

## Jonathan Edwards on I Corinthians 9:23-27

**"First,** we ought to follow the good example that the apostle Paul has set us in his seeking the good of his own soul. First. We should follow him in his earnestness in seeking his own salvation. He was not careless and indifferent in this matter; but the kingdom of heaven suffered violence from him. He did not halt between two opinions, or seek with a wavering, unsteady mind, but with the most full determination and strong resolution. He resolved, if it could by any means be possible, that he would attain to the resurrection of the dead. . . .

**Secondly.** The apostle did not only thus earnestly seek salvation before his conversion and hope, but afterwards also. What he says in the 3rd chapter of Philippians of his suffering the loss of all things, that he might be found in Christ, and its being the one thing that he did to seek salvation; and also what he says of his so running as not in vain, but as resolving to win the prize of salvation, and keeping under his body that he might not be a castaway; were long after his conviction, and after he had renounced all hope of his own good estate by nature. If being a convinced sinner excuses a man from seeking salvation any more, or makes it reasonable that he should cease his earnest care and labour for it, certainly the apostle might have been excused, when he had not only already attained true grace, but such eminent degrees of it. To see one of the most eminent saints that ever lived, if not the most eminent of all, so exceedingly engaged in seeking his own salvation, ought for ever to put to shame those who are a thousand degrees below him, and are but mere infants to him, if they have any grace at all; who yet excuse themselves from using any violence after the kingdom of heaven now, because they have attained already, who free themselves from the burden of going on earnestly to seek salvation with this, that they have finished the work, they have obtained a hope. The apostle, as eminent as he was, did not say within himself, "I am converted, and so am sure of salvation. Christ has promised it me; why need I labour any more to secure it? Yea, I am not only converted, but I have obtained great degrees of grace." But still he is violent after salvation. He did not keep looking back on the extraordinary discoveries he enjoyed at his first conversion, and the past great experience he had had from time to time. He did not content himself with the thought, that he possessed the most wonderful testimonies of God's favour, and of the love of Christ, already, that ever any enjoyed, even to his being caught up to the third heavens; but he forgot the things that were behind. . . .

**Thirdly.** The apostle did not only diligently seek heaven after he knew he was converted, but was earnestly cautious lest he should be damned; as appears by the passage already cited. **1 Cor ix. 27.** "But I keep under my body and bring it into subjection, lest by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be

a castaway.” Here you see the apostle is very careful lest he should be a castaway, and denies his carnal appetites, and mortifies his flesh, *for that reason*. He did not say, “I am safe, I am sure I shall never be lost; why need I take any further care respecting it?” Many think because they suppose themselves converted, and so safe, that they have nothing to do with the awful threatenings of God’s word, and those terrible denunciations of damnation that are contained in it. When they hear them, they hear them as things which belong only to others, and not at all to themselves, as though there were no application of what is revealed in the Scripture respecting hell, to the godly. And therefore, when they hear awakening sermons about the awful things that God has threatened to the wicked, they do not hear them for themselves, but only for others. But it was not thus with this holy apostle, who certainly was as safe from hell, and as far from a damnable state, as any of us. He looked upon himself as still nearly concerned in God’s threatenings of eternal damnation, notwithstanding all his hope, and all his eminent holiness, and therefore gave great diligence, that he might avoid eternal damnation. For he considered that eternal misery was as certainly connected with a wicked life as ever it was, and that it was absolutely necessary that he should still keep under his body, and bring it into subjection, in order that he might not be damned; because indulging the lusts of the body and being damned were more surely connected together. The apostle knew that this conditional proposition was true concerning him, as ever it was. “If I live wickedly, or do not live in a way of universal obedience to God’s commands, I shall certainly be a castaway.” This is evident, because the apostle mentions a proposition of this nature concerning himself in that very chapter where he says, he kept under his body lest he should be a castaway.<sup>1</sup> Cor. ix. 16. “For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of, for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me if I preach not the gospel.” What necessity was there upon the apostle to preach the gospel, though God had commanded him, for he was already converted, and was safe; and if he had neglected to preach the gospel, how could he have perished after he was converted? But yet this conditional proposition was still true; if he did not live a life of obedience to God, woe would be to him; woe to him, if he did not preach the gospel. The connexion still held. It is impossible a man should go any where else than to hell in a way of disobedience to God. And therefore he deemed it necessary for him to preach the gospel on that account, and on the same account he deemed it necessary to keep under his body, lest he should be a castaway.”

