

## Perseverance

Will all who are saved continue to persevere in their faith? In other words, could someone genuinely profess faith in Christ but die in a spiritually pathetic state? People have dealt with this issue for ages, especially in our day when many claim the name of Christ but show little fruit. Note below NT verses people use to advocate perseverance and a free grace position.

Perseverance	Free Grace
<p>Matthew 7:15-22</p> <p>"Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. <sup>16</sup> You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? <sup>17</sup> So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. <sup>18</sup> A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. <sup>19</sup> Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. <sup>20</sup> Thus you will recognize them by their fruits. <sup>21</sup> "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. <sup>22</sup> On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?'"</p>	<p>This text does not relate to people in general but to how to recognize false prophets.</p> <p>A false prophet's lifestyle reveals his true, unsaved condition. Such a person is not willing to suffer for the sake of righteousness. Rather, his only "suffering" is the difficulty entailed to convince his followers to open their wallets. Such people can be spotted not because they give open profession to Jesus or even due to their ability to perform miracles. We must discern their godless character by their unwillingness to do God's will.</p> <p>It goes beyond this text to say that these are believers who persevere in their faith. To establish such a claim, one must first prove such heretics are believers.</p>
<p>John 8:31-32 To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. <sup>32</sup> Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."</p>	<p>In this text Christ exhorts believers to be true disciples. He does not say that if they disobey that they will no longer be Christians (or never were). Rather, they will not truly be free.</p>
<p>John 15:6 If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned.</p>	<p>"Remain" denotes obedience. This text simply indicates that Jesus disciplines disobedient believers. It goes too far to claim that the fire here denotes hell.</p>
<p>Rom. 8:12 Therefore, brothers, we have an obligation—but it is not to the sinful nature, to live according to it.</p>	<p>Paul knew that believers could choose wrongly, so he exhorted the Roman Christians to live according to their new nature.</p>
<p>Rom. 11:22 Consider therefore the kindness and sternness of God: sternness to those who fell, but kindness to you, provided that you continue in his kindness. Otherwise, you also will be cut off.</p>	<p>"Kindness and sternness' (v. 22) are aspects of the divine nature, the latter experienced by Israel in her present condition, the former being the portion of Gentile believers. But the positions can be reversed, and if this occurs, it will not be due to any fickleness in God, but to the nature of the human response. Once Israel's unbelief is put away, God is prepared to graft her branches in again (v. 23)" (<i>NIV Bible Commentary</i>).</p>

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<p>1 Cor. 15:2 By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.</p>	<p>Belief "in vain" is not false faith or not "truly" believing. It means the <i>object</i> of their faith would be unreliable if Christ did not resurrect (v. 14; cf. Dillow, <i>Final Destiny</i>, 364-65).</p>
<p>2 Cor. 13:5 Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you—unless, of course, you fail the test?</p>	<p>We cannot assume that being "in the faith" means being regenerate, as elsewhere it means living according to what we believe (2 Cor. 1:24; cf. 1 Cor. 16:13; Dillow, 448-49). The verse means some Christians fail to live according to their profession.</p>
<p>Phil. 1:6 being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.</p>	<p>This can be handled in at least two ways:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. It teaches eternal security, not perseverance.</li> <li>2. The "good work" refers to God's work of bringing people into his family through the Philippians. God assured that their participation in the gospel would continue to bear fruit until Christ's return.</li> </ol>
<p>This verse places the responsibility of the believer's security upon God rather than any human being.</p>	<p>It does <i>not</i> say that each individual believer will remain faithful until Christ returns. Each one of them died prior to the return of Christ.</p>
<p>Col. 1:15 If you hold fast...</p>	<p>A believer may not be presented before Christ relatively blameless (Dillow, 536).</p>
<p>Titus 1:16 [False teachers] claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him.</p>	<p>These persons have never been believers since they reject the truth (1:14).</p>
<p>Heb. 3:6 But Christ is faithful as a son over God's house. And we are his house, if we hold on to our courage and the hope of which we boast.</p>	<p>Only faithful believers are in Christ's priestly "house", so they rule with him (cf. 2 Tim. 2:12). It is not true for every Christian (Dillow, 384).</p>
<p>Heb. 3:14 We have come to share in Christ if we hold firmly till the end the confidence we had at first.</p>	<p>There exists a distinction between "knowing Christ" (salvation) and "sharing in Christ" (being rewarded in Him).</p>
<p>Hebrews 10:35-39 <sup>35</sup>So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. <sup>36</sup>You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised. <sup>37</sup>For in just a very little while, "He who is coming will come and will not delay. <sup>38</sup>But my righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him." <sup>39</sup>But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved.</p>	<p>The fact that the author notes their need to persevere indicates that they may not do so. In fact, the entire letter appeals for the readers not to shrink back to Judaism, which he viewed as a distinct possibility. That such backsliders would not please God does not indicate that they were never believers in the first place. It indicates that such persons would be "destroyed" (killed) in the Jerusalem fires of AD 70 that consumed the unbelieving Jews with whom the readers were tempted to follow.</p> <p>"Apostasy here is not theoretical; it is a real possibility. This is the apostasy of... the regenerate child of God who has received the imputed righteousness of Christ" (Dillow, 527).</p>

