeying the law, he made a fake seatbelt to hang over his shoulder to make it appear he wore a seatbelt even when he didn't. His trick worked for a while. Then, he had a head-on collision, was thrown forward onto the steering wheel, and was killed. The coroner, when discussing the accident, described the fake seatbelt: "Though his car was fitted with seat belts, an extra belt with a long strap had been knotted above the seat belt on the driver's side, providing a belt to simply sit over the driver's shoulder." The coroner could have added, "His insistence the appearance of a seat belt was all he needed cost him his life."

Jesus declared in **Matthew 7:21-23** (NCV), "Not all those who say, 'You are our Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven. The only people who will enter the kingdom of heaven are those who do what My Father in heaven wants. ²²On the last day many people will say to Me, 'Lord, Lord, we spoke for You, and through You we forced out demons and did many miracles.' ²³Then I will tell them clearly, 'Get away from Me, you who do evil. I never knew you.'"" English-born George Whitefield (1714-70) had an electrifying effect upon his hearers by his bold proclamation of the Gospel and his remarkably powerful voice. Tens of thousands professed they committed themselves to Christ as Savior and Lord during his 13 preaching tours throughout the American colonies. But Whitefield wisely observed, "You may as well expect a crop of corn on unplowed ground as a crop of grace until the soul is convinced of its being undone without a Savior. That is the reason we have so many mushroom converts, so many persons that are always happy! happy! happy! . . . [T]heir stony ground is not plowed up; they have not got a conviction of the law . . . [and] they fall away. . ." [**Luke 8:13**]. Whitefield added, "That makes me so cautious now of dubbing converts too soon. Now I wait a little, and see if people bring forth fruit; for there are so many blossoms which March winds blow away that I cannot believe they are converts till I see fruit brought forth."

One of **Jesus'** own disciples fooled everyone but Him, for a time, he had committed himself to **Jesus** as Master and Savior. He even held the trusted position as treasurer among the 12 disciples (**John 13:27-30**),

there is every indication God's Spirit used him to heal, bless, and win others to Christ (**Matthew 10:1-8**), and none of the disciples immediately suspected him when **Jesus** declared on the night of His arrest, "I assure you: One of you will betray Me!" (**John 13:21-22**); yet he perished (**Matthew 26:24**). Who was this person? Judas Iscariot. Paul included Demas among the leading missionaries of the day, along with "Mark" and "Luke," describing them all as "my coworkers" (**Philemon 24**). Yet, within 6 years, Paul confided to Timothy, "Demas has deserted me, because he loved this present world" (**II Timothy 4:10**). If Demas died in this condition, more ruled by the values and lusts of a sinful world than by genuine love for **Jesus Christ**, did he go to heaven? Probably not. Peter described people like Judas and Demas in **II Peter 2:20-22** (GNT): "If people have escaped from the corrupting forces of the world through their knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ ["knowledge of Jesus Christ" is not the same as truly walking in humble, repentant obedience to **Jesus** as Savior and Master], and then are again caught and conquered by them, such people are in worse condition at the end than they were at the beginning. It would have been much better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than to know it and then turn away from the sacred command that was given them. What happened to them shows that the proverbs are true: 'A dog goes back to what it has vomited' and 'A pig that has been washed goes back to roll in the mud.'"

We distort the doctrine of the eternal security of the believer if we presume everyone who professes saving faith in Christ or who *appears* to live as a Christian for a time is truly a Christian. Genuine Christians do not base their hope of God's forgiveness for now and forever upon their *profession* of committing themselves to **Jesus** as Savior in the *past*, but upon their *possession* of evidence they are committed to **Jesus** as their Master in the *present*. Our only real security of God's forgiveness of our sins, and of God's favor upon us for eternity, is if we are persevering in our obedience and devotion to "Jesus Christ" as "our only Master and Lord." We misguidedly tell people, "In a few moments of time you can settle it once for all where you will spend eternity." Assurance that we are among those who are wedded to Christ as our Heavenly Bridegroom (**Ephesians 5:23-32**) requires the commitment of a lifetime, not of a few moments.

