

THE PERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS

Today I will be speaking on the Perseverance of the saints, the P in the acrostic TULIP. This doctrine is also known as the eternal security of the believer or “once saved, always saved”.

As usual, I will publish my sermon notes and references on our church website after this message..

In my previous message on Irresistible Grace I laid out the Ordo Salutis (the Order of Salvation). I said, first we are foreknown and predestined from eternity past; then we are called, regenerated, given repentance and faith, justified and adopted as sons and daughters, culminating in our eventual glorification. Even though we haven’t received our glorified bodies yet, this glorification is spoken of in the past tense therefore we can never be lost. Therefore, we can say our perseverance is implied in this and the other doctrines we have studied. It is a logical consequence of salvation being the work of an eternally loving and immutable God.

That said, it is dangerous business trying to make up Bible doctrine simply by implying what the bible says rather than reading what it actually does say. We want to understand it as it is taught in scripture. This means we have to eliminate some common misunderstandings.

Perseverance is not:

1. Perseverance does not mean that Christians are exempt from all spiritual danger just because they are Christians. On the contrary, the opposite is true. Once we become Christians the devil and the world will hate us passionately and will try to destroy us. Romans 8:35-39 is one of the greatest statements on the eternal security of the believer. *“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: “For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.” No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”* Paul writes of trouble, hardship, persecution, famine, nakedness, danger and sword, concluding, “For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.” But in spite of these many hostile forces the Christian will be kept by God’s power and love. It is because we really face these dangers that perseverance is so important.
2. Perseverance does not mean Christians are always kept from falling into sin, just because they are Christians. Christians do sin. All our heroes in scripture fell into sin, except Jesus himself. Noah fell into drunkenness, Peter denied Jesus three times, David committed adultery then arranged for the murder of the woman’s husband. Christians do fall but they don’t fall permanently. Peter was restored after denying Jesus, David was forgiven after his sin with Bathsheba and so on.
3. Perseverance does not mean that those who merely profess Christ without actually being born-again are secure. We live in a day when many claim to be Christians but are destitute of any true knowledge of the faith and any genuine Christian experience or character. Others may know about the Christian faith yet have no real

relationship or desire for Jesus. About 7-8 years ago I was in Chester cathedral visiting with family. We had a tour guide, a very pleasant woman who knew all about the church, when it was built, the history and all the politics behind it. She seemed very knowledgeable so I asked her, "Is this where you worship?" She said, "No, of course not!" She just goes there for the peace and tranquility of the place of worship. You may be listed on the membership rolls of this church but it still will not save you- you must be born-again. This sad truth explains the many warnings that appear in scripture to the effect that we should make our calling and election sure (2 Peter 1:10). Jesus's statements are among the most direct. For example, Jesus said, "You will be hated by everyone because of me, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved." (Matthew 10:22). We are able to stand firm only because God perseveres with us. But it is also true we must stand firm.

There is a strange anomaly in contemporary evangelicalism today. The majority of evangelicals are theologically Arminian i.e. they do not believe total depravity or sovereign election. They believe the deciding factor in whether a person becomes a Christian and is saved is not God's regenerating power but the individual's free will. In other words, we can put ourselves in the kingdom or out of it. In spite of this they believe in perseverance, insisting that when a person is saved, he is saved forever. They are correct in saying this, but Arminian theology provides no basis for this. The 39 Articles rightly grounds our eternal security in God's sovereign decree,

[Article 17. Predestination and Election](#)

"Hence those granted such an excellent benefit (predestination to life) by God are called according to God's purpose by his Spirit working at the appropriate time. By grace they obey the calling; they are freely justified, are made sons of God by adoption, are made like the image of his only-begotten Son Jesus Christ, they walk faithfully in good works and *at the last by God's mercy attain eternal happiness.*" The focus is on predestination and election but it clearly states that the predestined will attain eternal happiness in heaven so God must be the one preserving them.

