

James 5:7 in the Navajo Bible

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Éí baą shik'isóó, Bóhólníihii nádzáajì' hada'ínótní. Jó'akon, k'éé'dídléehii ni' bits'áádóó aneest'a' ílínii yiba' át'éego, áłtséedi índa akée'di bik'i nahat'íihjì' ha'ólníi łeh. (James 5:7)¹

Be patient, then, brothers, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop and how patient he is for the autumn and spring rains. (James 5:7)²

Introduction

Notice that forms of the same word occur twice in the present verse. First, we have *hada'ínótní* ("Be patient"), and second, *ha'ólníi łeh* ("how patient he is"). Be patient. What does this mean? Does it simply mean not becoming angry? It means that much, but more is involved. In this comparison the Lord is like the farmer, who is willing to wait for the rains and for the crop they bring to maturity. So at the very least, being patient means having a result in mind and keeping on until it has been fully achieved. Patience involves the passage of time and has a lot in common with perseverance – not giving up.

Faith and Grace

We need some background before going on to the next section, so please be, well, patient while I take you through the next six paragraphs. There are references in the Bible to God's faithfulness, but never His faith. Faith is not a divine characteristic. There's a reason for this. "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1, KJV). The problem is, no one can give God anything He does not already have (see Acts 17:24-25), and no one can reveal anything to Him that He does not already know (see Hebrews 4:13). In the absence of things hoped for and things not seen, what basis is there for talking about faith? The question does not arise in God's case because the biblical preconditions for it are not met.

Grace is another matter. That is something which follows inherently from God's nature. It is God's nature to love (see 1 John 4:8). Thus, it is His nature to have compassion on His creatures and to extend favor to them even when they don't deserve it, which is all the time, because no one ever deserves God's favor. If grace can be described as unmerited favor, as I suggest, it follows that grace does not pertain to people in their relationship to God, because God always deserves our praise. It is never undeserved. So faith pertains to us and only us, while grace pertains to God and only God.

¹ Navajo Bible quotations are from *Diyin God Bizaad. The Holy Bible in Navajo*. Revised edition. New York: American Bible Society, 2000.

² English Bible quotations not otherwise marked are from *The Holy Bible: New International Version*®. NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Publishing House.

I say that faith pertains to us, and yet it does not come from within us. It is a gift from God (see Ephesians 2:8). Just here is a point that could be misunderstood. If grace comes from God, and faith also comes from God, then perhaps there is no difference between them after all and God does both. Under this theory, when people respond to God in faith, they are not responding to God, God is responding to God, and the human agent has no part in the process. There is a theology which makes such an idea seem plausible, but we must ask whether it bears scrutiny.

I submit that exercising faith is not something God does for us, or could possibly do for us. He gives us the capacity to respond to Him in faith but we are the ones who must exercise it. By contrast, grace has nothing whatever to do with human activity. It is something that derives from the divine nature and is entirely outside ourselves. It comes only from God.

Consider some of the many abilities we have as humans. We have the ability to see, and hear, and think, and feel, and so on. We have these abilities – and every other – because God gives them to us. And yet when we see (or hear, or do whatever) we don't say that God is doing these things. He is not. We are. We have the ability to breathe. This also was given to us as a free gift from God (see Psalm 100:3). And yet, when we exercise our God-given ability to breathe, it is not the case that God is breathing. We are breathing. But we only do this because God has enabled us to.

Faith is like breathing in one sense. One could argue that breathing is natural, while faith is a gift from God. To this I answer that breathing is also a gift from God. "And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else" (Acts 17:25). Thus, faith does not occupy some unique category all its own. God enables us to exercise faith just as He enables us to breathe, and to do everything else of which we are capable. But the important thing to notice here is that it would not be possible for God to exercise faith for us, because faith presupposes a condition in which there are things we don't have and don't see, whereas God made all things and knows all things.

The Perseverance of God

I have emphasized the distinction between faith and grace because we will need to keep it in mind as we study chapter 17 of the Westminster Confession of Faith. This confession dates back to 1646 and summarizes the beliefs of Christians who follow the teachings of John Calvin, the great Swiss reformer. Here is the complete text of chapter 17, entitled "The Perseverance of the Saints."

