THE IMPORTANCE OF PERSEVERANCE

In the previous lesson on “Eternal Security,” we learned that:

1. Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. God is the Christian’s *new Father*. He has adopted us out of our old spiritual family, where we were once in bondage to Satan, but now we belong to God forever!
2. Your relationship with God is now a *Father-child* relationship by spiritual re-birth.

Review *John 1:12-13…*

12Yet to all who did receive Him, to those who believed in His Name, He gave the right to become children of God— 13children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God**. - John 1:12-13**

B. When you were born physically, a record of your birth was made, called your birth certificate.

When God gave you eternal life and you were *re-born*, and a record was made too.

11And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. 12Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life. 13I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so *that you may know that you have eternal life*. **– 1 John 5:11-13**

C. Your birth certificate was signed or marked with a seal. Your spiritual birth is *sealed* by the Holy Spirit of God.

13In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were *sealed* with the promised Holy Spirit **– Ephesians 1:13**

30And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were *sealed* for the day of redemption. – **Ephesians 4:30**

In ancient times an important document or letter was sealed with wax or lead, with the king’s royal seal stamped on the seal. The seal could not be broken unless opened by the one to whom it was delivered.

God has *saved you* and *sealed you* with His Holy Spirit.

After you were born, you cannot be unborn, right. You will forever be a child of your biological mother and father.

So it is that when you are *reborn*, you **cannot** be *un-reborn.* And, you will forever be your Heavenly Father’s child, for all eternity. God your Father has *saved and sealed* you! The deal has been sealed with His Holy Spirit! The deal cannot be broken. GOD does not break His promises, ever!

OK, so that’s what God has done for us, *spiritually*. Now let’s take a look at what this will look like *practically*.

**What about people who fall away from the faith?**

This is a very important question…

**Answer:** In short, they were ***never saved***to begin with.

The Bible warns us of this often. People will fall away for various reasons:

In actual fact, most of the people who began to follow Jesus because He miraculously healed them, or fed them, as in the feeding of the 5000, eventually fell away. They walked away from Jesus. But that’s because they were never saved to begin with. They followed Jesus around for a while, because of the temporary physical things He was offering them.

**23**Because of the miraculous signs Jesus did in Jerusalem at the Passover celebration, many began to trust in him. **24**But Jesus didn’t trust them, because he knew all about people. **25**No one needed to tell him about human nature, for he knew what was in each person’s heart. – **John 2:23-25**

Remember what we’ve said before. Many people claim to believe in God, but only pray to God or trust God when they need something from Him. We want Him to fix our marriage, job situation, finances, broken heart, fears or sadness. But there is no desire to worship God, even though He is the Lord God Almighty. Human nature is selfish and self-serving. So serving God is the farthest thing from our minds. Unless He saves us. Then we begin to desire to go to church to worship Him, and study the Bible to get to know Him, and obey the Bible, as we seek to follow Him.

There were thousands of early disciples (followers of Jesus). But Jesus knew the intentions of their hearts. They were under Roman rule. The Jews lived in an occupied state. All they wanted from Jesus was to make their lives easier. They wanted freedom from oppression. They didn’t care about freedom from their sin. Sounds like most of us today, doesn’t it?

**14**When the people saw him do this miraculous sign, they exclaimed, “Surely, he is the Prophet we have been expecting!” **15**When Jesus saw that they were ready to force him to be their king, he slipped away into the hills by himself. – **John 6:14-15**

Their motives for following Jesus were centered around their own desires and expectations of who they thought Jesus was or wanted Him to be.

Many people are still like that today.

When Jesus began to teach them what God ‘*expected from them’*, they didn’t want to hear it. When Jesus began to teach them the truth about Himself and their responsibility toward Him, they just walked away.

In **John 6** the Bible tells of the great event of Jesus feeding the 5000. The people had their felt needs met. Their desires. But, when Jesus explains that He Himself is the *true bread* from Heaven, the **Bread of Life**. They respond by saying that His teaching is too hard to understand, and instead of putting in any effort to learn and grow, they walk away.

63The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you—they are full of the Spirit and life. 64Yet there are some of you who do not believe.” For Jesus had known from the beginning which of them did not believe and who would betray him. 65He went on to say, “This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled them.”

66From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him. – **John 6:63-66**

After many disciples’ desert Jesus, He turns to the 12 Disciples that had left everything to follow Him.

Jesus asks…

67“You do not want to leave too, do you?” Jesus asked the Twelve.

68Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. 69We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God.” **– John 6:67-69**

Only Jesus’ true followers stayed with Him. Why? Because they believed in every Word that He said! After all, He is the WORD of God!

Remember, from our previous lessons: Only God brings Salvation, it is not by human effort. We can only *‘understand’* the truth of the gospel by the Holy Spirit’s enabling. *Understanding* how truly sinful we really are and how amazing God’s *grace* is, comes by *faith*, given by the Spirit. Our stubborn hard hearts won’t grasp this without the Spirit’s enabling.

