**Lesson 19**

**The Spirit Preserving**

“During recent years, much has been written upon the eternal security of the saints— some of it helpful, but most of it superficial and injurious. Many Scriptures have been quoted, but few of them explained. A great deal has been said about the **fact**of **divine preservation**, but comparatively little on the **method**thereof.”

“The **preservation of the believer** by the Father and by the Son has been given considerable prominence, but the work of the Spirit therein was largely ignored. The general impression conveyed to the thoughtful reader has been that the “final perseverance” of the Christian is a mechanical thing rather than a spiritual process, that it is accomplished by physical force rather than by moral persuasion, that it is performed by external might rather than by internal means—something like an unconscious non-swimmer being rescued from a watery grave, or a fireman carrying a swooning person out of a burning building. Such illustrations are radically faulty, utterly misleading, and pernicious in their tendency.”

Notice in the passage above that **Arthur Pink does not refer to “perseverance of the saints,” but the “preserving work of the Spirit.”** What is the difference between the “perseverance of the saints” and the “preserving of the Spirit”?

The difference in these two phrases . . . “perseverance of the saints” vs. “preserving of the Spirit” . . . is the emphasis on **who is primarily at work**.

* The phrase, “perseverance of the saints” seems to inherently emphasize the saints who are working to persevere, while the “preserving of the Spirit” emphasizes the work of the Holy Spirit in preserving those who are His.
* When we read in 1 Peter 1:5 that we are ***kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time*** or in Philippians 2:13 that ***it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure***,in such passages the immediate reference is always to the Holy Spirit—the “immediate,” though not the exclusive.
* In the Economic Trinity the work of redemption is **from** the Father, **through** the Son, **by the work of** the Holy Spirit.
  + All proceeds from the predestination of the Father
  + All that comes to the believer is through Christ, that is, on account of His atoning sacrifice
  + All is actually wrought by the Spirit, for He is the Executive of the Godhead, the active Agent in all the works of redemption.
* Thus, the believer is as truly and directly preserved by the Spirit as he was quickened by Him.

**Preservation in Holiness**

Arthur Pink reveals God’s purpose for our preservation: “The chief end for which God sends the Spirit to indwell His people is to deliver them from apostasy . . . to preserve them not only from the everlasting burnings, but from those things that would expose them thereto. Unless that be clearly stated, we justly lay ourselves open to the charge that this is a dangerous doctrine, making light of sin and encouraging careless living.”

**Question:** From Pink’s statement it can be implied that the doctrine of “perseverance of the saints” can be a dangerous doctrine. Why would this be? What would make it dangerous?

**Reply:** The thing that makes the doctrine of the “perseverance of the saints” dangerous is **the danger of the attitude of licentiousness that can come from it.**

* The popular Baptist saying of “once saved, always saved” is even more dangerous because it nowhere teaches of the requirement for obedience and holiness.
* The doctrine of “perseverance of the saints” and “once saved, always saved” imply a requirement is placed on God to save, regardless of the actions of men.
* In these two phrases . . . “perseverance of the saints” and “once saved, always saved” . . . is that there is no mention in them of the Christian’s duty to holiness or obedience.

**Question:** Arthur Pink states that “It is **not** true that if a man has once truly believed in Christ, no matter what enormities he may commit afterwards, nor what course of evil he follow, he cannot fail to reach heaven. Not so is the teaching of Holy Writ. The Spirit does not preserve in a way of licentiousness, but only in the way of holiness. Nowhere has God promised His favor to dogs who go back to their vomit, nor to swine that return to their wallowing in the mire.” Do you agree with this statement?

**Reply:** “The believer may indeed experience a fearful fall, yet he will not lie down content in his filth, any more than David did.” In other words, if a person is a true believer, while there will be periods of disobedience, such disobedience is not the “practice” or habitual pattern of their lives. On the other hand, if one’s habitual pattern of life is the licentious practice of sin, that person demonstrates himself to not be a true Christian.

**A Distinction**

Yet it needs to be pointed out that in maintaining His people in holiness, the power of God operates in quite another manner than it does in the maintenance of a river or the preservation of a tree. A river may dry up, and a tree may be uprooted. The one is maintained by being replenished by fresh waters, the other is preserved by its being nourished and by its roots being held in the ground—but in each case, the preservation is by physical power from without, entirely without their concurrence.

In the case of the Christian’s preservation it is quite otherwise. With him, God works from within, using moral persuasion, leading him to a concurrence of mind and will with the Holy Spirit in this work. God deals with the believer as a moral agent, draws him, maintains his responsibility, and bids him, ***work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.*** (Phi 2:12-13).

Thus there is both preservation on God’s part and perseverance in holiness on ours, and the former is accomplished by maintaining the latter.

