

*Apology* — Robert Barclay — 227-229

a state attainable in this life

extract of Proposition IX § iv v

§ iv. On one hand, some people are wrong in saying that we cannot fall away from or lose\* the least degree of true and saving grace. On the other hand, it is wrong to deny that it is possible to attain a stable condition from which there cannot be a total and final apostasy. Between these two extremes lies the Truth, confirmed\* in the Scriptures, which God has revealed to us by the testimony of his Spirit, and which we also know by our own experience. . . .

§ v. First, I freely acknowledge that it is good for everyone to be humble, and not to be overconfident so that they indulge themselves in iniquity, or relax in security as if they had already attained this condition. Watchfulness and diligence are very necessary to all mortals as long as they draw breath in this world. God wants this to be the constant practice of Christians, so that they may be more fit to serve him, and better armed against the daily temptations of the enemy. “The wages of sin is death,”<sup>1</sup> and for that reason everyone who is still sinning, still subject to sin, should assume that they may perish.

That is why the apostle Paul says (I Corinthians 9:27) “But I subjugate my body and enslave it, so that after having preached to others I will not myself be rejected.” Here the apostle supposes that it is possible for him to be rejected, and yet it seems probable that he was far more advanced in the inner work of regeneration when he wrote that epistle than many who nowadays so presumptuously suppose they

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<sup>1</sup> Romans 6:23

cannot fall<sup>2</sup> because they feel they have attained some small degree of true grace. In contrast, the apostle makes use of this possibility of his being rejected (as I have said before) as an inducement to him to be watchful, “I punish my body, so that,” etc. Nevertheless at another time the same apostle, in the feeling of God’s holy power, finds himself a conqueror over sin and his soul’s enemies through that power, and confidently affirms (Romans 8:38) “For I am convinced that neither death, nor life,” etc., which clearly shows that he had attained a condition from which he knew he could not fall away.

Second, it appears that such a condition is attainable because we are exhorted to it, and as has been proved earlier, the Scripture never tells us to do impossible things. The apostle exhorts us to it: “Therefore, brethren, be diligent to make your call and election sure” (II Peter 1:10). Although this sets up a condition for the promise, yet since we have already proved that it is possible to fulfil that condition then the promise which is attached to it can be attained. Where there is no assurance there is room for doubt and despair, and if we say the promise cannot be attained, then the saints of this world would never have a place where they might be free of doubt and despair, which is absurd in itself and contrary to the experience of thousands.<sup>3</sup>

Third, God has given to many of his saints and children, and is ready to give to everyone, a full and certain assurance that they are his, and that no power will ever be able to snatch them out of his hand. But that assurance would not

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<sup>2</sup> Latin: *hodie præsumptuose nimis impossibile sibi esse apostasiam facere jactitant* “today they presumptuously brag that it is completely impossible for them to become apostate.”

<sup>3</sup> Latin: *quod & Scripturæ & millium experientiæ repugnat*, “which goes against both the Scripture and the experience of thousands.

really be assurance if those who receive it were not established and confirmed beyond all doubt and hesitation. That being so, then surely there is no possibility that they will miss out on something that God has assured them of.

The Scripture abundantly shows that such assurance is attainable in this life, both in general and regarding specific persons. Revelation 3:12, “He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go out no more,” etc., contains a general promise to everyone. The apostle speaks of some people who have been sealed: “who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee” (II Corinthians 1:22). And so the sealing of the Spirit is called the guarantee or “pledge of our inheritance” (Ephesians 1:13) “in whom you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise.” And the apostle Paul declares that he himself has attained that state, not only in the verse from Romans noted above, but also in these words, “I have fought the good fight,” etc. (II Timothy 4:7) — which many good people have also done and witnessed.

Nothing can be more clear than what the experience of these days shows, and it is very similar to the experience of old times; we see that there have been people, both in the old days and recently, who have turned the grace of God into disordered desires, and have fallen away from their faith and integrity. From this we can safely conclude that that kind of falling away is possible.

We have also seen that some people, both in the old days and recently, have attained a certain assurance before they departed that they would inherit eternal life, and have died in that good hope, and the Spirit of God testified that they are saved. For that reason we also see that a state is attainable in this life from which there can be no falling

away. It was not possible for them to perish, since the Spirit of God gave testimony, *he who cannot lie*.<sup>4</sup>

Source: Robert Barclay, *Apology for the True Christian Divinity*, Proposition IX § iv, v (Glenside PA: Quaker Heritage Press, 2002) pp. 227-229; y Roberti Barclaii, *Teologiae verè Christianae apologia*, facsimile (Amsterdam: Jacob Claus, 1676) pp. 169-171.

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<sup>4</sup> Titus 1:2 "in hope of eternal life which God, who cannot lie, promised before time began."