



S E R M O N XI.

On the final perseverance of the saints.

JOHN X. 28.

And I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand.

The first SERMON on this text.

 S I design to consider among you that most establishing and comfortable doctrine of the saints final perseverance in grace, and certain enjoyment of eternal glory, I have made choice of the words I have now read, as apprehending they are admirably well adapted to this purpose. If we enquire into the occasion of them ; we are informed a little before our text, that, as our Lord was walking in the temple, he was accosted by some of the *Jews* with this question, *How long dost thou make us to doubt ? if thou be the Christ, tell us plainly*^a. What their

^a John x. 24.

their immediate design was in this question, we cannot be absolutely certain. The generality of interpreters suppose, that hereby they would have ensnared our Lord; for had he acknowledged himself to be the *Messiah*, as their mistaken notions were terminated in his being an earthly prince, coming to deliver them from the *Roman* yoke, I say, had he professed himself to have been the *Messiah*, they would have gone and accused him to the civil governour. However, we find *Christ*, in his reply to them, upbraiding them with their unbelief, says, *I told you, and ye believed not*^b: which crime was so much the more aggravated by the mighty works which he wrought, which carried their own evidence along with them, that they were effected by a divine power. Now as God cannot be supposed to set his seal to a lie, so the exceeding greatness of that power, that was exerted for the performance of them, was a sufficient testimony to the authority of *Christ's* mission, as coming immediately from the Father. And then, our Lord subjoins the great origin of this their incredulity, *But ye believe not*. Well, and why is it? but, *because ye are not of my sheep*^c; or, no part of that trust committed to me by the Father, and so are left to the unbelief of your own hearts, and this, without the least reflection on the divine justice? For, as *faith is the gift of*

^b John x. 25.^c Ver. 26.

of God^d, so he is under no obligation to bestow it upon any person. It is an act of pure favour, which, those, who enjoy it, have no right to in themselves. Our Lord goes on to give an account of his sheep, and their privileges. And the first thing he mentions, is his propriety in them; *My sheep*, “says he,” “hear
 “ *my voice*; they are mine, as they are the purchase of my blood, because I formed them
 “ for myself; they are mine, as I have taken them under my care and patronage; they are
 “ mine, as I delight in them, and will rejoice over them to do them good. These, having
 “ hearing ears, and understanding hearts, given them from myself, attend *to my voice*; they can distinguish my voice from the voice
 “ of a stranger, and are in some measure obedient to my call.” To which he adds, “*I know them, and they follow me*”. *I know them*, they
 “ are always before me, known unto me are their gifts and graces, all their joys and sorrows, all their dangers and infirmities: and as
 “ *I know them*, I love them, and delight in them. And as a consequence of my writing
 “ my laws in their hearts, *they follow me*. And
 “ *a stranger will they not follow* ^e.” Of these things I have spoken to you at large. Then our Lord adds the words of our text, as the greatest blessing of all, *and I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them*

^d Eph. ii. 8.^e John x. 27.^f Ver. 5.

them out of my hand. In which words we may observe,

1. THE great portion and privilege of Christ's sheep, and this of the weakest as well as the strongest amongst them; *eternal life* is theirs; *I give unto them eternal life*, says our Lord:

2. THAT this blessing comes to them in a way of gift, and not of merit: *I give*, &c.

3. THE glorious consequence of this: *They shall never perish*; which our Lord confirms, both by his own, and by his Father's care and power. *None is able to pluck them out of my hand*, says Christ in the text, and in the verse following, *none is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand*. Each of these very well deserve our particular attention. But as that which may have a greater tendency to answer the design I have in view, I shall raise from them the following doctrinal observation:

THAT Christ's sheep, being given to him by the Father, or committed to him as a great trust, his faithfulness is engaged, that not one of them, how weak, and how languishing or diseased soever in themselves, shall be finally lost, or fall short of eternal blessedness. *I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand.*

In the prosecution of this great and fundamental doctrine of the gospel we shall,

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- I. CLEAR our way by some positions, that may have a tendency to explain what we mean by it.
- II. WE shall endeavour to confirm and establish it, by several arguments ;
- III. ATTEND to the most considerable of those objections, which are advanced against it ; and,
- IV. CONSIDER the great improvement, that is to be made of this blessed doctrine, and how far our peace and comfort depend upon the firm belief of it.

WE begin accordingly with the first thing,
viz.

I. TO clear our way by some general positions, which may serve as illustrations of what we mean by the saints *final perseverance*. And in order to state the question, observe,

I. THAT it is not disputed, whether persons, who have an appearance of religion, make large pretensions to an interest in *Christ*, and bear a great profession in the world, whether, I say, such persons may not, after all, fall away and be lost. For we allow that this will be the case with, alas! but too many who have called our Redeemer Lord in this world, and yet have never really been acquainted with his grace, nor indeed have had any lot or share in this matter. It is therefore allowed on all hands, that we may think we are something, and others

may think so of us too, yet all the while we may have only a name to live, and be really dead. Again,

2. THE question is not whether any man, even a renewed man, is in himself a match for the enemies he is surrounded with, such as Satan, and the corruptions of his own heart. We are ready to acknowledge that we can no more think a good thought, as of ourselves, after conversion, than before; all our sufficiency being of God. No, view a man separate from the grace of God, and he is unequal to the least temptation. So that the question is not, whether he hath a sufficiency to overcome his enemies in himself, but whether at length he shall not gain a compleat victory over them. But again,

3. THE question is not whether, as to the acting, or exercising of grace, the soul may not many times seem to be in a very languishing condition, and in effect sometimes be at a very low ebb indeed. For this we readily grant hath been the case with some of the greatest believers in the world; such as *David*, *Peter*, and others. And, to add no more,

4. WE are not here disputing, whether a believer may not say, through the weakness of his faith, that he is exceedingly fearful, lest he should fall short, and never hold out to the end: we allow this also to have been often the case of the best of men.

BUT the question lies in this more especially; whether an elect vessel, having once tasted of the grace of God, can entirely lose that which was wrought in him, and so finally perish; whether in the issue, let his apprehensions or fears be what they will, he may either separate himself, or be plucked by any other out of *Christ's* hand. This we must deny, and hope to make it appear very evidently to you, that it is absolutely impossible. You see how express our text is. It is not said, perhaps, or it may possibly be, or there is good ground to hope that they shall not perish, if they hold on believing, or the like; but, in an absolute peremptory manner, *they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand.* Which brings us to consider the next general head, and that is,

II. To confirm or establish this great truth, which our Lord himself so strongly asserts in the text. And here we have a very large field opened to us. For as God, in his abundant grace, hath taken special care to furnish his people, in every part of his word, with strong arguments, and gracious promises of consolation; so, as this is one of the main springs of the saints hope and joy, we have such solid, and abundant evidence of it in the scriptures, that one should stand amazed, did we not consider the weakness of faith in the

best of men, that any should entertain a scruple about it. However, we shall begin,

1. WITH the immutable purpose of God in election, as a foundation every way sufficient to build the position laid down in the text upon, *viz.* That none of Christ's sheep shall ever perish. And in order to illustrate this, observe,

(1.) THAT God himself, as in his essence, so in his determinations, is absolutely incapable of the least change or alteration. This is not only confirmed by the word of God, where he is represented as *the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning*^g, but may very easily be evinced from reason. For, let it be considered, if the Lord changes, it must be owing to something in himself, or in his creatures. As to God himself, you know, one of the primary ideas that we have of Deity, is, that he should be always that same wise, holy, just and powerful Being, that he ever was. Thus you know that God speaks of himself, *I am the Lord, I change not : therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed*^h. As to his creatures, there cannot possibly be any thing in them, or done by them, but what was naked and open before him, even from everlasting. Add to this, that was he to alter on their account, or because of something that he did not fore-know concerning them, this would not only

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^g Jam. i. 17.

^h Mal. iii. 6.

be to eclipse the glory of his omniscience, but, so far, to render him dependent on the creature; which, you know, is directly contrary to the nature of an infinite, sovereign, and unchangeable Being. This being allowed us, we observe again,

(2.) THAT this immutable Being hath, by a peremptory decree, determined the salvation of his chosen. This we might prove to you from that place, where we are told, that *as many as were ordained to eternal life, believed*ⁱ: plainly supposing, that some certain number of persons were thus really *ordained* to eternal life. So that from hence it must necessarily follow, that they cannot perish, since an unchangeable Being hath thus decreed that they should enjoy eternal life, who says of himself, *My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure*^k. This is then the first argument, God is an immutable being, who hath resolved that not one of his chosen ones shall perish. But this truth will be farther evident, if we consider,

2. THAT, the same *Jesus* who hath declared that they shall never perish, hath, by his glorious undertaking, and perfect accomplishment of it, for ever set them so far out of the reach of their spiritual enemies, that all those who would endeavour to *pluck them out of his hand*, shall not be able to effect it. But more particularly.