**From the sermon "*The Character of Paul an Example to Christians*," which can be found at <http://www.biblebb.com/files/edwards/paul.htm>**

"Faith knows that of itself it does not produce salvation and abiding in Christ. So in the call to faith there is no room for a command to make a personal contribution to salvation and perseverance; there is simply a call to complete reliance on Christ."  
**(G. C. Berkouwer)**

"Only if we remember the profundity of God's faithfulness can we see our life, not as only a series of independent moments, but as a life that is preserved in spite of everything. Therefore the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints will always be a doxology to God's preservation, which again and again places the weak and threatened life in the unextinguishable light of His grace." **(G. C. Berkouwer)**

"It is not God's design that men should obtain assurance in any other way than by mortifying corruption, and increasing in grace, and obtaining the lively exercises of it. And although self-examination be a duty of great use and importance, and by no means to be neglected, yet it is not the principal means by which the saints do get satisfaction of their good estate. Assurance is not to be obtained so much by self-examination as by action. The Apostle Paul sought assurance chiefly this way, even by 'forgetting the things that were behind, and reaching forth unto those things that were before, pressing towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus; if by any means he might attain unto the resurrection of the dead.' And it was by this means chiefly that he obtained assurance: I Cor. 9:26, 'I therefore so run, not as uncertainly.' He obtained assurance of winning the prize, more by running than by considering. The swiftness of his pace did more towards his assurance of a conquest than the strictness of his examination." **(Jonathan Edwards, *Religious Affections*, p. 123)**

"When we speak of the grounds of assurance, we are thinking of the ways in which a believer comes to entertain this assurance, not of the grounds on which his salvation rests. The grounds of salvation are as secure for the person who does not have full assurance as for the person who has."

**(John Murray, "The Assurance of Faith," in *Collected Writings of John Murray, Volume 2: Systematic Theology*, p. 270).**

"Assurance of faith is the conviction that one has been redeemed by Christ and will enjoy everlasting salvation." **(Joel Beeke, "The Fullness of Grace," p. 107)**

"By 'Christian assurance,' I refer to a Christian believer's confidence that he or she is already in a right standing with God, and that this will issue in ultimate salvation." **(D.A. Carson, "Reflections on Assurance," p. 384)**

"Assurance of salvation is a God-given awareness that He has accepted the death of Christ on your behalf and forgiven you of your sins. It involves confidence that God loves you, that He has chosen you, and that you will go to heaven. Assurance includes a sense of freedom from the guilt of sin, relief from the fear of judgment, and joy in your relationship with God as your Father." **(Donald Whitney, *How Can I Be Sure I'm A Christian?*, p. 12)**

"...the undoubted certainty that a person belongs to Christ, possesses his saving grace, and will ultimately enjoy everlasting salvation." **(Joel Beeke, *Quest For Full Assurance*, p. 5)**

**The following quotes come from a little known sermon by Jonathan Edwards, entitled "Persevering Faith." Unfortunately it is not published in the *Works of Jonathan Edwards* or any popular compilations of JE's sermons; it is only available in the *Works* published by Yale, which are quite expensive:**

"[Perseverance] 'tis necessary to salvation as a necessary consequence and evidence of a title to salvation. There never is a title to salvation without it. Though it have not the righteousness by which a title to life is attained, yet none have that righteousness that don't persevere; and that because although it is not proper to say that perseverance is necessary in order to justification, yet a persevering principle is necessary in order to justification..."Tis necessary that a man should believe in Christ, and cleave to Christ in a persevering way: a temporary faith don't justify. But in order to that, persons must have that faith that is of a persevering, everlasting sort. He must have that sort of seed that is an abiding seed. 'Tis not a vanishing but a durable faith that justifies."

"Perseverance is necessary to salvation, as 'tis a necessary prerequisite to the actual possession of eternal life. A way of persevering holiness is the way to glory, and the only way to it; and 'tis impossible that we should arrive at glory without going to it in a way of persevering holiness, as 'tis impossible that we should go from one town to another without passing the ground that is between one and the other. We read of the strait gate and the narrow way. 'Tis necessary that both should be passed, before we obtain a crown of glory. God hath set up that crown of glory at the end of a race; and therefore he that stops short of the end of the race and turns back, and so never comes to the end of the race, will never come to the crown. And so 'tis necessary for every Christian, that he should finish his course...Perseverance in holiness is a necessary prerequisite to glory."