1. They, whom God has accepted in His Beloved, effectually called, and sanctified by His Spirit, can neither totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace, but shall certainly persevere therein to the end, and be eternally saved.
2. This perseverance of the saints depends not upon their own free will, but upon the immutability of the decree of election, flowing from the free and unchangeable love of God the Father; upon the efficacy of the merit and intercession of Jesus Christ, the abiding of the Spirit, and of the seed of God within them, and the nature of the covenant of grace: from all which arises also the certainty and infallibility thereof.

3. Nevertheless, they may, through the temptations of Satan and of the world, the prevalency of corruption remaining in them, and the neglect of the means of their preservation, fall into grievous sins; and, for a time, continue therein: whereby they incur God's displeasure, and grieve His Holy Spirit, come to be deprived of some measure of their graces and comforts, have their hearts hardened, and their consciences wounded; hurt and scandalize others, and bring temporal judgments upon themselves.³

Summary

Article 1 of the material quoted says that those whom God has accepted, called, and sanctified "can neither totally nor finally fall away from," what? What is the claim? Is it that Christians can never fall from faith? No. Article 3 makes clear that converted people all too frequently apostatize. And that's the whole point. Even when this happens, such people will still be saved at last. The doctrine of the perseverance of the saints has not been fully expounded until one comes all the way down to the bottom of article 3, where the writers deal with the reality that people can and often do fall from faith. The claim is not that we can't fall from faith, but rather that we can't fall from grace. It is an important distinction.

I ask, however, if saved Christians can't fall from grace, and if that certainty is called perseverance, who does the persevering? Not us, but God. We have said that grace pertains to God and only God. So the teaching has been misnamed. It should not be called "the perseverance of the saints," but "the perseverance of God." No believing Christian doubts "God's invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature" (Romans 1:20). The question is not and has never been whether God will be faithful to us. He will be. The question is whether we will be faithful to Him,⁴ and whether it matters if we remain faithful. The first answer is maybe. We knew that. But surprisingly, the second answer is no. In chapter 17 of the Westminster Confession, remaining faithful never enters the discussion.⁵

Problems

I have a number of problems with this teaching. First, to the extent that it involves saints (Christians, human believers in Christ), it does not involve persevering, whereas the Bible makes clear that remaining firm in faith – abiding in Christ – is vitally important (see John 15:5). Second, for this reason it is dangerous. Teaching people that if they have faith they will be saved, and if they don't have faith they will still be saved, makes faith irrelevant. Any theology which has the effect of making faith irrelevant is the wrong theology, because grace without faith can have no saving benefit. Let me illustrate what I mean.

After Adam sinned, humankind (good and bad alike) lived on "until the flood came and took them all away" (Matthew 24:39). The fact that God sent a flood illustrates justice, but the fact that it came when it did illustrates grace. For centuries people deserved death, but received

³ The Westminster Confession of Faith is widely available in print and online. For a web site which gives the complete text of this document see, http://www.reformed.org/documents/wcf_with_proofs/.

⁴ In 2 Timothy 2:13 Paul says, "If we are faithless, he will remain faithful, for he cannot disown . . ." Who? Who can Christ not disown? ". . . for he cannot disown himself." There is nothing here about Christ refusing to disown those who disown Him. In fact vs. 12 says in so many words, "If we disown him, he will also disown us; . . ." He will, or will not. There is a theology which says He won't. Paul says He will.

⁵ The Westminster Confession speaks of faith a number of times in its 33 chapters. Some of these are more significant for the present discussion than others. Sample quotations appear in appendix 1.

life. Nor was God mocking people through the preaching of Noah. They genuinely had an opportunity to respond, and doing so could have saved their lives. After the flood, once more good and bad alike lived on until Christ was born, died on the cross, and rose again the third day. My point here is that when Jesus came there was still a world for Him to come to. There were still people who could serve first as His ancestors and then as His parents. Thus, by being born into the world when He was, Jesus is not only the Source of grace but the proof that it has been made available to all mankind. The real point, however, has to do with faith. In this regard the exodus from Egypt and entrance into Canaan might provide a better example.