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ⁱ Acts xiii. 48.

^k Isai. xlv. 10.

(1.) HE hath delivered them from sin, the worst of their enemies, that which hath a natural tendency to separate betwixt them and their God. Sin, as it is a violation of God's law, so it is an act of rebellion, and highly provoking in his sight. And he who hath once been guilty of it, by this means, has set himself at a distance from God, and declares open war with him. Now if any thing in the world hath a tendency to promote the destruction of a person, it must be sin. And as *Christ's* sheep, as well as others, have sinned against God, so they must have perished in their iniquities, had he not, some way or other, removed their transgressions from them. Well, this he did by the sacrifice of himself. View him then, as he is represented in the word of God, as taking upon himself the iniquities of his sheep, undertaking, by a voluntary act of his own, to answer for them; and then, though they have gone astray in themselves, yet God can be *just, and the justifier of them*, who thus *believe in him*¹: and as he hath *by one offering perfected for ever them that are sanctified*^m, *there is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus*ⁿ, that is, to any of his sheep. And thus, you may easily suppose the difference between God and them is made up, as the apostle speaks, *He hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness*

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¹ Rom. iii. 26.^m Heb. x. 14.ⁿ Rom. viii. 1.

ousness of God in him°. They are now, become the objects of God's care and delight. And if sin, that enemy which wars against the soul, and which, if any thing in the world would pluck them out of *Christ's* hands, it must be that, if, I say, that hath entirely lost its power of destroying *Christ's* sheep; we may very safely conclude that they can *never perish*. Sin is undoubtedly that burden which makes *Christ's* sheep groan for deliverance. And tho' they may cry out, as the apostle did, *O wretched men that we are, who shall deliver us from the body of this death* ^p? yet, at the same time, in a view of their deliverer, they may well bless the name of the Lord, and with the same apostle say, *Thanks be to God, thro' Jesus Christ our Lord*^q. They will carry sin to the grave with them; but as sin would hinder them from entering into glory, so they shall lay aside every degree of it, at their dissolution. Well, this is one, and the principal of the enemies of *Christ's* sheep, which their great shepherd hath overcome. But again,

(2.) *SATAN*, that roaring lion, O with what diligence, with what subtilty and malice, doth he endeavour to ruin *Christ's* sheep! He doth all he can to hinder them from coming into *Christ's* fold: and when they are brought thither, he will labour, if possible, not only to destroy their comfort, but even to pluck them out of their shepherd's hands. But,
blessed

° 2 Cor. v. 21.

^p Rom. vii. 24.^q Ver. 25.

bleſſed be the Lord, he alſo is a conquered enemy. *Chriſt* as God, hath not only abſolute power over him, and keepſhim within limits, which he cannot exceed in his tempting of the ſaints, without his permiſſion; but he hath triumphed over him, as a great conqueror, and that as the head, and in the name of his people. So that, though he may deſire to ſiſt, or even to deſtroy them; yet the glorious captain of their ſalvation, as he knows the neceſſities of his people, ſo alſo the ſtrength of their enemies, and on all occaſions, will appear, one way or other, for their deliverance. And though the deſtruction of this enemy indeed is not ſo entire, as that he ſhall never aſſault the ſaints, or never gain, in ſome meaſure, the advantage againſt them; yet this we know, that he ſhall never be able to ſeparate them from the love of God, or rob them of everlaſting life, which *Chriſt* hath, by his ſatisfaction and righteouſneſs, obtained for them, and ſecured to them.

THAT we may have a more full idea of the malice of this adverſary, he is repreſented in the word of God, not only as a tempter, but an accuſer alſo. He not only endeavours to ſeduce God's people from their obedience to him, but then preſently accuſes them of the crime, with all its aggravating circumſtances, and pleads it for their ruin. And this he is ſaid to do with unwearied diligence,
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both *day and night*^r. Now to counterpoise this, we are assured, that, *if they sin*, he himself is *their advocate*^s, at the throne; not, as I humbly apprehend, to extenuate our guilt, but to represent continually to his Father, that great attonement, which he himself has made, whereby his people, though guilty in themselves, are become righteous in the sight of God. And in this he gains a renewed victory over *Satan*; for all his malice can never paint sin in such deep and dreadful colours, but *Christ* can plead his blood, and prove it to be capable of cleansing it away. His people may indeed have been greatly polluted, and their *sins of a scarlet dye*, yet as washed in his blood, they become *white as snow*.

THIS adversary may therefore roar, and threaten, and accuse, during the christian's pilgrimage, yet still here is his hope, and his city of refuge. And lest he should be dismayed with the terrible apprehensions of falling into the hands of this enemy, when he comes to give up the ghost, who would doubtless then, if possible, take the advantage, were it in his power, and hurry him into everlasting misery, *Christ* hath promised his presence at that time to secure his charge, and a guard of his angels, to conduct the souls of his people safe to that repose he designs for them, in the everlasting mansions of bliss. Thus then, as to this adversary, you see, that he shall never
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^r Rev. xii. 10.^s 1 John ii. 1.

pluck Christ's *sheep* out of his *band*. For, according to that ancient promise, the *seed* of the woman, has effectually *bruised* the *head*, or broken the power, of *the serpent*[†]. And then,

(3.) THE world, both as to its smiles and frowns, shall not destroy one of *Christ's* sheep. Sometimes good men seem to be so much glewed to this world, that one is at a loss to know whether they have any desires, or expectations, respecting a removal to their Father's house above. At other times they are so surprised, and distressed by unexpected afflictions and disappointments in outward things, that they can hardly believe the great shepherd takes any care of them at all. Thus, one while they feed upon husks, and another they repine at the blessings they enjoy, and murmur at the providence of God. Why, notwithstanding it may be, and is thus at times, with the best of God's people, and though they may be righteously and severely chastised for it, yet it is impossible it should effect their ruin. For as their shepherd often leads them over dark mountains, and in a way that they have known but little of; yet he hath engaged, and being in himself immutable, his word must stand, that these things instead of separating them from his presence, and care, and salvation, shall *work together for their good*[‡]. And as he is *the head over all things*

[†] Gen. iii. 15.

[‡] Rom. viii. 28.

things to the church ^w; so it is in his power, you know, to bring good out of the greatest evil, and to bring to pass what is least expected by the creature. Thus, though the believer finds the world a snare to him, as having a great tendency to confine his regards to itself, and sometimes attacking him with its terrors; yet *Christ* bids his people *be of good cheer*, for he has *overcome the world* ^x; They may then be sure it shall not ruin or destroy them. It may eat out a great deal of their present comfort, but shall by no means rob them of their future and eternal happiness. And if,

(4.) AND lastly, you add to these death, as rather a supposed, than a real enemy, *Christ* hath also conquered death. And let the believer never so much shrink back, at the thoughts of dying, yet his Lord will be with him, more or less, in that dark valley, and lead him by the hand safe into the future glory.

WE might be much larger upon each of these, but you know they are matters more usually insisted on, and therefore what we are ready to hope you are well acquainted with. That you may see the force of this argument then, observe, that if *Christ* hath overcome all the enemies of his sheep, such as sin, satan, the world, and death; then he hath taken effectual care, that none of these should

^w Eph. i. 22.

^x John xvi. 33.

should ever *pluck them out of his hand*, and so, that *they shall never perish*. If he hath reconciled them to God, by the sacrifice of himself, if he hath rescued them from the power of satan, and if he will keep them from the evil of the world, and make them conquerors over death, then surely *they shall never perish*; which was the matter to be proved.