"Those promises of eternal life to perseverance are for the comfort of the saints, for the more a person by experience finds that his goodness is of a persevering kind, the more evidence has he of his title to life."

"A hypocrite's faith is but a temporary faith."

"A godly man ordinarily lives a holy life, which implies not only negative, but positive religion." [my italics]

**"Though it be promised that true saints shall be so influenced and assisted, as that they shall persevere; yet this is one MEANS by which God influences them, viz. counsels and warnings against falling away."**

*“For this reason the Epistle to the Hebrews is full of admonition and consolation, because it is in this way that the preservation of the Church is accomplished...These admonitions have as their end the preservation of the Church, which precisely in this way is established in that single direction, which is and which must remain irreversible--the direction from death to life!” (G. C. Berkouwer)*

*“We, whom God has favored with the light of the Gospel, ought to acknowledge that we have been called in order that we may advance more and more in our obedience to God, and strive constantly to draw nearer to him. This is the real preservation of the soul, for by doing so we shall escape eternal perdition.” (John Calvin, *Commentary on Hebrews*)*

*“...anyone who sees a contradiction between the doctrine of perseverance and the numberless admonitions of the Holy Scriptures has abstracted perseverance from faith. Faith itself can do nothing else than listen to those admonitions and so travel the road of abiding in Him. For admonition distinguishes the true confidence, which looks for everything from grace, and the other 'possibility,' which is rejected on the basis of Christ and the Church. So admonition is at the same time both a remembrance and a calling. It points out the way of error to those who travel the way of salvation, and it exhorts them to keep going only in the true way.” (G. C. Berkouwer)*

*“It is therefore quite mistaken to infer from the admonitions of the Scripture the possibility of the total loss of grace. The certainty of the outcome does not make the means superfluous, but in God's order it is unbreakably tied up with them.” (Herman Bavinck)*

“We will never be able to understand these words if we see the divine preservation and our preservation of ourselves as mutually exclusive or as in a synthetic cooperation. Preserving ourselves is not an independent thing that is added paradoxically to the divine preservation. God's preservation and our self-preservation do not stand in mere coordination, but in a marvelous way they *are* in correlation. One can formulate it best in this way: *our* preservation of ourselves is entirely oriented to *God's* preservation of us...There is therefore no reason to see a tension between God's preservation and our preservation of ourselves if we do not view the latter as something complementing the divine preservation. In such a case the divine keeping would be only the starting point for perseverance and perseverance would be realized by an independent preservation of ourselves. This, however, is a train of thought that is foreign to the entire Scriptures...Preserving ourselves does not imply that we contribute our part and that God contributes His. Our preserving is oriented to His, and it is included in it. Faith can never say, and will never say, 'This is our part.' It is the mystery of faith that it cannot speak in this way. It understands the connection of promise and demand, of grace and admonition. The mystery of this connection is the profound content of the doctrine of perseverance. Apart from faith this doctrine petrifies into a meaningless train of argument; but in *faith* the correct view of God's sovereign grace and His loving mercy is maintained. Amidst all weakness and instability, faith confesses this mercy as the alpha and omega of life." (**G. C. Berkouwer**)

"...their proper primary effect evidently being just to bring out, in the most impressive way, the great principle of the invariableness of the connection which God has established between perseverance, as opposed to apostasy, as a means, and salvation as an end; and thus to operate as a means of effecting the end which God has determined to accomplish--of enabling believers to persevere, or preserving them from apostasy; and to effect this in entire accordance with the principles of their moral constitution, by producing constant humility, watchfulness, and diligence." (**William Cunningham**)

“So in the Holy Scriptures we continually find passages with forceful admonitions, earnest appeals, and warnings against apostasy. We also meet passages full of consolation about the unchangeableness of God's grace, of God's loving, all-determining grace. One might think for a moment that we are confronted here with two incompatible trains of thought, which one could label the 'apostasy of the saints' and the 'perseverance of the saints'...If we examine the witness of Scripture carefully, we observe immediately that it is not correct to say that one Biblical writer is dynamic in his description of the life of faith, while another works with purely static data, data of stability and immutability. If that were so, one could postulate differing Biblical-theological teachings, with one writer thinking in terms of election and another in terms of human responsibility. It is clear, however, that with such a method of division we do not really get at the problem of perseverance and apostasy. For what is striking about the Scriptures is that the passages concerning the steadfastness of God's faithfulness and the passages with admonitions are inseparable. We do not encounter a single passage that would allow anyone to take the immutability of the grace of God in Christ for granted...Only if we have some understanding of the depth of the correlation between God's grace and faith will we be able to go ahead correctly here...For the Scriptures, then, there is apparently no unbearable tension or opposition between the gracious faithfulness of God and the dynamic of life, because it is in the thick of the dynamic of the actual struggle of life that Scripture speaks of perseverance in grace.” (G. C. Berkouwer)