For we also have had the gospel preached to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith. (Hebrews 4:2)

At the present time good and bad alike are alive in great numbers and, since from a theological point of view all deserve death, that is evidence that all have received and are receiving grace. Unfortunately, not all respond in faith, and of those who do, not all remain faithful (see Matthew 13:19-23). Responding in faith and remaining faithful are important. What Jesus said was, "All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved" (Matthew 10:22). This is different from saying, "but he who stood firm at the beginning will be saved."⁶

It seems odd for a Seventh-day Adventist to be urging on Evangelicals the ideas (1) that Christians must exercise faith and (2) that salvation depends on our doing this. It's like faith is work.⁷ In one sense faith actually is work.

Then they asked him, "What must we do to do the works God requires?"²⁹ Jesus answered, "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent." (John 6:28-29)

Discussion

I have mentioned two points, i.e., that the perseverance of the saints, as popularly taught, does not involve persevering and that, by making faith appear irrelevant, it is dangerous. The third point is that it is puzzling. If a person no longer wants to be associated with Jesus but is saved anyway, what would salvation mean in such a case?

Avoiding the Son. Would it mean going to heaven even though we don't want to be there? One might argue that everyone wants to go to heaven, even though perhaps not everyone wants to spend eternity with Jesus. Is that true? What makes heaven what it is? Answer: Not gold paving material. The one defining feature that makes heaven attractive to the believing Christian is Jesus. It's not that God has a throne there, but that He has a Son there. Going to heaven and avoiding the Son might be difficult, but let us say for argument that it would be possible.

⁶ In His own experience Christ illustrates the point I'm trying to make. He did not merely express the right thoughts while praying in the garden and then slip away from His pursuers. He endured their mock trial. He climbed the hill of Calvary, He allowed Himself to be nailed to the cross, and both bled and died for us. This is perseverance. Jesus set out on the right course and He stayed on the right course to the end. If He had not, we would have not have the hope of salvation.

⁷ There is a thought world in which even rest is work. I'm referring here to the seventh-day Sabbath of the fourth commandment. The word "Sabbath" means "cessation" or "rest."

Avoiding the Father. If a person could enjoy heaven without wanting to be in the presence of Jesus, would he or she enjoy being in the presence of the Father? Jesus says, "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30; see also 1 John 2:23). If you like the one you'll like the other. There's no difference between them in terms of what draws or repels people. Apart from whether or not a person in heaven could avoid the Father (see Psalm 139:8), it is doubtful that anyone would be happy there while futilely trying to so.

Avoiding human beings. There is more. Avoiding the Father and the Son would not solve the problem, even if that were possible, because the spirit of heaven is one of constant praise (see Revelation 4:8-11). Could someone who does not share this spirit of praise enjoy being around people who are constantly and joyfully calling attention to the One they most wish to avoid? In order to be happy in heaven our unwilling stranger would have not only to avoid the Father and the Son, but everyone else. What kind of happiness is that? The pervasive spirit of praise in heaven would be a constant source of irritation for anyone who does not truly love Jesus from the heart.

So I find it puzzling why anyone who no longer loves Jesus would *want* to go to heaven, and also why God would want to take such a person there. All things considered, heaven would not be a happy place for such aliens, but a place of torment.

A possible alternative. Perhaps I have it wrong. Perhaps our stranger, who no longer loves Jesus, will be supernaturally enabled to love Him once more, in a way that "depends not upon their own free will, but upon the immutability of the decree of election" (article 2, above). By this I mean perhaps a renewed love of Jesus will be forcibly restored in the person's heart, even if this is not something he or she really wants. Thus, none of the difficulties described above would arise and the problem is resolved. This might seem to solve the problem, but actually it creates another one that is much worse. Now instead of wondering how just one person could avoid being unhappy in heaven, we must ask how anyone at all could enjoy spending eternity with a God who makes people love Him even when that may not be something they themselves want to do. There is a term for this type of arrangement. It is called rape.

There might be a theologically sound way out of this impasse, but I have not been able to find it. It would be far easier to accept at face value those passages which suggest that, if someone wants to leave, God sadly lets them go (see 2 Timothy 2:11-13; 1 Chronicles 28:9).⁸

The Perseverance of the Saints

We now consider some passages dealing with perseverance, by which I mean the saints persevering in faith, which is widely different from God unilaterally persevering in grace. Drawing on the Navajo text again will help us here, because forms of the word *hada'íínótní* ("Be patient," NIV) are used to translate nine different Greek words. Starting at James 5:7 we can trace the Navajo, English, and Greek words out through an expanding network of parallel passages, with their various associations. These will supply insight and perspective as we study the concept of perseverance and help us make some interesting connections.