I SHOULD now proceed to arguments, drawn from the nature of the covenant of grace, the promises, and the perfections of the divine Being, with several other considerations which will serve to demonstrate the great truth in our text: but these I shall reserve to another opportunity. Let me only add these two reflections upon what hath been said. And,

I. HATH our Lord given his people *eternal life*? then, this at once destroys the doctrine of merit, on the part of the creature, and the pharisaical notion of working for life. Would it not be the most preposterous thing in the world for a person, who has a clear title to a free bounty from a prince, to set about attaining it by some meritorious piece of service of his own, and that too when he is already in the possession of it? Yes certainly, such a one would surely rather endeavour to testify his gratitude, by paying suitable homage to his great benefactor. And yet, so foolish is man, that though the Lord declares

clares, that he *gives* his sheep *eternal life*, he is too apt to seek it in a way of desert. This is doing great wrong to our own souls: for if we stay till we deserve this life, before we will entertain any comfortable apprehensions of our interest in it, we may assure ourselves we shall never enjoy it. And such a conduct is indeed a setting up our wisdom in opposition to that of God. He will have the glory of giving us eternal life freely, but we would have it as our own purchase, and in a way of dependance on our own personal merit. Thus then you see how, in this, men oppose the grace of God: and this is not only the temper of those, who are not *Christ's* sheep, but alas! too many that are really related to him, they are for deserving eternal life, and not receiving it as his gift, in a way of pure grace. But again,

2. ARE we in *Christ's* hands, and therefore secured from perishing? let this teach us then, where to go for every needful supply of grace, in our way to everlasting blessedness, and for strength against all our spiritual enemies, and victory over them. For, we are not only *more than conquerors, thro' him that hath loved us*^y; but of his *fulness*, we are to *receive, and grace for grace*^z.

^y Rom. viii. 37.

^z John i. 16.



S E R M O N XII.

On the final perseverance of the saints.

JOHN X. 28.

And I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand.

The second SERMON on this text.



HAVING considered the connexion of these words in a former discourse, I observed the following things as more immediately contained in them :

1. THE great portion and privilege of Christ's sheep : *eternal life* is theirs :
2. THAT this blessing comes to them in a way of grace, and not of merit ; *I give unto them eternal life* : And,
3. THE happy consequence of this ; *they shall never perish* ; which our Lord confirms, first, by an assertion of his own power, *nei-ther*

ther shall any pluck them out of my hand ; and then, in the verse following my text, from his Father's care and power also ; My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all : and no one is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand ; and then sums up the whole by asserting his equality with the Father, both in power and glory ; I and my Father are one^a. Instead of insisting on these particulars, I chose rather to raise and prosecute the following doctrinal observation, as the subject of our discourse, viz.

THAT Christ's sheep, being given him as a trust by his Father, his faithfulness is engaged, that none of these should perish.

For the illustration of which,

- I. I LAID down some general positions, that had a tendency to explain this important doctrine, which I shall not now repeat ; and then,
- II. I ENDEAVOURED to establish the truth of it,

1. FROM the immutability of God's counsel, who hath determined their salvation ; and,

2. FROM the effectual care which our Lord *Jesus Christ* hath taken to subdue all their enemies.

Not to detain you therefore, with what was then delivered ; we proceed now to another
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^a John x. 30.

argument to prove the saints final perseverance, or their never losing, either grace in this world, or glory in the other; and that shall be taken,

3. FROM the nature of the everlasting covenant, which being founded in the grace of God, and not in the obedience of the creature, is therefore *ordered in all things and sure^b*: and every blessing arising from it, must undoubtedly be secured to all those who are interested in it. If you ask what I mean by the covenant of grace, you need only turn to that remarkable account the prophet *Jeremiah* hath given us of this matter, *But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel, after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts, and will be their God, and they shall be my people^c*. Compare with this the following passage. *And I will give them one heart, and one way, that they may fear me for ever, for the good of them, and of their children after them. And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; but I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me^d*. That this is to be understood of the covenant of grace, or a new covenant (so called, for this reason, amongst others, because there was now a more distinct or *new* display of it) I say, that this covenant is referred to by these passages,

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^b 2 Sam. xxiii. 5. ^c Jer. xxxi. 33. ^d Chap. xxxii. 38, 39, 40.

the apostle to the *Hebrews* puts beyond all doubt, where he says, *Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers, in the day when I took them by the hand, to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel, after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people^e.* Now observe what the Lord promises here; it is not only that he *will put his fear in their hearts, and his law in their inward parts*; but an assurance is subjoined, that their souls shall cleave unto him; *They shall not depart from me.* See how effectually God has secured the whole of their salvation to them. Are they guilty? saith he, *I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more^f.* Are they in fear of losing my favour? *They are born of incorruptible seed, and that seed abideth for ever^g: and, I will not turn away from them, to do them good^h.* Are they apprehensive of falling, or departing from me? *I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a peopleⁱ.* It is not said,
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^e Heb. viii. 8, 9, 10. ^f Jer. xxxi. 34. ^g 1 Pet. i. 23.
^h Jer. xxxii. 40. ⁱ Heb. viii. 10.

perhaps they may ; but they shall be to me a people.

BUT some may object, that this refers to the bringing back the *Jews*, from their captivity. We allow that this may be the literal signification of the words. But they must have a further reference, as appears from the last quotation out of the epistle to the *Hebrews*, and from what our Lord himself says, by which he extends it to the whole election of grace. *It is written in the prophets, says he, and they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me^k.* As a confirmation of this covenant, the Lord hath given us many great and precious promises, wherein he hath engaged his faithfulness for the security of his people, and which promises are all *yea and amen in Christ Jesus^l*. Thus, as the origin of this covenant was meer sovereign grace, so its foundation is established on the divine faithfulness, and the blessings contained therein have an undoubted security, as put into the hands of the mediator, and made over to us by the promise, and oath of him, who cannot possibly lie, or deceive. *He is not a man that he should lie, neither the son of man that he should repent. Hath he said, and shall he not do it ? Or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good^m ? For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed, but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall*

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^k John vi. 45.

^l 2 Cor. i. 10.

^m Num. xxiii. 19.

the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee ⁿ. And thus saith the apostle Paul, *He is faithful by whom ye are called into the fellowship of his son, who shall also confirm you unto the end, that ye may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ* ^o. And again, *Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you, will perfect it unto the day of Jesus Christ* ^p. And again, *The very God of peace sanctify you wholly : and I pray God your whole spirit, and soul, and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is he who calleth you, who also will do it* ^q. And to this the apostle Peter gives in his evidence, when he says, *We are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation* ^r. But I go on now to another argument to prove this point, and that is,

4. THE saints union with Christ, as members of his body. The strictness of this union is such, that, what he did is accounted to them, and their sins imputed to him. Now, as this union was founded in grace, so it is indissoluble. And as all things are present in the view of God, he knows what will be the temptations and corruptions of his people ; and notwithstanding the saving change that passes on them, and the sanctification of his Spirit, he knows what will be the weakness

ⁿ Isai. liv. 10. ^o 1 Cor. i. 8, 9. ^p Phil. i. 6. ^q 1 Theff. v. 23, 24. ^r 1 Pet. i. 5.

ness and sinfulness of their conduct; but as this has not hindered their being brought into this relation, so it never can influence him utterly to cast them off; for he is unchangeable, and his *gifts and calling are without repentance*^s. Our Lord gives us an account of this particular, where he speaks of himself under the character of a vine. *I am the vine,* saith he, *ye are the branches*^t. Here some may object, that *Christ* commands his people to *abide in him*^u, implying that it must be their act. In answer to this, observe he adds, *and I in you*; and read also those words in the same context, *Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you; and ordained you, that you should go, and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain*^w: Now as the security of the branch is in its union to the stock, so there can be no failure of life, whilst the root suffers no decay, and is constant and large in its supplies to every part, since *It pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell*^x, *that from his fulness we might receive and grace for grace*^{*}. A christian indeed would soon lose all the grace he has, were it not for that connection there is betwixt his Lord and him. *Christ*, related to us as our head, may well be said to be *the author and finisher of our faith*^y. As he is pleased by his Spirit to give the principle, so he will se-

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^s Rom. xi. 29. ^t John xv. 5. ^u Ver. 4. ^w Ver. 16.
^x Col. i. 19. ^{*} John i. 16. ^y Heb. xii. 2.

cure the finishing stroke in our compleat sanctification, and glory. Thus he says, *Because I live, ye shall live also; and in that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you*².

5. WE may argue the final perseverance of the saints, from the intercession of our Lord *Jesus Christ*. And here, that you may the better understand the force of this argument, you may observe,

(1.) THAT our Lord *Jesus Christ*, considered as our mediator, doth intercede in the behalf of his chosen, and more especially, as to their final perseverance. And then,

(2.) THAT this intercession of his, as being founded in his own merit, and the shedding of his blood, is always efficacious. From which we may safely conclude, that all those for whom he thus interceeds, shall inherit everlasting life, or *shall never perish*. Our first position, I believe is allowed on all hands, viz.

