

Am I Really a Christian? Week 4

Part 1: Perseverance Defined

A truth: You can have a pretty good idea who will win during the game, but you can only ever know for sure who is going to win after the final buzzer.

A true Christian must and will _____ in the faith until the end, whether the end is death or Christ's return.

Here's how Jesus puts it: "But the one who _____ to the end will be saved" (Matt. 24:13).

Definition: 1. steady persistence in a course of action, a purpose, a state, etc., especially in spite of difficulties, obstacles, or discouragement.

2. Theology . continuance in a state of grace to the end, leading to eternal salvation.

Grace here means a state of _____ (being made holy) by God, which is to say the state of becoming more like Christ while we follow Christ.

Other words/ phrases that the Bible uses that included this same concept:

We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers, remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and _____ of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Thes 1:3)

"The fact of the human condition is that we are all more the villain than the hero, and that the speech that the Bard put in the mouth of Don John is most nearly reflective of our inner selves: "If I had my mouth, I would bite; if I had my liberty, I would do my liking: in the meantime let me be that I am and seek not to alter me." - Mike Mikalatos, Night of the Living Dead Christian

And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do _____. (Gal 6:9)

Part 2: Can a Christian Quit?

A Problem: If someone is worried that by examining their faith they will find it wanting then they are really worried that their faith is not genuine. A true believer welcomes introspection because they have nothing to fear.

The issue of backsliding or losing salvation is a contentious one. But the fact is that some who were "Christian" leave the faith for a time and some for all time.

This goes back to the very first believers. Consider Paul's discussion with Timothy:

Timothy, my son, I am giving you this command in keeping with the prophecies once made about you, so that by recalling them you may fight the battle well, _____ to faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and so have suffered shipwreck with regard to the faith. Among them are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan to be taught not to blaspheme. (1 Tim 1:18-20)

Continuing: Avoid godless chatter, because those who indulge in it will become more and more ungodly. Their teaching will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, who have _____ from the truth. They say that the resurrection has already taken place, and they destroy the faith of some. (2 Tim 2:16-18)

"The idolatry that exists in man's heart always wants to lead him away from his Savior and back to self-reliance no matter how pitiful that self-reliance is or how many times it has betrayed him. Religion is usually the tool the self-righteous man uses to exalt himself." - Matt Chandler, The Explicit Gospel

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You Are Not a Christian if You
Don't Persevere to the End.

Additional Reading

Am I Really a Christian? By Mike McKinley

Night of the Living Dead Christian by Matt Mikalatos

The Explicit Gospel by Matt Chandler

This wasn't the only example of disciples leaving Paul (and Christianity). Consider Demas:

Colossians 4:14 "Our dear friend Luke, the doctor, and Demas send greetings."

Philemon 1:23-24 "Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends you greetings. And so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas and Luke, my fellow workers."

Clearly, Demas was not just another "Christian" but a fellow worker, or missionary. Yet it doesn't end well for him. Paul's final words on Demas are ominous:

"Do your best to come to me quickly, for Demas, because he loved this world, has deserted me and has gone to Thessalonica" (2 Tim 4:9-10).

Apparently, Demas' faith seemed real enough to mislead even the apostle Paul.

(And maybe _____.)

It wasn't just Paul who dealt with those who turned their backs on Jesus.

John wrote about this same _____ (falling away) in 1 John 2:19:

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

He was not saying, "These people were once Christians but no longer are." Rather, he was saying they were never Christians in the first place.

Part 3: Once Saved, Always Saved

A Spell: Accio Salvation!

There are two errors to avoid here.

On the one hand, we need to guard against the error of saying you can _____ your salvation. A genuine Christian cannot. A genuine Christian perseveres.

On the other hand, we need to guard against the error of those who flippantly use the words "Once saved, always saved!" as if you can make a decision for Christ but live like the Devil. That doesn't work, either. A genuine Christian perseveres in _____ Christ.

Can you see why a true believer, who has genuinely experienced Christ's forgiveness, will remain in the faith until the end?