⁸ When one's children leave home, one can no longer make them do anything. The relationship at this point is based entirely on good will. Things might happen and situations develop that break the parent's heart, but there is no way to impose one's will any more without ruining the child's life. There is instruction in this fact if we will benefit from it.

Below we compare twenty passages from 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, Hebrews, and James, where in the 2000 Navajo Bible, *Diyin God Bizaad*, some form of the word used at the beginning of James 5:7 (*hada'íínólní*, "Be patient") appears. A list of these verses is given in table 1. We could call this the first list.

Table 1
The Twenty Verses of the First List

Book	Verses
1 Timothy	1:16; 3:3; 6:11
2 Timothy	2:12, 24; 4:2, 3, 5
Titus	2:2
Hebrews	6:12; 10:32, 36; 11:27; 12:2, 3, 7; 13:22
James	1:3, 12; 5:7a, 7b

In the 20 verses in the first list, there are nine different Greek words that we'll want to look at further, because all nine are translated in *Diyin God Bizaad* using forms of the same Navajo word. The material could be arranged in any number of ways, but here I break it out into two tables based on whether the Greek word in question is a verb (table 2) or a noun (table 3).

Table 2
Verses Where the Parallel Involves a Greek Verb

Reference	Navajo	English (NIV)
anechomai (<anechō)		
2 Timothy 04:03	hada'ólní	put up with
Hebrews 13:22	hada'íínólní	bear with
hupomenō		
2 Timothy 02:12	hada'íínílní	endure
Hebrews 10:32	hada'íínólní	you stood your ground
Hebrews 12:02	ha'ólní	endured
Hebrews 12:03	ha'ólní	endured
Hebrews 12:07	hada'íínólní	Endure hardship
James 01:12	ha'ólní	perseveres
kakopatheō		
2 Timothy 04:05	ha'íínílní	endure hardship
kartereō		
Hebrews 11:27	ha'jólní	he persevered
makrothumeō		
James 05:07a	hada'íínólní	Be patient
James 05:07b	ha'ólní	how patient he is

Table 3
Verses Where the Parallel Involves a Greek Noun

Reference	Navajo	English (NIV)
anexikakos		
2 Timothy 02:24	ha'jólní	not resentful
epieikēs		
1 Timothy 03:03	ha'jólní	gentle
hupomonē		
1 Timothy 06:11	ha'íínílní	endurance
Titus 02:02	hada'íínólní	endurance
Hebrews 10:36	hada'íínólní	You need to persevere
James 01:03	ha'jólní	perseverance
makrothumia		
1 Timothy 01:16	ha'ólní	his unlimited patience
2 Timothy 04:02	ha'íínílní	with all patience
Hebrews 06:12	hada'ólní	patience

As you can imagine, the nine Greek words in our sample offer many different shades of meaning. That's why this exercise has potential value. The object is to view the idea of perseverance from as many different aspects as possible. I would like to argue that the main concept behind all these different words is pervasive within the New Testament, so just settling in on one word and looking up all occurrences would not have the same value.

What we do instead is look up all occurrences of all nine Greek words. This larger collection of material could be called the second list. The relationship between the two is that the first list is entirely contained within the second. From our second list of passages we then harvest some eighteen English expressions that give us an idea of how many-faceted the concept of perseverance is in the New Testament. These occur 98 times in 94 verses. (For the references see table 8, appendix 2.) The study could be expanded further by looking up these 94 verses in a variety of English translations, but comparing only two translations will suffice to make the desired point. My purpose is to view the text, not so much in the manner of a lexicon, but in the manner of a thesaurus. For the eighteen English expressions I encountered using NIV see table 4 (below).

Table 4
Eighteen English Expressions From
the First List, Using NIV

Basic Expression	Variations
be considerate	
be gentle	gentleness
bear with	bearing with
endure	endurance, endured, endures, enduring; patient endurance
endure hardship	
in trouble	
keep putting off	
listen to	
not resentful	
patience	be patient, patiently
persevere	perseverance, persevered, perseveres; by persevering
persistence	
put up with	
stand firm	standing firm, stands firm
stand one's ground	stood your ground
stay	stayed
stay behind	stayed behind
suffering	

By expanding our search to include the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV),⁹ we find, in addition to many of the items in table 4, the additional items in table 5.

