



## CHRISTIAN EDUCATION: LESSON 199

In order to deal with objections against the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints it would be very helpful to first understand what this doctrine does not mean or teach.

**Only true believers will persevere to the end** – The doctrine of perseverance does not teach that all who profess to be believers, or who have made a decision for Christ, or who go to church, will persevere to the end. Rather, the doctrine of perseverance is only with respect to genuine believers, those who have truly been born again, that is, the saints (2 Corinthians 1:1; Ephesians 1:1; Philippians 1:1).

God promises to keep only those who are His, His special people, His saints, those whom He elected in eternity past and for whom Christ gave His life. These are the ones of John 6 which the Father gives to His Son (John 6:37-40); these are Christ's sheep of John 10 who will never perish (John 10:27-29); and these are the ones of Hebrews 10 who "have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (Hebrews 10:10). It is only these who shall persevere to the end.

**Not all who look and sound like believers are true believers** – There are many who profess to be believers, who come to church, who do the same things that others do in the church, who externally look and sound like believers, but are not true believers. The Bible in many places warns of this condition.

The classic passage on this is Christ's parable of the sower, also known as the parable of the soils as Christ's emphasis is on the different soils upon which the seed falls (Mark 4:3-8, 14-20). Sadly, this parable has often been badly misinterpreted. The seed represents the gospel, and the sower is anyone who proclaims the gospel. We see that the farmer scatters the seed far and wide, and so should the gospel be preached far and wide, indiscriminately. This in theology is known as the external call. The first group of people is made up of those who show no interest in the gospel and immediately reject Christ. The second group is those who hear and immediately and joyfully respond; but when tribulation comes, having shallow roots they fall, renouncing Christ. Thus their faith is proven to be a false faith. The third group is made up of those who hear the gospel and seem to respond with faith, and they perhaps are even able to withstand opposition for Christ's sake. But then thorns come up around them, representing the cares of the world, and choke them. Thus their faith is also proven to be a false faith. Finally, the fourth group is made up of those who hear the gospel, respond with faith, and bear true fruit.

There are a couple of things we need to emphasize here. First, the seed fell on good soil. Given what the Bible says about humanity (Jeremiah 17:9; Romans 3:10-12), how is this soil good? It is good because God made it good. It is God who prepares the hearts of these people. In theology this is known as the internal or the effectual call, or the doctrine of regeneration (Deuteronomy 30:6; Ezekiel 36:25-27; 2 Corinthians 4:6; 5:17; Ephesians 2:1, 4-5). The second thing we notice is that all who belong to this group hear the Word and receive it. None of them reject the gospel. And all of them bear fruit, but with different amounts, representing the different rates of growth in believers. Thirdly, God only changes the heart of some and not all people (Romans 9:16, 18). The seed, the gospel message, did not take root in those belonging to the first three groups because their hearts were all hard, representing spiritually dead people. Contrary to what the majority of Christians affirm, these were not believers who for various reasons fell away and lost their salvation. Apart from the good soil, all others were false believers.

Thus, we should remember that external appearance, fervor, emotion, zeal, and enthusiasm, are not necessarily accurate indicators of the internal condition of someone. The Bible warns that coming to church and even doing the things that Christians do does not mean that someone is a Christian. True believers are those who continue and endure to the end; otherwise, Jesus says "I never knew you" (Matthew 7:21-23) and John says "they were not of us" (1 John 2:19).