(1.) THAT our Lord *Jesus Christ* interceeds, or is represented in the scripture, as pleading in the behalf of his people, and especially as to their final perseverance. This matter is put out of all doubt, by that passage in the evangelist *Luke*, where our Lord says to *Peter*, *Simon, Simon, behold, satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith*

² John xiv. 19, 20.

faith fail not^a; that is, that it should not finally fail, or the principle, or habit of it be lost. For as to the exercise of it, you know it failed him in a great degree, when a little after he so obstinately denied his Lord. Now if *Christ* thus prayed for *Peter*, the same reason that engaged him to exercise this office of an intercessor on his account, must have the same influence with respect to all the rest, even to the weakest of his flock. For why was it that he prayed for *Peter*, but because he was part of the trust committed to him by the Father; and therefore he was engaged not to lose him? If any should say, this proves nothing, being a particular case, wherein *Peter* only was concerned: it may with ease be replied, that our Lord mentions that which is equivalent to it, concerning all his disciples. *I pray for them* says he, *I pray not for the world*^b; plainly making a distinction betwixt his disciples, and those, who were not of that happy number. Well, and what is the reason? Why, see what our Lord adds, *for they are thine*, thy chosen beloved ones. In a general sense the whole world is the Lord's, as the cattle upon a thousand hills are his. But these are his in an intimate peculiar sense, as himself expresses it, *All mine are thine, and thine are mine*^c. They were his also, and, that not only as their creator, but more especially here as their redeemer,

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and

^a Luke xxii. 31, 32.^b John xvii. 9.^c Ver. 10.

and covenant-head. Upon which you may observe, what he says further concerning them. And it is worthy your notice, that this was the parting request which he put up for them, when he was just about to leave them, *And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to thee. Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are. While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name: those that thou gavest me, I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition: that the scripture might be fulfilled*^d. And then a little further, he adds, *I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil. And again, Sanctify them through thy truth, thy word is truth*^e. And then, lest any should confine this to the disciples, he says, *Neither pray I for these alone; but for them also, which shall believe on me through their word*^f. And as the sum of the whole prayer, he adds, *Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory which thou hast given me*^g. Now this would be impossible, unless they were kept by his mighty power, *through faith unto salvation*^h. Thus then you see how our Lord interceded for his people while he was on earth. And, though

^d John xvii. 11, 12. ^e Ver. 15, 17. ^f Ver. 20. ^g Ver. 24.

^h 1 Pet. i. 5.

though now heaven conceals him from our sight, yet he is not unmindful of us, he makes the same requests for us in that world which he did in this. See to this purpose a passage in the *Hebrews*, *Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost, that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them*¹. And this the apostle *John* confirms, when he says, *If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous*². Thus then we have largely proved our first position, that *Christ* interceeds for his people, and that he not only did so while he was on earth, but that he doth it now he is in heaven, and more especially for their final perseverance. Our next position is,

(2.) THAT this intercession of our Lord, being founded in his blood and righteousness, cannot but be efficacious, and so proves the point under our consideration. Observe, it was not an affectionate prayer only that *Christ* put up to his Father for these blessings on his people, which, by virtue of his interest in him, will be answered, but it is attended with something, that farther assures us that the blessings he prayed for will be bestowed; for, says he, *I not only pray for them, but, Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me be with me, &c.* And, the apostle *John* informs us, that *we have an advocate with the Father*, and he gives us this description of him, that
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¹ Heb. vii. 25.² 1 John ii. 1.

he is *Jesus Christ the righteous*¹: one who stands before the throne, as the righteous head of the church, who though guilty in themselves, are yet righteous and comely in him. And this it is, that makes his intercession effectual; for as our Lord *Jesus Christ* could not ask any thing of his Father but what is consistent with his glory to bestow, so, for instance, the pardon of sin, the removal of guilt, and the gift of everlasting life, could not be obtained by his intercession, for those who deserve everlasting destruction, unless it were attended with the effectual plea of his own merit. Sin lying at the door, all mankind are naturally and justly condemned, and exposed to ruin, till that is removed by our Lord *Jesus Christ*; and without that it is impossible either that he should pray for such souls to be admitted to glory, or that such a petition, if made, could be answered. For God's justice, being offended, that must be appeased, before he can be reconciled, or the sinner be admitted to his favour. We are to consider our Saviour therefore, as *having by one offering perfected for ever them that are sanctified*^m. In the virtue of which atonement he is now gone to his Father's right hand, and there pleads in the behalf of his chosen, and that his plea is most prevalent he himself lets us know, by what he says, as it is related by the evangelist *John*, *And Jesus*

¹ 1 John ii. 1.^m Heb. x. 14.

Jesus *lift up his eyes, and said, Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me. And I knew that thou hearest me always*^a. Now if so, then he must needs hear him, when he put up that prayer for the whole election of grace, *Father I will that they also whom thou hast given me, be with me, where I am; that they may behold my glory*^o. From which we may very safely conclude the final salvation of God's elect: *Christ* interceeds for them that they should not perish, and his intercession is most prevalent, therefore they cannot perish. But to proceed to another argument,

6. THE glorious truth contained in our text, may be confirmed by this consideration; that *Christ's* sheep have his Spirit promised to them, to take up his abode in their hearts, and to remain with them, not for a day or a year only, but for ever. Now if this be true, and we believe him to be possessed of infinite power, wisdom, and grace, his habitation cannot but secure, to all those who partake of such a blessing, a meetness for the inheritance of the saints in light. This meetness, lest we should mistake, may be considered, in a two-fold way; either as to worthiness, and then it is in *Christ's* righteousness that we expect to behold the glory of God to our comfort another day. But then as flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, that is, a principle of carnality is not consistent with

^a John xi. 41, 42.^o Chap. xvii. 24.

with the perfect purity and happiness of the saints in the world above; so here we are to consider it as the work of the Spirit. He it is that brings the salvation wrought out by our Lord, to our souls, subdues our enmity against it, enables us to receive it with pleasure and satisfaction, and then works all our works in us, and for us. Now if we prove that he is not only sent and given to *Christ's* sheep, but that he abides with them all for these blessed ends, then I think it will naturally follow, that they can *never perish*.

OBSERVE then what our Lord says, to this purpose, in the 14th of *John*. He was now about to depart; well, he will not leave his disciples comfortless: and which way does he take to encourage them? Why, says he, *I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him, for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you^p*. Observe, it is not said, he shall abide with you, unless you grieve, affront, and drive him away, and if so, he shall utterly forsake you; but in a peremptory way, *he shall be in you, and abide with you for ever*. He may be as it were quiescent, and for a time withdraw his consolations, but he will never utterly leave you. And then, that this must not be confined to
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^p John xiv. 16, 17.

the apostles will appear very plain, if we consider, that the glorious effect or consequence of this blessing, our Lord hath equally secured to all his sheep, when he says, *Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word: that they all may be one, &c.*¹ And if they are all to enjoy eternal life, then they must all partake of the same Spirit, for *If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his*². And he who is not *Christ's* shall never see his glory, in a way of peace and comfort. Thus then we see that the whole election of grace have *Christ's* Spirit secured to them, yea, as one that is to remain with them, and that for ever. Now, if so, it is impossible that they should *ever perish*. For observe, this good and glorious Spirit is no less than the most high God, and therefore able, surely, to effect what he pleases. Are they ignorant? he can reveal what he pleases to them; *for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God*³. Are they disconsolate, or unbelieving? he can enable them to cry, *Abba Father*⁴, and lead them to the Son of righteousness for joy and comfort. Are they subject to fall? he can keep them by his own power, make them more than conquerors, and at length accomplish *the good pleasure of his goodness in them*⁵, and with the dissolution
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¹ John xvii. 20, 21. ² Rom. viii. 9. ³ 1 Cor. ii. 10,
⁴ Gal. iv. 6. ⁵ Eph. v. 9. 2 Thef. i. 11.

of their bodies destroy even the principle of corruption, that gives them so much uneasiness, while they are on this side the grave. This we might also confirm, by considering the nature of those gifts which this Spirit bestows upon us; such as faith, repentance unto life, and the like. Now as these arise from the free grace of God, as abiding favours, so they are given never to be taken from us, as the apostle *Paul* expressly asserts, when he says, *The gifts and calling of God are without repentance*^w; or, without a possibility on God's part to repent that he has bestowed them upon us. And if so, if life and salvation are connected with these, then those who are made partakers of them can *never perish*. Now, nothing can be more evident from scripture than that salvation is connected with faith and repentance, or that the same God that gives us to believe in his Son, will also, as another blessing, give us an entrance into glory: for evangelical repentance is unto life: and as *he that believeth shall be saved*^x; so we are kept by the power of God thro' faith unto salvation^y. Thus then he who is partaker of the former will be of the latter, unless it repents the Lord that he hath bestowed these gifts upon him, which is utterly impossible. Observe, we are to consider faith, repentance and eternal life, as the gifts of God. They are all re-

^w Rom. xi. 29. ^x Mark xvi. 16. ^y 1 Pet. i. 5.

represented to us in his word, under that view. Thus the apostle *Paul* says, *By grace are ye saved, through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God*^a. And the apostle *Peter* speaking of our Lord *Jesus Christ*, says, *Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a prince and a saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins*^a. And as to eternal life itself, we find our Lord, in our text, acquainting us that we have it as an act of favour; *I give unto them eternal life*. You may also further observe, that there is a certain order and connection betwixt these blessings, not in a way of merit, but in a way of priority. Thus he whose sins are done away by the death and satisfaction of *Christ*, shall in time be effectually called, and this as an act of grace in God, and of power in the Spirit; and then he who is called, shall be kept through faith; and he who is so kept, shall at last be compleatly saved. All these blessings are entirely independent on the creature; and where one is given, all the rest necessarily follow. And the reason is because, as I have said, *the gifts and calling of God are without repentance*^b. If therefore *Christ's* sheep have these gifts bestowed upon them; then they cannot but enjoy eternal life, which was the matter to be proved. But I proceed now to the last argument.