Table 5
Some Additional English Expressions From
the First List, Using NRSV

Basic Expression	Variations
accept the complaint	accepting the complaint
endure a hard struggle	endured a hard struggle
endure suffering	
endure trials	
remain behind	remained behind
show endurance	showed endurance
steadfastness	
submit to	
suffer hardship	

⁹ *New Revised Standard Version Bible*. Copyright © 1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America.

Now that we've created this scatter of variously related words and expressions,¹⁰ let's run the process in reverse and ask if there's anything all of them have in common. As it happens, there is. The common element has to do with time.

Bearing with someone (see Colossians 3:13, NIV; Luke 9:41, NRSV) is a process.¹¹ If you bear with someone for only a moment, you're not bearing with them at all. That's not what the expression means. Bearing with someone, or putting up with them (Matthew 17:17, NIV), takes time. So does being patient with people (see Matthew 18:26, NIV), enduring hardship (Hebrews 12:7, NIV), persistence (Romans 2:7, NIV), standing firm (Matthew 10:22, NIV), standing one's ground (Hebrews 10:22, NIV), being steadfastness (2 Thessalonians 1:4, NIV), and so on. All of these terms have a certain durative quality about them.

Notice that some of the words and phrases listed in tables 4 and 5 (above) have to do with the virtue of firmness (endure, persevere, persistence, stand firm, stand one's ground, suffering), that some have to do with the quite different virtue of kindness (bear with, considerate, gentle, listen to, patience), whereas others describe traits that no one would consider a virtue (keep putting off). So the meanings are quite diverse, and yet all have a similar relationship to time.

In this section I have not tried to be exhaustive. The qualities of firmness, perseverance, persistence, and so on run through the New Testament like a thread. This thread is even longer than I have suggested. The following example does not appear in either list mentioned above, but is consistent with everything that does appear there.

And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the prophets,³³ who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions,³⁴ quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies.³⁵ Women received back their dead, raised to life again. Others were tortured and refused to be released, so that they might gain a better resurrection.³⁶ Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison.³⁷ They were stoned; they were sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated—³⁸ the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground.³⁹ ¶ These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised.⁴⁰ God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect. (Hebrews 11:32-40)

In this passage there is nothing here about giving up, about it being unfortunate and yet acceptable for a person to lose faith. Just the opposite. The fact that those who do not lose faith are praised does not prove that those who do lose faith are damned. I do not offer the above examples as proof texts. Taken together they indicate one of the major themes of the New Testament. And the theme makes sense. The farmer we read about in James 5:7 does not promise his seeds that all would participate in the harvest even if some should fail to develop or die prematurely under their clods.

¹⁰ A handful of expressions occur only in the form(s) labeled "Variations." This includes "stand firm," "stand one's ground," "stay behind," and "suffer."

¹¹ These are only representative examples. For a complete list see appendix 3.

Discussion

With this much as background we now compare what we have found in chapter 17 of the Westminster Confession Faith with what we find in the New Testament. The question is whether the two sources are saying the same thing. I submit they are not.

In the Confession the word "faith" does not appear, nor is it unfair to point this out. The concept of faithfulness is not there. In article 3 its absence is provided for explicitly and with emphasis. No similar provision can be found anywhere in the New Testament, or in the Old, whereas in its 33 chapters the Confession restates this point a number of times. (See appendix 1.) The Confession says that, as regards salvation, if Christians keep faith, or drift away from Christ, the result is all the same. One's salvation is never in doubt. In the New Testament, by contrast, the entire discussion is about standing firm, not giving up, enduring, persevering, and so on with the use of many similar terms. I think it is fair to say that the thrust of what we find in the two documents is not the same. The discussion is being carried in different directions.

Conclusion

If one were to examine a stream by dipping water from it at several points (as scientists do, for example, when examining the breeding practices of salmon), this would provide a basis for rigorous scientific investigation. What these samples would not tell us, however, is which way the stream was flowing. The water itself can no longer tell us that once it leaves the stream.