[Scriptures Supporting Perseverance](#)

(Psalm 34:7) The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him, and he delivers them.

(Jeremiah 31:3) The Lord appeared to us in the past, saying: "I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with unfailing kindness.

(Ezekiel 11:19-20) I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh. Then they will follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. They will be my people, and I will be their God.

(John 5:24) "Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life."

(John 6:51) I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."

(Romans 11:29) for God's gifts and his call are irrevocable.

(Hebrews 10:14) For by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.

(1 Peter 1:3-5) Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.

(1 John 5:11-13) And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life. I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.

These verses, taken from many places in the bible are plain statements that the one who called the believer to faith will also preserve him to the end. It is a double security. On the one hand God will never depart from us, but will keep, preserve and defend us; and that, on the other hand because he acts in this way, we for our part will not depart from him.

Two Great Perseverance Verses

A couple more verses I want to look at in more detail.

(Philippians 1:6) being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. Our salvation was started by God and will be completed in us by him. No question. He will not leave us unfinished till we are made like Jesus.

(Romans 8:35-39) Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. It is difficult to think of any words more comprehensive than these which prove that once we come to Christ, nothing can separate us from the love of God. In these verses seventeen obstacles to salvation. Yet not one of them poses the slightest threat to the eternal security of the believer. The point is not simply that these obstacles can be overcome, but that nothing in eternity can threaten the security of God's elect, who will therefore persevere to the very end.

Summary

The doctrine of perseverance is precisely what Paul declares it to be in Romans 8, namely that those whom God has foreknown and predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son will indeed come to the great consummation. For sure they will be harassed and they will be tempted. Frequently they will fall. Nevertheless, in the end they will be with Jesus and be made like him because this is the destiny that God has already ordained for them.

The 5 Points, Redux

In my first message on the Doctrines of Grace I mentioned that the 5 points were a response to specific objections raised against Reformed Calvinist teaching. However, John Calvin himself did not summarise his theology in 5 points. What he taught was a systematic approach to the gospel. Calvin and the other Reformers went to great lengths to emphasize they were not teaching any new doctrines only returning to the pure undiluted word of God.

The 5 Points Redux

Total depravity is the doctrine that teaches that all mankind is hopelessly corrupt because of original sin and we cannot save ourselves. In our natural state we are slaves to sin.

Unconditional Election: teaches that God, in his mercy, has chosen a remnant from all humanity that will receive his salvation. Those whom God did not specifically choose will reject him with eternal consequences.

Limited Atonement: Jesus's sacrifice on the cross was intended only for those the father gave him. Though his death is sufficient to save everyone for all eternity, the design of the atonement is such that it is only effective for those he came to save.

Irresistible Grace: those whom the father has chosen, the son died for, the Spirit will draw them to the Godhead. They may resist the Spirit but they are unable to resist the grace of God effectively.

Perseverance of The Saints. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit work in concert to bring people to salvation. The process is entirely dependent on God therefore the elect of God will persevere to the very end.

Taken together, the Doctrines of Grace tell us our salvation is entirely a work of God from start to the very end. It is not a cooperative effort. It is unfortunate that Calvin and his acolytes in England (the Puritans) have had their reputations sullied. Mention Calvin today and lots of folks picture a gloomy, mean-spirited sourpuss. Similarly, to call someone puritanical today generally is a pejorative term. The American polemicist H.L Mencken once defined Puritanism as, "the haunting fear that someone, somewhere, may be happy". This is very wrong of course. At the heart of Calvin's theology, he wanted Christians to have assurance of what they believed. Calvin stressed that God establishes the bible as the word of God in our hearts. He does this by his Holy Spirit so we can be confident and certain of what we believe. Calvin had a passion that people have confidence in Christ as their saviour. God's will for us is that we have life in Jesus. God's will is that we have confidence in, and take refuge in his son. The doctrines of grace are a small part of his overall message. Amen.