“Indeed, because the Scriptures continually warn against falling away, many think that the perseverance question is already basically settled. They believe that such warnings, if they are in earnest, have meaning only if the danger of falling is not imaginary but is a very real threat with which one must constantly reckon.” (G. C. Berkouwer)

“...a person cannot be motivated by the ‘alarming admonitions’ until he abandons his confidence in the ‘consolation’ passages—the (supposed) promises of God that perseverance is inevitable and apostasy is impossible.” (Robert Shank)

“The purpose is always to warn those who are thinking of falling away or have fallen away that if they do this it is a strong indication that they were never saved in the first place.” (Wayne Grudem)

“The doctrine of the perseverance of the saints can never become an a priori guarantee in the life of believers which would enable them to get along without admonitions and warnings. Because of the nature of the relation between faith and perseverance, the whole gospel must abound with admonitions. It has to speak thus, because perseverance is not something merely handed down to us, but it is something that comes to realization only in the path of faith. Therefore the most earnest and alarming admonitions cannot in themselves be taken as evidence against the doctrine of perseverance.” (G. C. Berkouwer)

“If God has put it in, he has put it in for wise reasons and for excellent purposes. Let me show you why. First, O Christian, it is put in to keep thee from falling away. God preserves his children from falling away; but he keeps them by the use of means... There is a deep precipice: what is the best way to keep any one from going down there? Why, to tell him that if he did he would inevitably be dashed to pieces. In some old castle there is a deep cellar, where there is a vast amount of fixed air and gas, which would kill anybody who went down. What does the guide say? ‘If you go down you will never come up alive.’ Who thinks of going down? The very fact of the guide telling us what the consequences would be, keeps us from it. Our friend puts away from us a cup of arsenic; he does not want us to drink it, but he says, ‘If you drink it, it will kill you.’ Does he suppose for a moment that we should drink it. No; he tells us the consequences, and he is sure we will not do it. So God says, ‘My child, if you fall over this precipice you will be dashed to pieces.’ What does the child do? He says, ‘Father, keep me; hold thou me up, and I shall be safe.’ It leads the believer to a greater dependence on God, to a holy fear and caution, because he knows that if he were to fall away he could not be renewed, and he stands far away from that great gulf, because he knows that if he were to fall into it there would be no salvation for him.” (Charles Spurgeon)

“Still, our redemption would be imperfect if he did not lead us ever onward to the final goal of salvation. Accordingly, the moment we turn away even slightly from him, our salvation, which rests firmly in him, gradually vanishes away. As a result, all those who do not repose in him voluntarily deprive themselves of all grace.” (John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2.16.1)

“This was added for the purpose of exciting alarm, that believers may be more careful to be on their guard; for when such unbounded freedom of action is allowed to false prophets, and when they are permitted to exert such powers of deceiving, those who are careless and inattentive would easily be entangled by their snares. Christ therefore exhorts and arouses his disciples to keep watch, and at the same time reminds them that there is no reason for being troubled at the strangeness of the sight, if they see many persons on every hand led away into error. While he excites them to solicitude, that Satan may not overtake them in a state of sloth, he gives them abundant ground of confidence on which they may calmly rely, when he promises that they will be safe under the defense and protection of God against all the snares of Satan. And thus, however frail and slippery the condition of the godly may be, yet here is a firm footing on which they may stand; for it is not possible for them to fall away from salvation, to whom the Son of God is a faithful guardian. For they have not sufficient energy to resist the attacks of Satan, unless in consequence of their being the sheep of Christ, which none can pluck out of his hand (John 10:28). It must therefore be observed, that the permanency of our salvation does not depend on us, but on the secret election of God; for though our salvation is kept through faith, as Peter tells us (1 Peter 1:5), yet we ought to ascend higher, and assure ourselves that we are in safety, because the Father hath given us to the Son, and the Son himself declares, that none who have been given to him shall perish (John 17:12).” (**John Calvin, Harmony of the Evangelists, Vol. 3, p. 141; these comments refer to Mark 13:22/Matt. 24:24**)