The Westminster Confession is a remarkable document. It is resoundingly systematic and scholarly. But there are points at which I believe it has lost a sense of which way the stream was flowing. The present case is an example. Everywhere the New Testament speaks of persevering, enduring, maintaining one's faith, abiding in Christ, and so on. It also says things which, taken out of context, or even taken in a limited context, might lead to the conclusions that the Confession draws about perseverance. But the thrust of where the New Testament takes the argument is not the same as where the Confession takes it.

Perseverance in the New Testament has especially to do with faith, and more specifically with faith cherished and maintained over time. The idea that if one does not maintain faith God will still save – whether in the absence of faith, or by a faith if once lost then later supernaturally renewed – is not taught in the New Testament. It follows from assumptions made elsewhere in a theological edifice which admittedly takes Scripture as its starting point but then develops a life of its own.

Consider one concluding example, by which I hope to illustrate the above point. 2 Peter 3:8-9 (quoted below), rather than taking the discussion in a new direction, sums up what has been said so far.

But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. ⁹ The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient [Greek *makrothumeō*, Navajo *ha'ólní*] with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. (2 Peter 3:8-9)

The focus of vs. 8 is on time, we have seen in other passages above. Only here we're not talking about time in terms of minutes or months, but years – measured in their thousands. By delaying the second coming as He has, God is "not slow in keeping his promise." Instead, "He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance." Notice a number of things about this last sentence. First, it consists of three clauses. Second, the word "patient" is translated from Greek *makrothumeō* (here *makrothumei*, "he is patient"), which is the same as a word used earlier in James 5:7. The corresponding Navajo word *ha'ólní* (as in *nihich'í' ha'ólní*, "He is patient with you") occurs in exactly this same form in James 5:7 and 2 Peter 3:9.

When Peter says, "He is patient with you" (vs. 9), who is "you"? Who does he have in mind? Whoever it is, God does not want them to perish. It is possible that, contrary to what I have said, "you" means Christians – people who share the beliefs of the original recipients of the letter. Thus, God wants every Christian to be saved, whether they remain strong in faith or allow their faith to grow weak. When the text says, "not wanting anyone to perish" (vs. 9), what is the difference between "not wanting" and "not willing"? One could argue that it is the will of God that none of the elect should perish and that He guarantees their salvation at last, as stated in chapter 17 of the Westminster Confession.

I say this would be possible, but the possibility only remains until we come to the third and final clause, "but [wanting] everyone to come to repentance." A person who still needs to come to repentance has not come to repentance yet. So what the verse is actually saying appears to be that God wants everyone – everyone – to repent. He is not willing that any should perish, even though some eventually do. "For I take no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Sovereign LORD. Repent and live!" (Ezekiel 18:32). Thus, God wants everyone to believe and have eternal life (see John 3:16). Where NIV says, "not wanting anyone to perish," the Navajo is more emphatic (*ts'idá doo ła' ázhdoodijít da nízingo*, "wanting absolutely no one to perish").¹²

The expression "absolutely no one" (or even NIV's less emphatic "anyone," clause 2) cannot be confined to the elect only. It also includes those who have not yet come to repentance (clause 3). Making Peter's "everyone" into "everyone [of the elect]" changes what Peter is saying into something he is not saying. God wants everyone to come to repentance, and makes this possible by freely making His grace available to all. This seems like a reasonable way to interpret the word "everyone." The problem is that, while in this way all receive grace, not all respond in faith and, of those who do, not all remain in Christ. But without Christ there can be no salvation (see Acts 4:12; 1 John 5:10-12). Losing Christ has the same effect as never finding Him.

The point I'm trying to make is the opposite of that found in chapter 17 of the Westminster Confession – not in the sense of displacing grace, but in the sense of not allowing grace to displace faith. The bottom line is that for our concept of perseverance to be biblical it must include persevering, i.e., keeping faith, keeping Christ, remaining and abiding in Him. There is no substitute for this. There is no salvation in starting well and then giving up, at least Matthew 13: 3-9, 18-23 would not lead us to think so (see also Mark 4:3-9, 14-20; Luke 8:5-15). God is patient with us and He expects us to be faithful to Him.