7. AND

^a Eph. ii. 8.^a Acts v. 31.^b Rom. xi. 29.

7. AND this may be drawn from the absurdity of the contrary opinion. As one well observes, “ that doctrine is undoubtedly to
 “ be received, that hath the greatest tendency
 “ to illustrate the glory of the divine per-
 “ fections; and no sentiments are to be en-
 “ tertained that in the least reflect on the
 “ mercy, sovereignty, immutability or any
 “ of those peculiar glories of God, which he
 “ will not give to another.” Now I hum-
 bly apprehend, that to suppose the possibility
 of any of *Christ’s* sheep perishing, or that
 any of those committed to him by the Father,
 may finally fall from their interest in his favour,
 carries in it not only an impeachment of every
 perfection in the Deity, but the greatest slur
 upon the glory of each of the divine persons
 in the blessed Trinity, Father, Son, and Spi-
 rit. And,

(1.) As to the Father, to suppose he hath
 not absolutely determined the final salvation
 of the elect, is to render him uncertain as to
 this very important event. For, according to
 these men, the Lord hath rested eternal life
 upon certain conditions, which entirely de-
 pend on the free-will of the creature, whe-
 ther he will accept them or not, and accord-
 ing to his acceptance or refusal of these con-
 ditions, God deals with him, and either be-
 stows eternal life or excludes him from it.
 Now observe what this necessarily implies, to
 wit, uncertainty even on God’s part, whether
 this

this blessing is to be his or no. For having given him a condition which is at his pleasure, he may either accept or refuse it. But that the Father has determined the final salvation of his people has been already abundantly proved; and as the purpose is from everlasting, and the decree is gone forth, to suppose it shall in any instance fail of success, and prove abortive, is to suppose an imperfection in the Father's wisdom, a defect in his power, or a disregard to strict justice and faithfulness, or rather indeed a deficiency in all these glorious attributes. And can there be a greater, or a more unworthy reflection on the divine Father? Again,

2. To dispute the certainty of the saints final perseverance reflects great dishonour on our Lord *Jesus Christ*. It is to suppose the insufficiency of his capacity as a Saviour, and the uncertainty of the success of his undertaking; it is to conclude, either that he has not fully answered the demands of divine justice, fulfilled his engagements in the everlasting covenant, and *brought in* a perfect and *everlasting righteousness*^c, or that he has not taken care to secure his own purchase, tho' it has been obtained at so inestimable a price; it is to suppose that he will be unfaithful to his own promises, and, tho' he has said he will *love his own to the end*^d, that yet he will not make it good; it is, in a word, to suppose, after

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all

^c Dan. ix. 24.^d John xiii. 1.

all he has gone through in order to present the body perfect of which he is the head, he will be content to do it in maimed and dismembered circumstances at last. And again,

3. THIS doctrine casts great reflection either on the ability, or the faithfulness and goodness of the holy Spirit, who has undertaken effectually to *shew the things* of Christ to his people^c, to purge and *sanctify*^f them, to give them *new hearts*^g, to *inhabit* them^h, and *make his abode* with them, to communicate to them the *spirit of adoption*ⁱ, to *guide* them by his hand^k, to conduct them in the way through this howling wilderness, and at last to deliver up his charge safe into the hands of Christ, and into the possession of that glory for which he undertook to make them meet^l.

HAVING thus explained this blessed doctrine, and endeavoured to establish the truth of it, I should have proceeded to consider the principal objections against it, but that I must leave to another discourse, and close what I have said with a few words of application. And,

1. LET this be matter of comfort to christians who have backslidden, and whose hearts mourn on that account. They *have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous*^m. This can be no encouragement to

^c John xvi. 13, 14. ^f 1 Cor. vi. 11. ^g Ezek. xxxvi. 26. ^h Rom. viii. 9, 11. John xiv. 16. ⁱ Rom. viii. 15. ^k John xvi. 13. ^l Psal. lxxiii. 24. ^m 1 John ii. 1.

to sin, but may be a blessed preservative against despair. That there is a necessity for such an advocate, who can plead a perfect atonement and righteousness on our behalf, is such an evidence of the strict justice of God, and his perfect holiness, that it is the best argument for the necessity of purity to the christian character, and the greatest motive to engage us to aspire after growing improvements in it. And since in our best condition, in this imperfect state of things, we are still groaning under *a law in our members, which wars against the law of our mindsⁿ*, and we are liable to miscarriages which bring us sometimes even into doubt of our state; what a blessed provision of grace is it, to prevent the dreadful consequences of a state of desperation, that we may apply ourselves to such a powerful and successful intercessor, who is always before his Father's throne to plead for us? But again,

2. LET us try ourselves by this way, whether we are of that happy number, who *shall never perish*. Have we the Spirit of *Christ*? If so, then we are *his*. And would you know whether you have the Spirit? why, he always exalts *Christ*, and humbles the creature. If the more we advance in the appearance of religion, the more vain we grow in the opinion we have of ourselves, and the less we improve in our value for *Christ*, our love to him,

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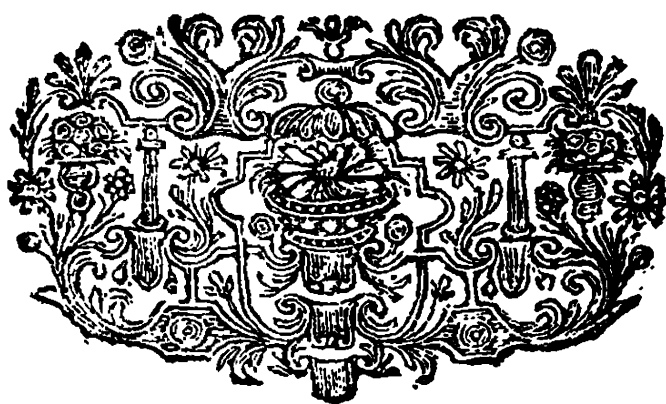
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and our experimental reliance on him, it is a sad proof that our pretensions are not founded on the work of his Spirit, whose proper business it is to lay the creature in the dust, and to take of the things of *Christ*, and shew them to his people. But if, in the midst of all our weakness, we daily improve in humility, and in our honourable esteem of *Christ*, and love to him, it is a good sign that we are under the influence of his Spirit, in whose hands we can *never perish*. Once more,

3. AND lastly, can any of us say, that we have had the experience of *the gifts and callings of God*, and believe them to be *without repentance*? let us then be looking and longing for *Christ's* appearance: for *unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time, without sin, unto salvation*°. And, in the mean time, let us labour to walk as those who have received so glorious an inhabitant into our hearts, as the Spirit of God. Are we *temples of the Holy Ghost*^p? O what manner of persons ought we to be in all holy conversation and godliness^q? How should we labour, by our living testimony, to refute the cavils of those who cast contempt on his glorious person, and his almighty work? How should we constantly endeavour to preserve and improve the divine consolations he came to ensure, by a watchful, tender, humble and holy walk? Then may we hope for growing light, and
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• Heb. ix. 28. p 1 Cor. vi. 19. q 2 Pet. iii. 11.

growing comfort ; and, in one word, then may we hope to be instruments to spread the glory of rich grace, and maintain a steady confidence of our personal interest in the eternal love of the divine Father, in the perfect atonement of our great Redeemer, and our everlasting safety in the hands of his Spirit.





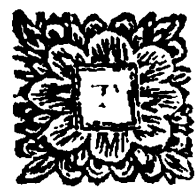
S E R M O N XIII.

On the final perseverance of the saints.

JOHN X. 28.

And I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand.

The third SERMON on this text.