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<p>James 2:20-26 You foolish man, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? <sup>21</sup>Was not our ancestor Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? <sup>22</sup>You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. <sup>23</sup>And the Scripture was fulfilled that says, “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness,” and he was called God’s friend. <sup>24</sup>You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone. <sup>25</sup>In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction? <sup>26</sup>As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.</p>	<p>Does James distinguish false faith from true faith that saves from damnation? No. How does James use “faith” and “salvation”? James contrasts a regenerate person who claims he has a <i>walk of faith</i> with one who actually does have this lifestyle (Dillow, 392). Faith in James refers not to the <i>initial</i> act of faith that saves from hell. It denotes the ongoing <i>walk of faith</i> that can save one from the pathway to “death,” or the downward progression “unto death resulting in a negative assessment of one’s life at the Judgment Seat of Christ” (ibid.). The NT often refers to faith as a walk instead of as an initial event (Rom. 14:23; Gal. 3:11; 5:25; Col. 2:6; 2 Cor. 5:7), especially in James (1:2-4, 6; 2:1, 5; 5:15).</p> <p>Further, James uses “salvation” in a temporal—not eternal—sense. In fact, the NT refers to salvation as entering heaven only 43% of the time and not even once in the OT (Dillow, 394). “Normally salvation refers to deliverance from a temporal difficulty, death, disease, or a meaningless life” (Dillow, 395). James uses “save” five times, never referring to salvation from eternal damnation. It denotes salvation from consequences of sin (1:21), loss at the Judgment Seat of Christ (2:14), sin’s penalties (4:12), disease (5:15), and physical death (5:20; cf. Dillow, 394-404).</p>
<p>2 Pet. 1:10-11 Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure. <sup>11</sup>For if you do these things, you will never fall, and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.</p>	<p>The context notes, “For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But if anyone does not have them, he is nearsighted and blind and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins” (1:8-9). The “falling” refers not to loss of salvation but to a stumbling in one’s growth as a Christian.</p>
<p>1 John 2:19 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.</p>	<p>The key issue here is, “Who are ‘they’?” Are these believers who had not persevered? The context contrasts the “they” in verse 19 with the “you” in verse 20, meaning antichrists (“they”) had arisen from the apostolic circle itself. Other passages in the epistle show the same we/you contrasts (1:1-3; 4:4-6). John is speaking of heretics whose defection showed that they were never saved in the first place (Hodges, <i>The Gospel Under Siege</i>, 58-59).</p>

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The Reformed view typically says that these men had never believed in the first place.

**Free Grace****Apostasy of Hymenaeus and Alexander**

1 Timothy 1:18-20 <sup>18</sup>Timothy, my son, I give you this instruction in keeping with the prophecies once made about you, so that by following them you may fight the good fight, <sup>19</sup>holding on to faith and a good conscience. Some have rejected these and so have shipwrecked their faith. <sup>20</sup>Among them are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan to be taught not to blaspheme.

These men: (1) had believed ("faith"), (2) had given evidence of their faith in a good conscience, and (3) needed to be taught not to blaspheme, "taught" being a word used of divine discipline of the regenerate (1 Cor. 11:32; Tit. 2:12-13; Heb. 12:5-6; Dillow, 525).

**Apostasy in Galatians**

Galatians 6:12 <sup>12</sup> Those who want to make a good impression outwardly are trying to compel you to be circumcised. The only reason they do this is to avoid being persecuted for the cross. .