Fourteen years ago, I made a profession of devotion to Loretta, who demonstrated grace by accepting me as her husband even as **Jesus** demonstrated grace when He accepted me into His Bride, the Church. During the past 14 years, could Loretta have had moral, legal, and spiritual grounds for divorcing me, if I violated my profession of commitment to her by certain acts of unfaithfulness? Yes! Last week, our study of **Jude 5** revealed **Jesus** was most likely "the Lord," who, "after saving a people out of the land of Egypt, subsequently destroyed those who did not believe." In essence, the pre-incarnate Christ divorced most of the Israelites after they had an experience of "salvation," which both Jude and Paul (**I Corinthians 10:1-12**) declared had many similarities to what we may experience as professed Christians today. This is why Jude reminds us of the responsibility to "keep yourselves in the love of God" by "building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit (**vss. 20-21**). Instead of presuming upon God's love for us, it is our duty to demonstrate an ongoing marriage-quality devotion to the Lord, unlike the Israelites who demonstrated their unfaithful desertion of the Lord and were "subsequently destroyed" by Him.

Does this mean **Jesus** expects perfect faithfulness toward Him for a lifetime or He will immediately threaten us with divorce? No, but does **Jesus** have even more right than any earthly spouse to expect we will remain faithfully committed to Him in the ways that count most? Yes! A young man asked a friend the secret to his 52 years of marriage. The husband replied, "We never go to sleep angry." The young man replied this sounded like a great plan to follow. "Yes," the husband said, before adding with a twinkle in his eye, "And the longest we've been awake so far is five days." Have I always been the husband Loretta deserves? No. But her gentle grace and mercy toward me has inspired me to be much more in love with her, filled with awe that she would be my wife, and committed to be faithful to her, than the day we were married!

CONCLUSION

Samuel F. B. Morse, sent the first telegraph message in history, on the instrument he chiefly invented and in the Morse Code he developed. On May 24, 1844, Samuel Morse telegraphed from Washington, D. C. to his assistant in Baltimore, Maryland, these four words, "What hath God wrought!" drawn from **Numbers 23:23** (KJV).

From the days the telegraph remained the fastest means of long-distance communication, there's a story of a young man who applied for a job as a Morse code operator. Answering an ad in the newspaper for an "experienced telegrapher," he went to the address that was listed. When he arrived, he entered a large, noisy office. In the background a telegraph clacked away. A sign on the receptionist's counter instructed job applicants to fill out a form and wait until they were summoned to enter the inner office. This young man completed his form and sat down with seven other waiting applicants. After a few minutes, he stood up, crossed the room to the door of the inner office, and walked right in. The other applicants perked up, wondering what was going on. Why had this man been so bold? They muttered among themselves that they hadn't heard any summons yet. They took more than a little satisfaction in assuming the young man who went into the office would be reprimanded for his presumption and summarily disqualified for the job.

A few minutes later, this bold applicant emerged from the inner office escorted by the interviewer, who announced to the other applicants, "Gentlemen, thank you very much for coming, but the job has been filled by this young man." The other applicants began grumbling to each other, and then one spoke up, "Wait a minute! I don't understand. He was the last one to come in, and we never even got a chance to be interviewed. Yet he got the job. That's not fair." The employer replied, "All the time you've been sitting here, the telegraph has been ticking out the following message in Morse code: 'If you understand this message, then come right in. The job is yours.' None of you heard it or understood it. This young man did. So the job is his."

Do you recall the newspaper ad invited "experienced telegraphers" to apply for the job? By showing up at the business and completing an application, they all *professed* to be skilled in Morse Code and qualified for this job. The employer therefore had every right to subject them to the test he devised. They all had some knowledge of the telegraph and Morse Code; enough to fool an outsider and enough, they hoped, to get them hired. But how many of these applicants truly *possessed* the qualifications they professed? Just one. Just one was admitted to join this firm. The rest were excluded. Unless our lives demonstrate we *possess* the qualifications of those whose heart truly belongs to **Jesus**, what good is anything we *profess* about knowing **Jesus** as our Savior? Such presumption will not gain us a place in God's forever family, either in this life or in the next!