THE doctrine, which from this subject I have been endeavouring to explain and confirm, is the certainty of the saints final perseverance; which I have inferred, at large, from the unchangeableness of the nature of that God, who, as he hath power to bring to pass what he pleases, so he hath by a peremptory decree secured this blessing to all his chosen; from the effectual care which our Lord *Jesus Christ* hath taken to secure them from all their enemies; from

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from their interest in the covenant of grace, established upon the best promises; from their union with *Christ*, their interest in his intercession, and their enjoyment of his Spirit to abide with them, the nature of whose gifts and graces are incorruptible and have everlasting life connected with them. And I have proved it also from the absurdity of the contrary opinion, and the dishonour it reflects on the divine Being; on Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

To which I may add, that the reason which is assigned why any, who have made a profession of religion, are left to final apostacy is, their not being of the number of God's chosen; plainly implying that those who are, should be preserved from it. Thus *Judas* was *the son of perdition*^a. And the apostle *John* says of such, *They went out from us, but they were not of us: for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us. But ye have an unction from the holy One, &c.*^b

I MIGHT also, in the last place, confirm this doctrine from the various similitudes by which it is represented to us in the word of God, which are abundant evidences that *Christ's* sheep shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of his hand. They are the Lord's own portion, and the lot of his inheritance^c;

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they

^a John xvii. 12. ^b 1 John ii. 19, 20. ^c Deut. xxxii. 9.

they are his jewels^d; they are set as a seal on his heart, and on his arm^e; they are graven on the palms of his hands, and their walls are continually before him^f; they are the members of that mystical body of which Christ is the head^g; the living branches of the true vine^h: Christ is the bridegroomⁱ, and they are espoused to him^k; they are the Lord's building^l, founded on the rock of ages^m; God himself is a wall of fire round about themⁿ, their place of defence is the munition of rocks^o, and the gates of hell shall never prevail against them^p: their faith is more precious than gold that periseth^q, their hope as an anchor sure and stedfast, cast within the veil, whither Christ as their forerunner is for them entered^r: and whosoever drinketh of the water he gives, shall never thirst; but the water he shall give him shall be a well of water in him springing up into everlasting life^s.

HAVING thus at large established the doctrine itself, I come,

II. To consider the most material of those objections which are raised against it. And here,

1. SOME argue from the fall of our first parents from their state of innocence, and say, if

^d Mal. iii. 17. ^e Cant. viii. 6. ^f Isai. xlix. 16. ^g Col. i. 18. ^h John xv. 1, 2. ⁱ Chap. iii. 29. ^k 2 Cor. xi. 2.
^l 1 Cor. xiii. 9 ^m Isai. xxvi. 4. ⁿ Mal. vii. 24. ^o Zech. ii. 5.
^p Isai. xxxiii. 16. ^q Mat. xvi. 18. ^r 1 Pet. i. 7. ^s Heb. vi. 19. ^t John iv. 14.

if they, in the rectitude of their nature, were subject to fall, much more a poor weak believer, who has the same enemies, and less strength with which to encounter them. To this it is replied; that there is a vast deal of difference between grace in the believer, and innocency in *Adam*. The one was in its own nature mutable, the other is incorruptible. The condition of *Adam*'s standing was settled; the possibility and danger of his fall represented, and the punishment that was to follow. He stood in his own natural strength, and so he fell. But it by no means follows, that the believer should perish from that state, his stability in which is secured by the immutability of God, the steadfastness of the everlasting covenant, the satisfaction and strength of *Christ*, and the habitation of the Spirit. But I proceed,

2. To the consideration of the scriptures, which are principally brought in defence of the possibility of the saints final apostacy. Such as,

(1.) THAT account we have of the stony-ground hearers, who *received the word with joy*, and yet afterwards *fell away*^t; where I need only observe, that of these it is only said, that they *received* the external message of the gospel *with joy*, which is very consistent with the want of that faith in our Lord *Jesus Christ*, which is absolutely necessary to salvation. And
you

^t Mat. xiii. 4, 5, 6, and Ver. 20, 21.

you know it is added that they *had not root in themselves*; and so only *endured for a while*. To which I will add, that when *Paul* and *Barnabas* preached to the gentiles at *Antioch*, it is said of them *all* in general, that *they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord*; but it was only *as many* among them *as were ordained to eternal life* that *believed*^u. But this we shall confirm at large under another head, and proceed,

2. To consider that passage in *Ezekiel*, where it is said, that *when the righteous turneth away from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, and doth according to all the abominations that the wicked man doth, shall he live? All his righteousness that he hath done shall not be mentioned: in his trespass that he hath trespassed, and in his sin that he hath sinned, in them shall he die*^w. And here it is to be first of all observed, that it appears from the whole scope of this context, that the prophet is vindicating the equity of the divine proceedings with respect to the people of the *Jews*, on whom he had brought heavy temporal judgments, for the heinous instances of their rebellion against him, and departure from him. And if we take the words in a still larger sense, it is very evident they are not to be referred to the covenant of grace, because they speak not the language of it, but of the law. They say *the soul that sins shall die*^x: whereas the voice

^u Acts xiii. 48.^w Ezek. xviii. 24.^x Ver. 4.

voice of grace is, that *God hath sent forth his Son to be a propitiation for us*¹, and that whosoever *believeth in him shall not perish, but have everlasting life*². In one word, there is nothing said here of the imputed righteousness of *Christ*, which is that alone that justifies, but of a righteousness which is a man's own; and which is not the fruit of faith, or of a principle of grace wrought in the heart, but a meer moral, partial, temporary reformation, which however useful it may be, often deceives others by its appearances, and will fatally deceive that man himself who depends upon it. And as a man may fall from it, into open practical wickedness, contempt of all his outward profession, and into obdurate and final apostacy, and receive suitable punishment; all this we allow: but no argument can be drawn from hence in opposition to our text, and the current of the scriptures, which assure us of the eternal safety of *Christ's* sheep. I go on now to consider,

3. THAT passage in the epistle to the *Hebrews*, where it is said, *It is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come; if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance: seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an*

¹ Rom. iii. 25.

² John iii. 16.

an open shame^a. The argument advanced from these words is to this purpose: If the persons mentioned in the text are true believers, then believers may fall away; but the former is true, therefore the latter. As a confirmation of which, it is observed that the persons spoken of here, are not only said to be *enlightened*, but to have *tasted of the heavenly gift*, that, is say they, to have been fed by faith, on the Lord *Jesus Christ*, and have been *made partakers of the holy Ghost*. Now these are discriminating privileges of believers; therefore the apostle must be supposed to have his eye upon those in this passage, and if so, then there is a possibility for the most eminent saint to apostatize. This is the sum of the objection, I think, in its greatest force.

IN answer to which I would first observe, and that only for argument sake, for I hope to shew you the contrary, that though we should grant that what the apostle says here might be referred to the believer; yet I humbly apprehend, that the words being proposed conditionally, to argue any thing from thence, in a matter of disputation, is little more than begging the question. For I cannot but apprehend that it is highly consistent with the glory of God, as a holy Being, to declare in his word the connection there is between final apostacy and everlasting punishment,

^a Heb. vi. 4, 5, 6.

ment, without supposing the one or the other as necessarily the case and portion of any of his children. And that he may have wise ends in this is equally evident; for as the believer may be considered under a two-fold view, either as in himself, or in the Lord *Jesus Christ*, so the Lord may bespeak him as thus considered in his word. Thus for instance, as to the matter in hand, the most eminent saint while in a state of conflict, view him in himself, separate from the grace and strength of *Christ*, and he is liable every moment to apostatize, because of that propensity there is in his nature to turn aside from God; but view him, on the other hand, as related to, and united with *Christ*, as standing in and by his strength, and it is absolutely impossible. Which though it be undoubtedly the case, yet doth this hinder the Lord from declaring in his word the inseparable connection there is betwixt final apostacy, and the punishment of it? This he may do for the humiliation of his children, and the exalting his own grace. Thus what is more natural than for a child of God, when looking round on all his enemies, in the sense of his own inability to encounter them, to lie in the dust before the Lord, adoring his grace that ever he should be preserved by his mighty power unto salvation, and all this without the least doubt or hesitation as to the security of the blessing itself? May I not say, that unless the

Lord keep me I shall certainly fall, and if I do fall finally, I shall certainly perish, without contradicting my well-founded faith and hope, that he who hath kept me hitherto is able to preserve me, and bring me off victorious, and that he will do so? You see then, that if we refer it to believers, the objection proves of no force, since it is only a declaration of the connection there is between sin and punishment.

