

Hebrews 10:39

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul.

Analysis

But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul. This climactic verse concludes chapter 10 with confident assurance. "But we" (hēmeis de, ἡμεῖς δὲ) emphatically distinguishes the author and faithful readers from apostates. Despite stern warnings, the author expresses confidence in their genuine faith. This isn't presumption but appropriate confidence based on evidence of their previous faithfulness (verses 32-34) and continuing endurance.

"Are not of them who draw back unto perdition" (ouk esmen hypostolēs eis apōleian, οὐκ ἐσμὲν ὑποστολῆς εἰς ἀπώλειαν) denies belonging to the apostasy category. Hypostolēs (ὑποστολῆς) means shrinking back, withdrawal. Apōleian (ἀπώλειαν) means destruction, perdition, ruin—the ultimate fate of those who permanently reject Christ. The author confidently asserts that he and genuine believers don't belong to this category destined for destruction.

"But of them that believe to the saving of the soul" (alla pisteōs eis peripoiēsin psychēs, ἀλλὰ πίστεως εἰς περιποίησιν ψυχῆς) identifies them with faithful perseverance. Pisteōs (πίστεως) is genitive of description—they are characterized by faith. Peripoiēsin (περιποίησιν) means preserving, obtaining, possessing—they are of faith that results in soul preservation. This faith perseveres to final salvation, securing the soul for eternity.

The verse balances divine sovereignty and human responsibility. God preserves His

elect through persevering faith; genuine believers demonstrate their election by persevering. Those who apostatize prove they were never truly elect (1 John 2:19). True believers, though tested, will persevere because God keeps them through faith (1 Peter 1:5).

Historical Context

This conclusion shows pastoral wisdom. After stern warning against apostasy, the author affirms confidence in the readers' genuine faith. He doesn't presume all are saved nor paralyze them with doubt, but expresses appropriate confidence based on evidence while warning against complacency. This models how to address mixed congregations containing both genuine believers and false professors.

The early church struggled with this balance. Novatianists refused restoration to those who lapsed under persecution, claiming apostasy proved they were never saved. Donatists required re-baptism of those ordained by bishops who had lapsed. Against these extremes, the orthodox church maintained that genuine believers may fall temporarily but will be restored, while permanent apostasy proves profession was false.

The Reformed doctrine of perseverance of the saints affirms both truths: God preserves His elect infallibly, and true saving faith necessarily perseveres. The Westminster Confession (17.1-3) states that true believers may fall into sin but cannot fall totally or finally, and will certainly persevere to eternal salvation. This provides both assurance (God keeps us) and warning (true faith perseveres).

Related Passages

1 John 4:8 — God is love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Study Questions

1. How can you maintain both confidence in God's preservation of true believers and vigilance against self-deception about your own faith?
2. What evidence in your life demonstrates genuine persevering faith rather than mere temporary profession?
3. How can you encourage fellow believers to take seriously both God's warnings and His promises?

Interlinear Text

ἡμεῖς δὲ οὐκ ἐσμὲν ὑποστολῆς εἰς ἀπώλειαν
we But not are of them who draw back to perdition
G2249 G1161 G3756 G2070 G5289 G1519 G684

ἀλλὰ πίστεως εἰς περιποίησιν ψυχῆς
but of them that believe to the saving of the soul
G235 G4102 G1519 G4047 G5590

Additional Cross-References

1 John 5:5 (Faith): Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?

1 Peter 1:5 (Faith): Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

Mark 16:16 (Faith): He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.

1 John 5:16 (Parallel theme): If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death: I do not say that he shall pray for it.

1 Samuel 15:11 (Parallel theme): It repenteth me that I have set up Saul to be king: for he is turned back from following me, and hath not performed my commandments. And it grieved Samuel; and he cried unto the LORD all night.

Hebrews 11:1 (Faith): Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

Psalms 44:18 (Parallel theme): Our heart is not turned back, neither have our steps declined from thy way;

Proverbs 14:14 (Parallel theme): The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways: and a good man shall be satisfied from himself.

2 Peter 3:7 (Parallel theme): But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.

John 17:12 (Parallel theme): While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name: those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition; that the scripture might be fulfilled.