¹² Bear in mind that references to the Navajo text are not an afterthought to the discussion, but my starting point. Navajo readers are not guests at the meal, but hosts. And yes, there are Navajos who know their Bibles well enough to read these things understandingly.

Appendix 1

Other References to Faith in the Westminster Confession of Faith

Statements Which Appear to Make Salvation Follow from Faith¹³

Chapter 3: Of God's Eternal Decree

VI. As God has appointed the elect unto glory, so has He, by the eternal and most free purpose of His will, foreordained all the means thereunto. Wherefore, they who are elected, being fallen in Adam, are redeemed by Christ, are effectually called unto faith in Christ by His Spirit working in due season, are justified, adopted, sanctified, and kept by His power, *through faith, unto salvation*. Neither are any other redeemed by Christ, effectually called, justified, adopted, sanctified, and saved, but the elect only.

Chapter 7: Of God's Covenant with Man

III. Man, by his fall, having made himself incapable of life by that covenant, the Lord was pleased to make a second, commonly called the covenant of grace; wherein He freely offers unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ; requiring of them faith in Him, *that they may be saved*, and promising to give unto all those that are ordained unto eternal life His Holy Spirit, to make them willing, and able to believe.

Chapter 11: Of Justification

II. Faith, thus receiving and resting on Christ and His righteousness, is the alone instrument of justification: yet is it not alone in the person justified, but is ever accompanied with all other *saving graces*, and is no dead faith, but works by love.

Chapter 14: Of Saving Faith

I. The grace of faith, whereby the elect are enabled to believe *to the saving of their souls*, is the work of the Spirit of Christ in their hearts, and is ordinarily wrought by the ministry of the Word, by which also, and by the administration of the sacraments, and prayer, it is increased and strengthened.

II. By this faith, a Christian believes to be true whatsoever is revealed in the Word, for the authority of God Himself speaking therein; and acts differently upon that which each particular passage thereof contains; yielding obedience to the commands, trembling at the threatenings,

¹³ The quotations that follow are drawn from http://www.reformed.org/documents/wcf_with_proofs/. The same material is available from many online sources. For completeness, and for fairness, each statement is quoted as an entire paragraph. Emphasis added.

and embracing the promises of God for this life, and that which is to come. But the principal acts of *saving faith* are accepting, receiving, and resting upon Christ alone for justification, sanctification, and eternal life, by virtue of the covenant of grace.

III. This faith is different in degrees, weak or strong; may often and many ways assailed, and weakened, but gets the victory: growing up in many to the attainment of a full assurance, through Christ, who is both the author and finisher of our faith.

Statements Which Appear Not to Make Salvation Follow from Faith

Chapter 3: Of God's Eternal Decree

V. Those of mankind that are predestinated unto life, God, before the foundation of the world was laid, according to His eternal and immutable purpose, and the secret counsel and good pleasure of His will, has chosen, in Christ, unto everlasting glory, out of *His mere free grace and love, without any foresight of faith, or good works, or perseverance in either of them, or any other thing in the creature, as conditions, or causes moving Him thereunto; and all to the praise of His glorious grace.*

Chapter 11: Of Justification

I. Those whom God effectually calls, He also freely justifies; not by infusing righteousness into them, but by pardoning their sins, and by accounting and accepting their persons as righteous; not for any thing wrought in them, or done by them, but for Christ's sake alone; *nor by imputing faith itself, the act of believing, or any other evangelical obedience to them, as their righteousness;*¹⁴ but by imputing the obedience and satisfaction of Christ unto them, they receiving and resting on Him and His righteousness by faith; which faith they have not of themselves, it is the gift of God.

Chapter 18: Of Assurance of Grace and Salvation

IV. True believers may have the assurance of their salvation divers ways shaken, diminished, and intermitted; as, by negligence in preserving of it, by falling into some special sin which wounds the conscience and grieves the Spirit; by some sudden or vehement temptation, by God's withdrawing the light of His countenance, and suffering even such as fear Him to walk in darkness and to have no light: yet are they never so utterly destitute of that seed of God, and life of faith, that love of Christ and the brethren, that sincerity of heart, and conscience of duty, out of which, by the operation of the Spirit, this assurance may, in due time, be revived; and by the which, in the mean time, they are supported from utter despair.