BUT as I cannot but apprehend that the design of the holy Ghost here was not to speak of believers; so, if I shew you that there is nothing in the text which can give us just ground to confine it to them, and give you some instances of persons who have arrived at all these attainments, and yet have been strangers to faith in the Son of God, that faith which denotes a man an heir of salvation, then I hope it must be allowed that the passage is entirely out of the question. For though a person, how exceedingly soever distinguished from the rest of the world by his profession and outward appearance, nay by the eminency of his talents, but wanting the root of the matter, may apostatize; yet we are not from thence to conclude, that true believers may.

AND here, for your better understanding the mind of the holy Ghost in this passage, let me observe in general, that, as every gift comes from God as a sovereign Being, he
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distributes these according to his own pleasure; to some he gives greater, to others less attainments: just as it is in the common bounties of providence, some have as much as heart could wish, while others are in great straits. This we see also confirmed as to natural abilities: some the Lord endues with quick apprehensions, solidity of judgment, and exceeding retentive memories; while others are in want of all these, and this without the least reflection on the justice of God, because they are favours which we have no right to, and he may do what he *will with his own*^b. And thus it is also as to spiritual abilities, or attainments in religion: some shall be under unavoidable necessity of remaining strangers to the sound of the gospel, as the heathens; while others shall enjoy it, and attend all their days upon it, and yet be almost as ignorant of the great things contained in it, as the very pagans themselves: others again, and which comes to the matter in hand, shall receive the gospel in the letter of it, and arrive at a competent measure of knowledge as to the way of salvation by *Christ*, and yet, contenting themselves with this, are very far from the kingdom of God. Others, again, shall go one step higher, and receive the message, as it brings happiness with it, with pleasure, and satisfaction, and perhaps continue to *rejoice* in it *for a season*, till afterwards it ap-

^b Mat. xx. 15.

appears that they had *no root in them*^c by their apostacy from it. Some of these have been found, in all ages of the church, to have been favoured with many eminent gifts, such as freedom of expressing themselves either to God in prayer, or for God in the work of the ministry, and which perhaps, though coming from a dead unrenewed heart, being clothed with the energy of the holy Ghost, hath brought life with it to other souls, while the instrument hath been left in the natural enmity of his mind against it. That this may be, and really hath been the case with many, is too well known to be disputed. However our Lord puts it out of all doubt, when he assures us, that *many* will plead their right to the kingdom of heaven in the day of account, in that they *have prophesied in his name, and in his name have cast out devils, and done many wonderful works*; but notwithstanding all this, shall be rejected by him^d. Now it is evident, that, without some more than common gifts, these persons could not be said to do these things. Thus *Judas* doubtless preached *Christ*, and very likely wrought miracles, when at the same time his heart was under the government of the basest covetousness, and in order to gratify this wicked principle, he had entertained in his mind the most detestable purpose of betraying his Lord and master. And, as the
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^c Mat. xiii. 20, 21,

^d Chap. vii. 22, 23.

last thing I shall mention under this head, see the account we have of this matter from the prophet *Isaiah*. *Yet they seek me daily, and delight to know my ways, as a nation that did righteousness, and forsook not the ordinance of their God: they ask of me the ordinances of justice: they take delight in approaching to God^e.* Here were persons, not only under a profession of religion, but who seemed to bid very fair for sincerity, and yet were all the while guilty of the greatest hypocrisy and deceit.

Now observe, if this may be, and hath been the case with many persons, then, if I shew you that the apostle in this passage hath his eye to such professors as these, and not to true believers, the objection, how forcible soever in its first appearance, will prove invalid. That he hath not then his eye to believers in this place I prove thus: There is nothing, in the whole of it mentioned, either of faith in the Lord *Jesus Christ*, or what is equivalent to it: nor on the other hand any of those privileges by which believers are described, such as their being chosen, *called*, and *saved*, according to the purpose of his grace^f, *elect* according to the foreknowledge of God^g, *chosen in Christ*^h, and the like; but those things only are mentioned, which persons, making a bare profession of religion, may attain unto, in common with those who are really regenerated. Now you will

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^e Isai. lviii. 2. ^f 2 Tim. i. 9. ^g 1 Pet. i. 2. ^h Eph. i. 4.

plainly see, that we are not to argue, from that which is common to unbelievers with believers, any thing whereby we may properly infer a man to be really born of God. Thus, for instance, all that are born of God have their measure of light and knowledge in the things of God. But all that have light and knowledge are not born of God, as we have before proved to you. And taking this remark along with us, let us now proceed to examine the passage itself.

AND here observe, that the persons spoken of are said to be *enlightened*. The original is φωτισθέντας, which some have chose rather to render *baptised*, than *enlightened*, because of the frequent use of the word in that sense among the ancients, who very commonly when they speak of a person's being baptised, and so received into the christian church, make use of the same word which we translate here *enlightened*. Now if you understand the word here in this sense, you remember that, as in the *jewish* church, *all were not Israel, who were of Israel*ⁱ; so, in the *christian* church, all are not members of *Christ* who come under that ordinance: this is so apparent that none deny it. But taking the word, as it is translated, I hope none will dispute whether *Judas* must not be supposed to be, in some measure, *enlightened* (and the degree is not set down here) before he could preach *Christ* with the rest of the apostles: and yet

ⁱ Rom. ix. 6.

yet who have supposed him to have true grace? And thus, though all believers are *enlightened*, as we observed before, it doth not follow that all enlightened persons are believers. So that the first expression hath nothing in it but what the christian enjoys in common with many, who are not in the same relation with himself to the Lord *Jesus Christ*; and this character cannot therefore be brought as an argument that the apostle's design is to speak of believers.

THE next expression is their having *tasted of the heavenly gift*. By *the heavenly gift* the objectors for the most part understand the Lord *Jesus Christ*, and thence infer that these persons must be believers. To this I answer, that persons may be in some measure convinced of their sins, and be full of trouble and anxiety about their condition, and so be looking out after a remedy, and hearing of *Christ* in the gospel as the saviour of sinners, may find some pleasure and satisfaction in the message, and so be said to *taste the heavenly gift*, who yet are never made saving partakers of it. Observe, it is not said having *fed on Christ by faith*; for, were that the case, our Lord soon puts an end to the controversy, by assuring us, that whoever *eateth his flesh and drinketh his blood hath life eternal**. So that *tasting* in the text must be something different from *feeding on Christ*; or else apostacy, final apostacy I mean,

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* John vi. 54.

and that is what we are contending about, would be impossible. This expression therefore hath nothing in it that proves the persons to be believers. For a person may have some slight superficial *relish* of *Christ* in the gospel, and yet never be *drawn* to him by *the Father*¹.

THE next expression, and that which they most rely upon, is their being *made partakers of the holy Ghost*. Now, observe, the holy Ghost in scripture is put either for the third person in the sacred Trinity, as one with the Father, and the Son, *God over all blessed for ever*; or else for those gifts and graces which he bestows upon mankind. That he is thus to be understood in scripture is universally allowed. If therefore you understand the words in the former sense, we have before at large proved to you, that wherever he comes, it is to *take up his abode* for ever, which must necessarily prevent final apostacy. So that it must be referred to those gifts, which, in a sovereign way, as I have before shewn you, he gives to many, whom he never designs to bring to glory.

As to the next expression, *viz. their tasting of the good word of God*, I have already explained it, by observing, that persons may receive the gospel with joy, and yet not mix it with faith. And as to *the powers of the world to come*, if you understand this of the doctrines
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¹ John vi. 44.

of the resurrection and the final judgment, these may influence a person to a considerable degree of morality in his conversation, who may be yet wholly *ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish a righteousness of his own^m*, and seeking salvation, *as it were by the deeds of the lawⁿ*, may fall short of it.

THUS then I have shewn you that there is nothing in all this passage that contradicts the proposition laid down in our text: for though persons arriving at all these attainments may fall away, yet the least of *Christ's* sheep shall not, being under his care and patronage. And as a further confirmation of it, let me only add, what the apostle says to these very *Hebrews*, in the words just following those under our consideration, *But beloved we are persuaded, that is, we are confident^o, of better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak^p*. As if he had said, “ Though we speak to you all as pro-
 “ fessors of religion, and assure you, that if
 “ any of you having made such a profession,
 “ and rest in external attainments, and after-
 “ wards fall away, and apostatize, it will be
 “ next to impossible, that is very difficult,
 “ that you should be renewed again to repen-
 “ tance; yet for your encouragement *who are*
 “ *beloved*, we are persuaded that this will ne-

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“ ver

^m Rom. x. 3. ⁿ Rom. iii. 20. ^o *πεπείσμεθα*. ^p Heb, vi. 9.

