



## CHRISTIAN EDUCATION: LESSON 202

Critics of the doctrine of perseverance claim that if it is impossible for believers to apostatize and that it is certain that they will persevere to the end, then warnings of apostasy found in the Bible would be unneeded and pointless (Psalm 95:8-9, 11; Hebrews 3:12-14; 4:11; Romans 11:22). Furthermore, they cite passages which seem to teach that some believers did fall away from the faith and apostatized.

**God works through means** – Before we look at such passages, it is important to note that God works through means to accomplish His purposes in our lives. As we saw in our study of the doctrine of justification, though our salvation is a free gift of God, and man does nothing to earn it, we are justified only when we believe in Christ. That is why we say that faith is the instrumental cause or means of justification (Mark 1:15; John 3:16; 20:31; Acts 16:31; Romans 3:21-28; 10:9, 13; Galatians 2:15-16; Philippians 3:9). Thus we see that in our justification God works through our faith.

**Warnings are God's means of preserving us in the faith** – Now that we are saved God uses many means to sanctify and preserve us in Christ, such as corporate worship and prayer, preaching of the Word, the administration of the sacraments, serving, giving, individual time of prayer and the study of the Word, and so on. Other means which God uses to encourage us not to give up and to persevere in the faith are the various encouragements, exhortations, admonitions, and also warnings found in His Word.

And though believers may stray from the faith and even fall into grievous sins, the Holy Spirit will not let them remain in that condition, for He will work in their lives and hearts to reprove and discipline them, and thus cause them to heed biblical exhortations and warnings (Isaiah 55:10-11). Thus, the warnings in the Bible are real, and true believers take them seriously. Though we are confident that we will persevere to the end, as promised by God, we do not presume to be believers unless we see the presence of faith and repentance in our lives. God's preserving of us is not a passive preserving, happening by itself and apart from us; rather, we have a part to play in our perseverance.

God also uses the love, encouragement, and admonition of other believers to direct and encourage us to remain steadfast in the faith (Matthew 18:15-20; Galatians 6:1-2; Hebrews 3:13; 10:24). Thus we heed biblical warnings for we know that these are the means which the Holy Spirit uses to lead us to examine ourselves, to be sorrowful for our sins, to turn from our sins, to continue trusting in the Lord, to grow in holiness, and thus to persevere to the end (2 Corinthians 13:5; Philippians 1:6; Colossians 1:22; 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24; 2 Peter 1:10-11; Jude 24-25).

This is how God works in all areas of our lives. He is the primary or ultimate cause of all events; His decree is set, sure, and unchanging, nevertheless He works in and through us, as secondary causes, to direct and accomplish His plans (Acts 27:22-26, 31, 34, 44; Hebrews 12:1-3). Therefore it is obvious that though God makes promises, which are as immutable and trustworthy as His character, He brings these to fulfillment through various means, such as His commands, exhortations, and even His warnings. Just as God's promise to take care of us does not endorse laziness or careless living, and make His commands and warnings futile (Matthew 6:11, 25-26; 2 Thessalonians 3:10), nor should God's promise to preserve us result in careless living and make His warnings unnecessary. In reality, this principle is valid and effective in all areas of our lives.

God loves us, His people, so much that He will not allow us to endlessly wallow and linger in unrepentant sin and careless living, but will use all the means necessary, including the encouragements, admonitions, and warnings found in His Word, to lead us to repentance and faith, ensuring that we remain steadfast in Him, and to continue to love Him and His truth. This doctrine correctly understood, will not lead us to discouragement and fear but to greater joy, motivation to action, and assurance.