**Regeneration and Preservation**

There are two eminent benefits, or spiritual blessings, that surpass all others, filling up the entire space of the Christian’s life from the moment of his quickening unto his ultimate arrival in heaven, namely, his regeneration and his preservation.

The Holy Spirit is both the giver and sustainer of all life, physical and spiritual.

**How the Spirit Preserves**

The preservation of God’s people through all the shifting circumstances of their pilgrim journey is accomplished, immediately, by the Holy Spirit. He it is Who watches over the believer, delivering us though we fail recognize it, keeping us from fall into the world’s carnal traps, sustaining us when the enemy comes like a flood against us. It is the Holy Spirit Who keeps us from accepting those fatal heresies that deceive and destroy so many empty professors. It is the Holy Spirit Who prevents us from becoming satisfied with head-knowledge and notional religion.

And how does the Spirit accomplish the Christian’s preservation?

* By sustaining the new nature within us, and calling it forth into exercise and action by working such graces in us that we become firmly established in our faith
* By keeping us conscious of our utter ruin and deep need of Christ
* By bringing us to a concurrence with His providential design for our lives

But, primarily, the Holy Spirit accomplishes our preservation through His instruction in God’s commands and statutes. As the Psalmist says in Psalm 119:33, ***teach me, O LORD, the way of thy statutes; and I shall keep it unto the end.***

We lost the way of true happiness when we fell in Adam, and ever since men have wandered up and down vainly seeking rest and satisfaction. Man cannot discover the way of holiness and happiness by himself. He must be taught it spiritually and supernaturally by God. And being regenerated by the Spirit and endowed with a hunger to know and obey God, such teaching is earnestly desired by the believer, for the Spirit makes us painfully aware of our depravity and our need for God’s sustaining hand upon us.

* Amid the perturbations caused by indwelling sin and the anguish from our repeated defeats, it is one of the Spirit’s greatest works to sustain the soul by the expectation of things to come.

Now, faith implies not only the knowledge and belief of the truth, but also those pious affections and dispositions, and the performance of those spiritual duties, which constitute practical holiness.

God has not promised that no matter how loosely a saint may live or what vile habits he may persist in, he shall not perish, but rather does He assure us that He will preserve from such looseness and wickedness as would expose him to His wrath. It is by working grace in our hearts, by calling into exercise the faculties of our souls, by exciting fear and hope, hatred and love, sorrow and joy, that the saint is preserved.

**The Spirit Confirming**

In the chapter entitled, *The Spirit Confirming*, Arthur Pink presents an explanation of the significance of **the Holy Spirit as “*Earnest*.”** The metaphor of the Holy Spirit given to believers is helpful in illustrating our current relationship with God through the Holy Spirit.

**What is an *earnest*?**

An “***earnest***” is a method used in the clinching a commercial bargain or contract.

* It is a part of the price given beforehand, to assure the one to whom the “earnest” is given that at the appointed season he shall receive the whole of that which is promised.”

In real estate transactions “earnest money” is provided by the purchaser as a commitment that the full sale price will be paid upon closing. If the buyer backs out of the contract the seller has the legal right to keep the buyer’s earnest money and may pursue a legal suit to force the buyer to fulfill the purchase contract.

The Greek word for “***earnest***” is *arrabōn*. Interestingly, in modern Greek *arrabona* is an "engagement ring."

**What are the components of an *earnest*?**

**1.** “An “***earnest***” **supposes a contract wherein two parties are agreed**, the one who is ultimately to come into possession of what has been agreed upon being given a token of the other’s good faith that he will abide by the terms of the bargain. It is a part of the price given beforehand, to assure the one to whom the “earnest” is given that at the appointed season he shall receive the whole of that which is promised. In the case of our relationship to God, ours in not contract but **an irrevocable covenant**.

**2.** “An “***earnest***” intimates **there is some delay before the thing bargained for is actually bestowed**. In the case of property, possession is not immediately entered into. It is for this reason that the token of good faith or preliminary installment is given: **because the promised deliverance is deferred, possession being delayed for a season, an “earnest” is bestowed as a pledge or confirmation of what is to follow**. Now as soon as the believer really enters into covenant with God, he has a right to the everlasting inheritance, but his actual entrance into full blessedness is deferred.

**3.** “An “***earnest***” is **a part**, though only a very small one, **of the whole that has been agreed upon**. If a contract was made for the delivery of a sum of money on a certain date, then a trifling installment thereof was given; if it were the transfer of a piece of land, then a square of turf was cut and handed to its future possessor, that being a symbolic guarantee to assure him during the interval of waiting. So too, **those comforts which the Spirit communicates to believers are the same in kind as the joys of heaven, though they are vastly inferior in their degree**. The saving gifts and graces of the Spirit are but a small beginning and part of that glory which shall yet be revealed in and to us.