From a human perspective, to be saved means to be saved from a life of disobedience and rebellion. Someone who continues to disobey and rebel simply has not been saved, because salvation, among other things, is salvation from that.

It's like pointing to someone sitting in a puddle of mud and saying that you saved them from the mud. Your words make _____.

When someone who once professed faith now has no desire to _____, _____, _____, and _____ God, it demonstrates that that he or she did not receive Jesus's reconciling, purifying salvation in the first place.

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The book of 2 Timothy
in the Bible

From Jesus's perspective, it's worth considering the metaphors for salvation.

Someone who has been given _____ cannot begin to unsee.

Someone who has been _____ to life is alive, not dead.

Someone who has been _____ as a son is a son.

The point is that Jesus saves. He doesn't save and then _____.

Remember Luke 8 and the parable of the seeds? What inhibited the second and third soils from finding true vibrant, growing Christianity?

The plants growing in the second soil start up with great joy, but persecution (or how tough being a Christian can really be) sets in and they decide for one reason or another Jesus isn't _____ it.

The plants growing in the third soil actually grow but then are hindered by either concerns or cares about worldly things.

What is so tough about Christianity?

Christianity (Jesus) wants _____.

He wants the _____ plus the New Testament.

Many American churches teach that being a Christian is just a matter of making a decision. If at some point in your life you want to be a Christian, tell God that you accept his forgiveness, and then the deal is done. They treat it like a measles vaccination, where you get a dose of forgiveness that permanently inoculates you against the fires of hell, whether you continue to follow Christ or not. - Mike McKinley, Am I Really a Christian?

Examples of costs to count:

Willingness to _____ others even when they don't deserve it.

Willingness to _____ selfish desires for the benefit of others and the Kingdom.

Willingness to lay down goals and interests if they don't _____ with the will of God.

Some questions:

How do you spend your _____?

How do you spend your _____?

How do you spend your _____?

In plain language persevering in the faith means that you:

Worship God _____

Fellowship with other believers at church _____

Read the Bible _____ and discuss it with others

Pray to God _____, asking for his will to be done

This isn't an exhaustive checklist, this is a very simple starter list that grows from there to encompass your whole life.

But if you aren't interested in God, church, his Word, praying for your will to be conformed to his will then there is a problem with your heart.

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Part 4: Your Responsibility

A Truth: God is there for us, if we want Him.

Jude 1:21 instructs us to keep ourselves “in the love of God.” God loves us, yes, but we must keep ourselves in that love. In other words, perseverance is a _____ responsibility.

Matthew 24:13 says, “But the one who endures to the end will be saved.”

It is _____ responsibility to endure to the end.

It is _____ responsibility to give you the strength to endure to the end.

(And like a lot of the gifts of God, it is up to us to seek it. He won't force it on us.)

God “is able to keep you from _____ and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy” (Jude 1:24).

A true Christian can have confidence that they will endure until the end because it's the Lord himself who keeps his people _____.

God uses the warnings of _____ listed above to alert his people and to empower them to avoid falling away.

Just as a believer's salvation is not their own doing, neither is their perseverance. The amazing grace which saves wretches is the same amazing grace that brings them home.

If you are relying on some past profession of faith that has nothing to do with your day-to-day life, pray that you will hear Scripture calling you to come to Christ. If you have walked away from Christ, you are not a Christian.

Homework

A Point: Running the race and fighting the fight are not just words of encouragement for Christians. They are descriptive terms for what our every day faith journey is like: a fight and a race. And to win, it takes effort and God's grace.

Read 1 & 2 Timothy in context. Ask yourself:

1. What is Timothy (and I) supposed to get from Paul about how to persevere?

2. What does it mean to “run the good race”?

3. Have I been running the good race?

4. What evidence is there that I've been persevering?

Pray: God, Thank you for bring me this far. Thank you for sustaining me when I would have failed without you. Thank you for giving everything for me and help me to learn to love to give everything to you. Help me endure to the end. I love you! Amen.

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