"Submission to circumcision indicated cessation of faith in Christ (Gal. 2:17-21). In fact, it meant that a believer viewed Christ's death as vain, had severed himself from Christ (Gal. 5:2), had fallen from grace (Gal. 5:43), and was liable to judgment (Gal. 5:10). To be severed from Christ and to fall from grace logically required a former standing in grace and connection with Christ from which to fall and be severed! Those who are regenerate may possibly deny the faith and forfeit their share in the coming kingdom. There is no need to assume that they lose salvation, as the Arminian maintains" (Dillow, 527).

**Apostasy in Hebrews**

Hebrews 10:38-39 <sup>38</sup>But my righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him." <sup>39</sup>But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved.

**Perseverance****Free Grace**

2 Peter 1:5-11 <sup>5</sup> For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, <sup>6</sup> and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, <sup>7</sup> and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. <sup>8</sup> For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>9</sup> For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins. <sup>10</sup> Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to make your calling and election sure, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall. <sup>11</sup> For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Verses 8-9 note that some who are forgiven are ineffective, unfruitful, nearsighted, and blind. They should return to Christ so they won't fall away and so they will be richly rewarded upon entrance into eternal life (vv. 10-11).

**Apostasy in the Last Days**

<sup>NIV</sup> 1 Timothy 4:1 The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons.

The verb for "fall away" (*apostesontai* ἀποστήσονται, from ἀφίσταμαι) is used only here in the NT in the intransitive sense as "leave, go away; desert, commit apostasy; keep away; trans. incite to revolt" and appears in Acts 5.37 (Friberg NT). One cannot abandon a faith that he never had accepted.

**Denial of the Faith**

<sup>NIV</sup> 1 Timothy 5:8 If anyone does not provide for relatives, and especially for his immediate family, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever

This text says that some Christians act worse than unbelievers. This is a lifestyle of apostasy that is equally as serious as spoken blasphemy.

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	<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>Apostasy of Widows</u></b></p> <p>1 Timothy 5:14-15 <sup>14</sup> So I counsel younger widows to marry, to have children, to manage their homes and to give the enemy no opportunity for slander. <sup>15</sup> Some have in fact already turned away to follow Satan.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>Apostasy for Materialism</u></b></p> <p>1 Timothy 6:10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>Apostasy Due to Gnostic Deception</u></b></p> <p>1 Timothy 6:20-21 Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to your care. Turn away from godless chatter and the opposing ideas of what is falsely called knowledge, <sup>21</sup>which some have professed and in so doing have wandered from the faith</p> <p>Timothy himself is being warned here, which makes it clear that the possibility of apostasy relates to genuine believers.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>Apostasy of Demas and Others</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demas (2 Tim. 4:10)</li> <li>• Phygelus &amp; Hermogenes (2 Tim. 1:15)</li> <li>• Many others (2 Tim. 4:16)</li> </ul> <p>In the NT, “fall away” does not “refer to falling away from eternal salvation. It refers, rather, to a falling away from the path of growth, or forfeiture of eternal reward” (Dillow, 535, n. 1743).</p>