**4.**  “An “***earnest***” is given **for the security of the party who receives it**, and not for the benefit of him that bestows it. **He who gives the earnest is legally bound to complete his bargain**, but the recipient has this guarantee in hand for the confirming and comforting of his mind while he is waiting. The spiritual earnest that Christians receive is given solely for their benefit, for there is no danger whatever of backing out on God’s part.

**Question:** Arthur Pink makes the point that the Holy Spirit is given to us as an “***earnest***” and not as a “**pledge**.” What is the difference between an “earnest” and a “pledge”?

**Reply:** “An “***earnest***” remains the irrevocable possession of its recipient until the bargain is consummated, and even then it is not taken from him. This is where an “***earnest***” differs from a “pledge,” for when a pledged article is returned, the pledge is taken back again. But the “earnest” which Christians have received from God is irrevocable and inalienable.”

In the story of Judah and Tamar, in Genesis 38, thinking Tamar to be a prostitute, Judah gives her his “signet ring, his cord and his staff” (Gen. 38:18) as a pledge of the money that he owed her. When the payment was made the pledged items were to be returned to him.

According to the literal meaning of the figure, an “***earnest***” signifies the clinching of a bargain, that it is a portion of the whole that has been agreed upon. The ***earnest*** confirms and ensures the consummation of the contract.

And that is what the operations and presence of the Spirit in the believer connote.

* First, they supply proof that God has made a covenant with us.
* Second, the present work of the Spirit in us is a foretaste and firstfruit of the coming harvest.

**Question:** From our Christian perspective, why is this distinction important?

**Reply:** Fortunately for us, God has not pledged His Holy Spirit to us, but has given us the Holy Spirit forever. **What we now have of the Holy Spirit will be added to, not subtracted,** **in glory**.

It is interesting to note that in the New Testament the word ***earnest*** (Greek word *arrabōn*) is only used 3 times . . . in 2 Corinthians 1:22, 5:5 and Ephesians 1:14. While the KJV translates the word *arrabōn* as ***earnest***, the NASB translates the word *arrabōn* as ***pledge***.

***2 Corinthians 1:21-22— 21 Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and anointed us is God, 22 who also sealed us and gave us the Spirit in our hearts as a pledge.***

***2 Corinthians 5:5— Now He who prepared us for this very purpose is God, who gave to us the Spirit as a pledge.***

***Ephesians 1:13b-14— 13 . . . you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, 14 who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory.***

**Question:** Does the translation of *arrabon* as ***pledge*** in the NASB present an interpretive problem? In other words, does this imply a different meaning of the word ***pledge*** from the one Pink gives?

**Reply:** While Pink points out the distinction between an ***earnest*** and a ***pledge***, I believe the word ***pledge*** is used in the NASB to mean “a promise to fulfill an obligation.” I do feel, however, that the word ***earnest*** is a better and more precise word than ***pledge***.

* The ESV translates *arrabōn*as ***guarantee***, which implies the same meaning as ***earnest***.

As a reminder, in a financial transaction the money that is given as “earnest money” is credited toward the full purchase price, while a “pledged” item is returned to the owner. For example, you may give something of value (the title to your car/house) as a pledge toward the fulfillment of a contract, such as repaying a loan. After fulfillment the pledged item is returned. That is the concept behind making bail. Your money is your pledge that you will return to answer your charges in court. In the example of Judah and Tamar, Tamar agreed to return Judah’s signet ring, cord and staff when he had paid her what he owed her.

**Closing Thought**

As Ephesians 1:14 teaches us, **the Holy Spirit *is given as a pledge of our inheritance***. What is the ***inheritance*** that the Holy Spirit is ***earnest*** to? Our ***inheritance*** is none other than God Himself!

By the indwelling presence and ministry of the Holy Spirit, God grants His people a taste in this world of what He has prepared for them in the world to come. The gifts and graces of the Spirit in the sons and daughters of God affirm the certainty of the glory awaiting them. As surely as an “***earnest***” guarantees the whole sum, so do the “***firstfruits of the Spirit***” (Romans 8:23) the coming harvest of bliss. The nature of the Christian’s “***earnest***” intimates both the character and the greatness of what is in store for him. Even now the Spirit bestows a measure of life, light, love and liberty upon us. But what shall these be when we have them in their fullness! One ounce of real grace is esteemed by its possessor more highly than a ton of gold. What, then, will it be like to bathe in the ocean of God’s favor? If now there are times when we experience that peace which “***surpasses all understanding***” (Philippians 4:7), and are made to “***rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory***” (1 Peter 1:8), how incapable we are of estimating the full value of our Inheritance, for an “earnest” is but a tiny installment of that which is promised. O that the realization of this, faint though it be, may move us to look and long for the heavenly glory with greater vehemence.