Therefore, in Biblical times as well as today, many people begin to follow Jesus because they want what He isn’t actually offering. It isn’t really Jesus they’re after, but rather certain *perceived benefits*. We want the *blessings*, but not the *blesser.*

Think about it. Any sane person would rather want Heaven than hell. Everybody wants a *blessing* on their marriage, on our relationships, upon our children, our work, our finances, our health. We want to have the security that there is someone or something that would or could fix our problems.

Now, although God can and does help us with these things, He often doesn’t do it the way *we expected* or even the *way we want* Him to. God is not our Servant, we are His!

Remember, if we don’t have a Biblical understanding of God, and understand GOD backwards, as many people do, GOD spelled backwards is…D.O.G – We throw the stick and command GOD [D.O.G] to fetch it. That’s blasphemy. Again, God is not our servant, we are His. He is the Master!!!

Jesus’ call to follow Him, is not so that we can have all of our problems solved, but that we can be SAVED!

The call to follow Christ, is one of repentance! A change, a life transformation!

In fact, and most importantly, as we saw in our lesson on Baptism: Christ’s call is for us to die to our old self and be raised to a new life in Him! Living the Christian life is certainly not easy, and Jesus never ever said it would be. In fact, He says the exact opposite.

The very fact that many people *fall away*, is the evidence that they never truly died to themselves, and were never born again, and therefore never raised to a new life in Christ. Please, please don’t be like them!

You must commit to follow Christ, and ***persevere*** (Endure) to the end of your life.

Look what Jesus said…

You will be hated by everyone because of My name, but the one who *perseveres* to the end will be saved. – **Matthew 10:22**

**12**Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, **13**but the one who *stands firm* *to the end* will be saved. – **Matthew 24:12-13**

Therefore, only true believers follow Christ and continue to follow *to the end*, because the Spirit alone has saved them, sealed them, and given them eternal life, and it’s the Holy Spirit who gives the power to endure. All other people without the Spirit, will eventually fall away.

Jesus explains this phenomenon of ‘falling away’ in the *Parable of the soils*.

**3**And he told them many things in parables, saying: “A sower went out to sow. **4**And as he sowed, some seeds fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured them. **5**Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and immediately they sprang up, since they had no depth of soil, **6**but when the sun rose they were scorched. And since they had no root, they withered away. **7**Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. **8**Other seeds fell on good soil and produced grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. **9**He who has ears, let him hear.” – **Matthew 13:3-9**

Beginning at verse 18 Jesus explains the parable to His disciples…

**18**“Hear then the parable of the sower: **19**When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does **not understand** it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is what was sown along the path. **20**As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, **21**yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away. **22**As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful. **23**As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and **understands** it. He indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty.” – **Matthew 13:18-23**

(Notice the word: “**Understand**” is only used of the **good soil** who perseveres and bears fruit. With the first soil Jesus clearly says it “**does not understand**.” The next two soils (weedy and rocky soil) react or respond to the gospel, and do so even with great enthusiasm, although notice: *nothing is said about understanding*. We’re left to assume and even hope that there is *understanding*, but they eventually fall away. Therefore, it becomes clear that there was no true *understanding* of the gospel to change them eternally. Since this understanding and change only comes by the power of being BORN OF THE SPIRIT, when God gives a person a new heart and Spirit. One that desires to honor God, not just receive His blessings.

Finally, with the good soil, Jesus says, they **“understand”** – so clearly the Holy Spirit has given them Faith to believe.

That plant *grows*, and it ***endures*** and it *produces* much fruit! That fruit comes from the Holy Spirit!

Only “*Good soil*” (a heart prepared and made good by God’s Spirit) is ‘rooted in Christ’ – the other seeds were not.

So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in Him, rooted and built up in Him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness**. – Colossians 2:6-7**

**1 John 2:19-20** clearly teaches that those who don’t *persevere* in the faith were never truly in Christ to begin with…

19They *went out* from us, but they *did not really belong* to us. For *if* they had belonged to us, they would have *remained* with us; but their *going* showed that none of them *belonged* to us.

20But **you** have an anointing from the **Holy One**, and all of you **know the truth**. **– 1 John 2:19-20**

This passage also teaches us that, Christ Jesus the Holy One has *‘anointed us’* (*poured out upon us*) His Holy Spirit.

Therefore, as mentioned earlier:

1. The Holy Spirit *saves us* and *enables us to believe*

Flesh gives birth to flesh, but *the Spirit gives birth to spirit*. - **John 3:6**

1. The Holy Spirit *seals us for Salvation*

**13**And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a *seal*, the promised Holy Spirit, **14**who is a deposit *guaranteeing* our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession—to the praise of His glory. - **Ephesians 1:13-14**

1. The Holy Spirit *leads you into all truth*

But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into *all the truth*. He will not speak on his own; He will speak only what He hears, and He will tell you what is yet to come. - **John 16:13**

So, in a way, we have a built in ‘lie detector.’ No true believer can deny Christ, nor can they be led astray from the truth of the gospel to believe a false gospel.

