

## The Perseverance of God

By Jesse Larsen

While there are verses in the Bible that emphasize a perseverance on our part (such as Hebrews 10:36), there are also some verses that emphasize a perseverance on God's part. The perseverance that God expects from us will not be accomplished unless it is God who is persevering through us. For example, Paul told believers that *"it is God who works in you both to **will** and to **do** for His good pleasure"* (Philippians 2:13).

Personally, I believe that God has given us a free will in order to accept His free gift of eternal life. A gift, by its very nature, must be received - otherwise it is not truly a gift. This is why John 1:12 says, *"As many as **received Him**, to them He gave the right to become children of God."* So we receive Him first, and **then** we become children of God (not the other way around), which is one of the main reasons that I believe in free will.

However, although I believe in free will, I also believe that our wills are regenerated once we have been born again, and it is then God who works in us to will and to do for His good pleasure (as Philippians 2:13 declares). Philippians 1:6 declares that **He will** complete the work that He has started in us - because it is in fact the Holy Spirit who is persevering through us!

Paul told the Philippians to *"work out your own salvation with fear and trembling"* (Philippians 2:12) just before stating that it is God who works in them to will and to do for His good pleasure. Notice that Paul was not telling them to work for their salvation (which is the idea that some people seem to get when they read that verse). Instead, he was telling them to work out the salvation that God had already given them. This is also made clear by the statement: *"created in Christ Jesus **unto** good works"* (Ephesians 2:10).

It is our being created in Christ Jesus that enables us to do the good works that He requires of us - and by doing them, we are working out the salvation that He has given us. This explains what Paul meant when he said that he was *"striving according to [God's] working which works in me mightily"* (Colossians 1:29). To strive without His working in us will only leave us burned out, because our motive may not have been righteous. But God's working in us gives us the right motives as He continually searches our heart (See Psalm 139:23-24). He also gives us the strength to perform His work. This is important to remember because there are times when we get so carried away in the work of the Lord that we forget the Lord of the work. I say that not to look down on anyone, but because I have been there myself, which is why I know it to be true.

But the Lord's working through us is done more and more as we abide in His Word: *"If you abide in My word, you are my disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free"* (John 8:31-32). Because of this (and also because 1 Peter 1:23 tells us that we are born again by the Word of God), I cannot emphasize the importance of the Word of God enough. It is what keeps us from sin (See Psalm 119:11). The Word of God is what gives us strength to will and to do God's pleasure, is described by the Psalmist as *"a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path"* (Psalm 119:105), and is understandable to the young (See Psalm 119:9).

Reading the Word causes us to want to read it more. Like many other things, we need to develop a taste for it. And once we delight in His Word (the Lord and His Word go together), He then gives us the desires of our heart (See Psalm 37:4). Until then, we will end up frustrated, seeking things that only satisfy temporarily before leaving us even emptier than we were in the first place. Once again, I have been there myself, and the times that I have been the most depressed and discouraged are times when I have not been abiding in His Word.

Since it is through His Word that the truth sets us free (See John 8:31-32), it is through His

Word that God's Holy Spirit perseveres through us. Only then is it true that *"tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character hope"* (Romans 5:3-4). But we quickly become burned out if we strive in the flesh to persevere. We need to recognize the Believer's position in Christ to persevere as God would have us persevere.

For example, Hebrews 10:14 says, *"By one offering [Christ] has perfected **forever** those who are being sanctified."* Obviously, someone who has been perfected **forever** cannot be unperfected, which brings me to the words of Philippians 1:6 again: *"He who has begun a good work in you **will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ**."* With some of us, there may be missed opportunities to have grown more in our walk with the Lord, but the above verse guarantees that God Himself will continue to persevere in those who have *"been born again, not of corruptible seed but **incorruptible**, through the word of God which lives and abides forever"* (1 Peter 1:23). Anything that has been born of corruptible seed can perish, but those who are truly born of incorruptible seed *"shall never perish"* (John 10:28)! Never means never, and this is why 1 John 3:9 states that God's seed **remains** in those who have been born of God.

Although we will not reach sinless perfection while we are on this earth, those whom God is persevering through no longer **practice** sin, because they see sin as God sees sin. So it is the Holy Spirit who sees sin for what it is, through us, and therefore it is He who perseveres through us. I believe that this is what is meant by the statement: *"sealed [by the Holy Spirit] unto the day of redemption"* (Ephesians 4:30). A true believer may struggle with sin (especially a babe in Christ - See 1 Corinthians 3:1), but, nevertheless, *"sin **shall not** have dominion over you [if] you are no longer under law but under grace"* (Romans 6:14). And once again, the Word of God is where to turn if we are struggling with sin (See Psalm 119:11). When a true believer understands their position that they *"shall **never** perish"* (John 10:28), they have far more gratitude and a much higher motive to obey the Lord than if they strove in the flesh to obey His commandments. They then realize God's commandments *"are not burdensome"* (1 John 5:3). If someone who seemed to be a believer clearly rejects Christ, the following verse explains why....

*"They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us"* (1 John 2:19).