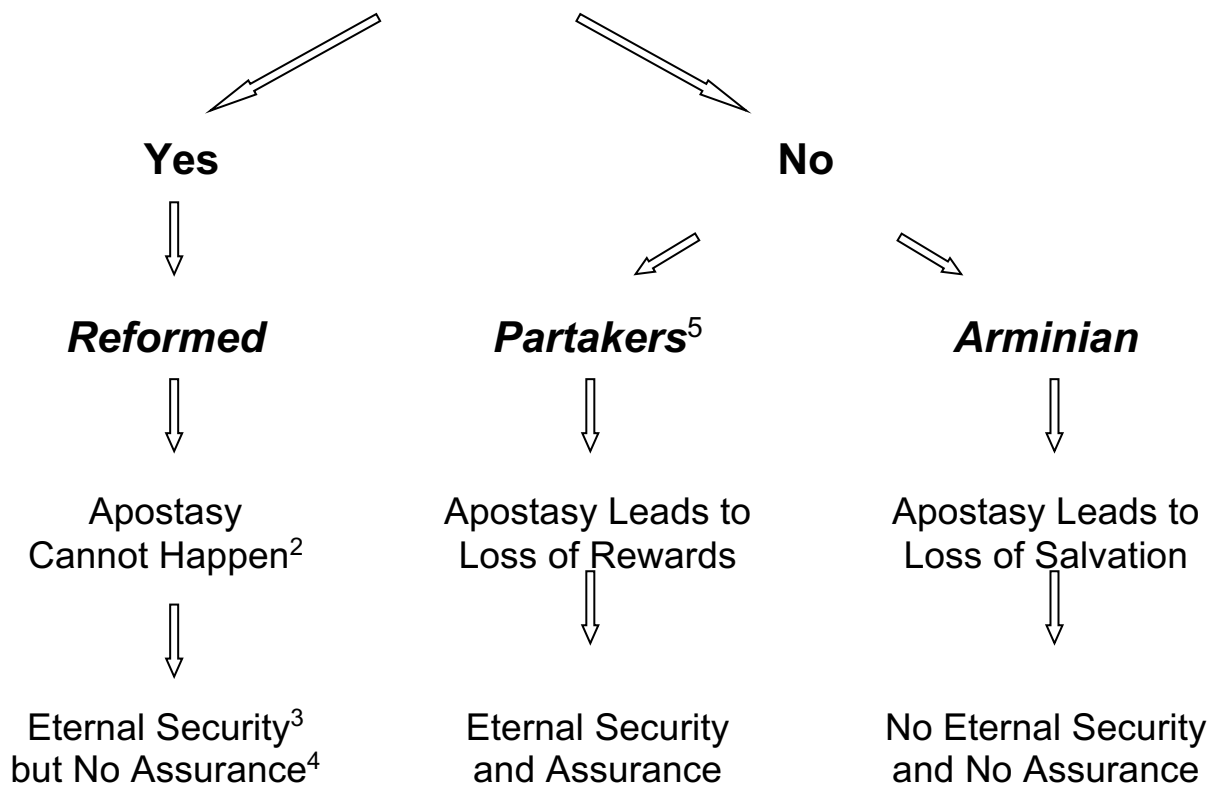
### **Supporting Perseverance (i.e., Advocates Conditional Security)**

Davis, John Jefferson. “The Perseverance of The Saints: A History of the Doctrine,” *JETS* (June 1991): 213-38.

### **Opposing Perseverance (i.e., Advocates Eternal Security)**

Dillow, Joseph C. *Final Destiny: The Future Reign of the Servant Kings*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Monument, CO: Paniym Group, 2012. 1093 pp. pb.

## Will each genuine Christian persevere in faithfulness at death?<sup>1</sup>



<sup>1</sup> The Reformed view allows for *temporary* lapses into a carnal (worldly) state, but it assumes that these will always be rectified by the time of death so that no true believer can die in rebellion with God.

<sup>2</sup> Apostasy refers to a true Christian denying the faith in word or deed. This cannot happen in the Reformed view because perseverance is upheld. The Reformed view sees what *appears* to be a denial of one's personal faith means that the person was *never* a Christian in the first place (only a "professing Christian" but in reality an unbeliever).

<sup>3</sup> Eternal security means "once saved, always saved" so that salvation can never be lost, either through the fault of the believer or of God. Security is *God's* work of preserving each person by his own grace and choice. This doctrine keeps a consistent meaning to "eternal life," for to lose "eternal life" is nonsense if it never was eternal. One cannot possess *temporary* "eternal life" that can be lost!

<sup>4</sup> Assurance of salvation means the believer can know with 100% confidence that he will go to heaven at death because the work of Christ on his behalf has forgiven any sin that could be committed. Since the Reformed view teaches that all believers will persevere and no one ever knows until death whether he will continue believing until death, this results in a continual state of lack of assurance of salvation, even though a true believer's eternal security is guaranteed. Dillow calls the scholar advocating the Reformed view "the Experimental Predestinarian" due to that scholar's insistence upon perseverance in good works. This term is used because, even though one might be predestined (elect, chosen) for salvation, no one can tell if a person has persevered until that person's "experiment" of life is completed at death (Joseph Dillow, *Final Destiny*, 12-17).

<sup>5</sup> Dillow calls his view "partakers" or "partner" based on Hebrews 3:14, "For we have become partakers [lit. partners, Gr. *metochoi*] of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end." "The Partner perseveres in good works to the end of life" (Dillow, 18). Paul uses the synonym in 1 Corinthians 9:23, "I do all things for the sake of the gospel, so that I may become a fellow partaker [Gr. *synkoinonos*] of it." The Partaker receives his inheritance in the future millennial kingdom as Christ's partner, reigning with Him.