**OK, so in light of *Perseverance*, how can I know for sure that I am saved?**

The Bible says that we will face many hardships in life, but we need to *endure!* Endurance is a good tester of true faith, especially in times of persecution or great difficulty.

…the love of many will grow cold. But the one who *endures to the end* will be saved.**– Matthew 24:12-13**

Blessed is the man who *remains steadfast under trial*, for when he has *stood the test*, he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him. **– James 1:12**

The bible uses many other phrases like: *‘press on,’ ‘fight the good fight,’ ‘kept the faith,’ ‘run the race with endurance’* etc. to encourage believers to persevere in trials, because at times you will feel like giving up.

So, let me encourage you…**Don’t give up!**

The good news is that we can trust that God always finishes what ***‘He starts***.’ If God’s Holy Spirit has initiated faith in you, He promises that He will carry you through the process of purification and maturity, causing you to endure all the way to the finish line.

6being confident of this, that *He who began* a good work in you *will carry it on* to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. **– Philippians 1:6**

If you’re a true Christian, it is because God gave you salvation and God will keep you saved…to the very end!

Therefore, remember it is:

**God** who *Justifies* (saves us right now by His Spirit and considers us not guilty for our sins);

**God** who *Sanctifies* (makes us Holy by His Spirit and uses our trials as lessons to transform us into Christ’s likeness); and…

**God** who G*lorifies* (will make us like Jesus’ new body one day when we get to Heaven)

So, trust **God**…*not yourself* for your entire Salvation!

**But, what if I don’t feel saved?**

Not feeling the part is often a normal part of life*.* We can’t allow our mood to dictate what is true or not. Also, doubt can actually be good if it causes us to evaluate our worship and our commitment and causes a desire to change for the better. But we can’t allow doubt to creep in *unchecked*.

If we don’t feel saved because we feel too guilty about our sin, for example. Then, remember what we learned in lesson one and two: As long as we live in this body, we will always have our old sinful nature [Adam nature], that body of sin, who is drawn to sinful things, as well as the Holy Spirit [God’s Nature] who desires to honor God in all things.

You will experience the tension of this ‘double nature’ throughout this life, it doesn’t mean you’re not saved. By God’s grace you will *persevere* through your trials and hardships as God disciples you and you learn to be more Christlike as you persevere through it all, for His glory!

We don’t yet have Christ’s *perfection*…but we *press on* in that *direction!* That’s Christian perseverance!

The Apostle Paul’s goal in life was to become more and more like Jesus, as should be our goal.

**12**Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. **13**Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, **14**I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. – **Philippians 3:12-14**

*Illustration:* A father and his little boy walked along the sidewalk of a very busy main road. Fast cars and large trucks unceasingly zoomed past them. The boy, noticed an alluring candy store on the other side of the road.

Without even thinking, he suddenly let go of his father’s hand. But, never made it to the other side of the road.

He didn’t make it because, although he let go of his grip of his father’s hand, his *father never let go* of his grip on his son’s hand! -- That’s *eternal security!* We’re safelyin the grip of our Savior!

Notice though, what the Apostle Paul says in the above passage: “…but I press on to *take hold* of that for which Christ *took hold* of me!” --- Christ has his grip on Paul, but he desires to tighten his grip on Christ too!

See, *Perseverance* through life teaches me to ‘tighten my grip’ onto my Heavenly Father’s already lock-tight grip! So that I will learn to be more and more committed to Him and not lose my grip during trying or tempting circumstances.

Therefore, every day, pray for strength and wisdom from God to live the Christian life. Ask for strength and wisdom to *persevere* through your trials, for His glory. That’s why God gives us trials. Because He loves us and wants us to become more and more like Christ, the perfect man. Trials can be compared to tests at school. You may not like them, but they prove what you know and don’t know and how much you still need to learn.

Always have a repentant heart and trust God and thank God for his grace and forgiveness. Keep pressing on in your personal Bible study and prayer, attending and serving in your church. Commit each day to the Lord. Learn to love Him and strive to live in obedience to Him.

And, when you don’t give up, don’t take the credit, but realize that any power you have to persevere is from Him!

We’ll close with this wonderful promise in the Bible…

**24**Now all glory to God, who is able to keep you from falling away and will bring you with great joy into his glorious presence without a single fault. **25**All glory to him who alone is God, our Savior through Jesus Christ our Lord. All glory, majesty, power, and authority are his before all time, and in the present, and beyond all time! Amen. – **Jude 24-25**