¹⁴ Am I reading this right? "What does the Scripture say? 'Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness'" (Romans 4:3); "However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness" (Romans 4:5; also Genesis 15:6; Romans 4:9, 22; Galatians 3:6; James 2:23).

Appendix 2 Various Lists

Table 6
Parallels From the First List

Reference	English	Greek
ha'íínílní (2s: you persist)		
1 Timothy 06:11	endurance	hupomonē
2 Timothy 04:02	with all patience	makrothumia
2 Timothy 04:05	endure hardship	kakopatheō
ha'ólní (3s: he or she persists)		
1 Timothy 01:16	his unlimited patience	makrothumia
Hebrews 12:02	endured	hupomenō
Hebrews 12:03	endured	hupomenō
James 01:12	perseveres	hupomenō
James 05:07b	how patient he is	makrothumeō
ha'jólní (4s: one persists)		
1 Timothy 03:03	gentle	epieikēs
2 Timothy 02:24	not resentful	anexikakos
Hebrews 11:27	he persevered	kartereō
James 01:03	perseverance	hupomonē
hada'íínílní (1p: we each persist)		
2 Timothy 02:12	endure	hupomenō
hada'íínólní (2p: you each persist)		
Titus 02:02	endurance	hupomonē
Hebrews 10:32	you stood your ground	hupomenō
Hebrews 10:36	You need to persevere	hupomonē
Hebrews 12:07	Endure hardship	hupomenō
Hebrews 13:22	bear with	anechomai
James 05:07a	Be patient	makrothumeō
hada'ólní (3p: they each persist)		
2 Timothy 04:03	put up with	anechomai
Hebrews 06:12	patience	makrothumia

Table 7
Navajo Forms Encountered

	Singular		Plural	
First person	...	I keep on	hada'íínílní (1)	we keep on
Second person	ha'íínílní (3)	you keep on	hada'íínólní (6)	you keep on
Third person	ha'ólní (5)	s/he keeps on	hada'ólní (2)	they keep on
Fourth person	ha'jólní (4)	one keeps on	...	they keep on

Table 8
The 94 Verses in the Second List

Word	In the Sample	In the NT	References
anechō / anechomai	2	14	Matthew 17:17; Mark 9:19; Luke 9:41; Acts 18:14; 1 Corinthians 4:12; 2 Corinthians 11:1, 4, 19, 20; Ephesians 4:2; Colossians 3:13; 2 Thessalonians 1:4; 2 Timothy 4:3; Hebrews 13:22
anexikakos	1	1	2 Timothy 2:24
epieikēs	1	5	Philippians 4:5; 1 Timothy 3:3; Titus 3:2; James 3:17; 1 Peter 2:18
hupomenō	6	16	Matthew 10:22; 24:13; Mark 13:13; Luke 2:43; Acts 17:14; Romans 12:12; 1 Corinthians 13:7; 2 Timothy 2:10, 12; Hebrews 10:32; 12:2, 3, 7; James 1:12; 5:11; 1 Peter 2:20
hupomonē	4	31	Luke 8:15; 21:19; Romans 2:7; 5:3, 4; 8:25; 15:4, 5; 2 Corinthians 1:6; 6:4; 12:12; Colossians 1:11; 1 Thessalonians 1:3; 2 Thessalonians 1:4; 3:5; 1 Timothy 6:11; 2 Timothy 3:10; Titus 2:2; Hebrews 10:36; 12:1; James 1:3, 4; 5:11; 2 Peter 1:6; Revelation 1:9; 2:2, 3, 19; 3:10; 13:10; 14:12
kakopatheō	1	3	2 Timothy 2:9; 4:5; James 5:13
kartereō	1	1	Hebrews 1:17
makrothumeō	2	9	Matthew 18:26, 29; Luke 18:7; 1 Corinthians 13:4; 1 Thessalonians 5:14; Hebrews 6:15; James 5:7, 8; 2 Peter 3:9
makrothumia	3	14	Romans 2:4; 9:22; 2 Corinthians 6:6; Galatians 5:22; Ephesians 4:2; Colossians 1:11; 3:12; 1 Timothy 1:16; 2 Timothy 3:10; 4:2; Hebrews 6:12; James 5:10; 1 Peter 3:20; 2 Peter 3:15