“ ver be your case, God having now bestowed
 “ upon you those graces of the holy Ghost
 “ which accompany salvation.”

AND here, lest any doubting soul should from this text write bitter things against himself, remember, that though the words seem to run in an absolute way, yet the word we translate *impossible* hath been taken in other places, and I apprehend it must in this, with limitation. Thus our Lord says, *It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God*^a; and yet we know that many who have been rich, and for a time have trusted in their riches, are now set down with *Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob*, in that blessed kingdom. And besides our Saviour adds, when his disciples were astonished at these words, *with men it is impossible, but not with God: for with God all things are possible*^r. So that all allow, that our Lord is only expressing the great difficulty that attended it: and why may not the word have the same sense here? Thus then I have largely considered this passage, and I have been the more particular upon it, not only because of its difficulties, but the very great applause it hath met with when produced in favour of the apostacy of the saints; whereas in reality it hath no manner of reference to them, and if it had, it is only an intimation of the connection between apostacy

^a Mark x. 25.

^r Ver. 27.

stacy, and the punishment of it, for the humiliation of the saint, and the exalting the glory of the grace of God.

(4.) THE same answer may be given to that passage, where the apostle says, *For if we sin willfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment; and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries*: which, if you understand it of final apostacy, it supposes nothing, in fact, as to the possibility of the saints falling under it; but only, in general, that wherever any fall from their profession, if they renounce the sacrifice of *Christ*, there is no other provision for their salvation. And should any man infer from my saying to a fellow-christian, If you should appear in in the end to be no true believer, by your final apostacy, you will certainly be damned; would it, by any rational conclusion follow, that therefore the saint that is really so, may be liable to so dreadful a condition? Thus then I hope I have let you a little into the fallacy of the reasonings that are made use of from this passage.

(5.) THE next portion of scripture I shall turn you to, that is advanced in favour of the saints apostacy, is that where it is said, *Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure*

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in him. But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition : but of them that believe, to the saving of the soul[†]. Those who plead for the possibility of the saints falling from grace, find fault here with our translation of the words, and render them thus : *Now the just shall live by faith, but if they draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in them.* From whence they form this argument ; If by the *just man* here is meant the believer, then, if there is a possibility of his falling, there is also a possibility of the falling of the greatest saint upon earth. But the former is true, therefore also the latter. As to the first proposition, that it is spoken of believers is evident, from the character that is given of them ; they are *the just*, and they *live by faith*. So that they think they have good ground to conclude, that the meaning of the words runs thus : *The just shall live by faith*, that is, if he continues in his faith, *but if he draws back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him.* This I take to be the sum of what is produced from this text in their favour.

In answer to which, what I said under another objection will, I think, solve every difficulty that can remain in this. For, observe, if you suppose it to refer to the believer, what doth it conclude, but this, that God may declare, for the humiliation of the saint, and the exaltation of his own grace,
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[†] Heb. x. 38, 39.

the connection there is betwixt sin and punishment, without supposing either the one or the other necessarily in his chosen? It is evident to every one, that the words are proposed in a conditional form: and to argue any thing from thence to a matter in dispute, as I have before shewn you, is begging the question. Were this all that we could say to the objection, for my own part, I cannot see but it might be sufficient to convince every one acquainted with the word of God, and duly attending to it. But if, on the contrary, I shew you, that the design of the holy Ghost was to speak of the believer only in the first expression, and of a person making only a profession of religion, and having only a form of godliness, in the next; it must be allowed, that the argument drawn from hence to support the final apostacy of the saints cannot but be entirely inconclusive. For though some may *draw back* in the sense of the text, yet it doth not therefore follow, that the true believer may.

BUT that you may better understand this passage, you may observe, that the apostle is, through the whole of this chapter, speaking of two sorts of persons, both having a form of godliness, and one of them no more than a form. Thus he speaks a little before of some who *forsake the assemblies of Christ*, and this, in contradistinction from the true members of his mystical body, who desire to preserve

a due regard to the honour of his institutions^e. And many other instances might be mentioned in the context, were it needful: but I believe, if you consult it at your leisure, you will easily perceive the truth of this observation. Well, taking this along with us, we may see how beautifully the apostle carries on the same design in the words before us. There are two different states mentioned which are applicable to two different sorts of persons. These two states are *πίστεως* on the one hand, and *ὑποσολῆς* on the other, of them that *believe*, and of them that *draw back*.

OBSERVE again the different ends that are assigned to these persons; the one shall *live*, and *believe to the saving of their souls*; and the other shall be disowned by God; he *will have no pleasure in them*, notwithstanding all their pretensions, and in the issue shall fall into *perdition*. And now what can any infer from all this, but that the believer, being *kept by the mighty power of God*, shall in the end obtain everlasting *salvation*; whereas, on the contrary, persons who *draw back* shall certainly be destroyed? which may with the utmost freedom be allowed, without denying the doctrine of the saints final perseverance. Thus then you see how foreign this passage is from the purpose for which it is brought; for instead of containing any thing of that nature, it appears to carry in it a plain evidence of the

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^e Heb. x. 25, 26.

contrary truth, which I have been endeavouring to confirm. For you will observe, what the apostle says, *We are of them that believe to the saving of the soul*; that is, eternal life will be our portion. And what is the reason? Why it is given to us to believe in the Lord *Jesus Christ*, as an instance of his kindness to us, and as he hath begun his good work in us, we may depend upon the full inheritance, as well as the first pledge of it. But,

(6.) THE next considerable passage that is brought to prove the saints apostacy, and indeed the last that I shall mention, is in the writings of the apostle *Peter*, when describing the dreadful character and condition of the apostates of those times, he says, *When they speak great swelling words of vanity, they allure, through the lusts of the flesh, through much wantonness, those that were clean escaped from them who live in error: while they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption: for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage. For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world, through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome; 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. But it is happened unto them accord-*
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ing to the true proverb, the dog is turned to his own vomit again ; and the sow that was washed, to her wallowing in the mire^w. The argument drawn from this passage is of the same nature with the preceding, *viz.* If the persons spoken of in the text are said to *have escaped the pollutions of the world, and that through the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ*, they must be believers : and if so, then believers may turn as *dogs to their vomit*, and so be lost.

IN answer to this I shall only observe, that it is so very evident, even upon the bare reading of the text, who the persons are that the apostle would describe, that one would wonder any man should ever suppose them to have really believed in the Son of God. Who knows not but persons may have escaped from error, and have arrived at a moral conversation, and so may be said to have *escaped the pollutions that are in the world*, and yet afterwards make it appear that this was not upon a right foundation, by a returning to their former course? May not a man that never tasted of the grace of God, know the way of righteousness, and seemingly set out with much zeal in it, and yet all the while be an enemy to God in his heart, and so turn again to his folly ; whose knowledge instead of profiting him may prove an aggravation of his guilt? These things are so commonly insisted on in
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^w 2 Pet. ii. 18,—22.

practical discourses, that you cannot but be well acquainted with them. And now, understanding the passage in this sense, and if you read the context at your leisure, you will see how consistent it is with the design of the apostle. What is there in it to oppose the saints perseverance? Though some, who may have the name of saints, and also a degree of knowledge in common with those who are really so, may *turn away from the holy commandment*; yet it doth not hence follow that saints may.

AND thus I have gone through the most considerable texts of scripture which are produced by the adversaries of the saints final perseverance. I should now have gone on to the consideration of those instances that are given, by which they think they can demonstrate that this hath been the case with some, and therefore may be with all. But this I must leave till another opportunity, only let me drop these two reflections.

I. ARE there many who may go a great way in religion, and yet not one spiritual and believing step towards the kingdom of God? How earnestly then should we beg of God, that we may not be left to deceive our own souls? Every grace hath its counterfeit; and we know *the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked*^{*}. But would we judge safely concerning our own state; let us ask ourselves where we are putting our trust

^{*} Jer. xvii. 9.

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trust and dependance. Is it in *Christ*, or in ourselves? do we look for glory, immortality, and eternal life in him, as the only refuge set before us? Why then,

2. WE may assure ourselves, that he who hath been *the author*, or *beginner*, will be *the finisher of our faith*^r. Though many shall appear in this world like stars for their brightness, and in the issue lose their lustre and fall into hell; yet, where grace hath once taken possession of the soul, it shall never be lost. Though many may have received light and seeming satisfaction under the means of grace; and may have had eminent gifts of the holy Ghost, and yet after all *fall away*, and are never *renewed unto repentance*; yet that soul who has those things which necessarily accompany salvation, shall certainly in the issue arrive at the full enjoyment of it.

^r Heb. xii. 2.



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