

PRESSING ON: THE PERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS

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In studying the doctrines of grace the last several weeks, we have learned some wonderful things about our salvation. It is my plan to continue on a few Sundays with this same theme, although we are concluding the doctrines, as such, this morning. I want to spend a few Sundays dealing with some of the practical implications of believing in the doctrines of grace. I want to take up the subject of prayer, the subject of missions and evangelism, and other things that are often used by people against these doctrines. They will say, "Well, if God has chosen people for salvation and their salvation is guaranteed, then why pray, or why preach the Gospel?" So I want to deal with some of those things, as well as God's purposes through these wonderful truths.

We began by considering the attributes of God. Then we turned from that to learn something of the dreadful effects of Adam's sin upon the human race, effects which all of us have experienced. Unlike Adam who was created without sin, as a result of his disobedience to God, we have been born in sin, born with a sin nature. Consequently, as the Word of God teaches us, we are bondservants of sin, at enmity with God, proud, self-sufficient, blinded to our own need, blinded to the truth of God, and unable to help ourselves. All of this means also that man by nature is under the judgment of God. If you want to know why the world is the way it is today, then look at man. If you want to know what is wrong with man, then listen to the words of David in his great Psalm of confession, Psalm 51 and verse 5, where he said, "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me." We cannot visualize a more hopeless situation than the natural state of man, man as he is born into this world. Nothing that man may seek to do for himself can ever change this. We are not able to help each other with respect to sin. But the good news is that God has done something. The Scriptures teach us that before the world was created, God sovereignly ordained everything concerning the salvation of sinners. In eternity past, the Bible teaches us that it was ordained, it was determined that the Son of God would come and die for sinners. Revelation 13:8 speaks of the Lord Jesus Christ as "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world."

But in eternity past, God did another thing which we have been learning about. He sovereignly chose those who would be saved. Listen again to words that we have been over several times, in Ephesians chapter 1, verse 4: "According as he (God) hath chosen us in him (Christ) before the foundation of the world, that we should
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be holy and without blame before him in love." We have the same truth again in 2 Thessalonians 2:13: "But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because

God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth."

We have also learned that God has put two truths together: one, the death of Christ; and secondly, His choice of sinners to be saved. This means, as we have seen also in a number of passages of Scripture, that when Christ died He died specifically for those whom the Father had chosen for salvation. The Lord Jesus Christ came to give His life for the sheep. John 10:11 is one of the passages that teaches this. The Lord Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep." This is the doctrine of particular redemption.

But, at this point in considering these great doctrines, we realize that there is a major problem. How will God get those who refuse to seek Him, to seek Him? Both David in the Old Testament and Paul in the New Testament teach us that "there is none that seeketh after God" (Psa. 14:2; Rom. 3:11). How can God get those whom He has chosen to seek Him? The answer is that God draws those chosen ones to Himself. He calls them. He calls them effectually and effectively. This means that those whom God draws and calls, come to Him. Listen again to John 6:44: "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him." And John 6:37: "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." So the chosen ones do not come of their own free will because their will is not free. Their will is bound by sin. They come by God's sovereign call and according to God's sovereign will. They come because they are drawn to Christ by the sovereign call of God. That is the explanation for the salvation of every single one of us here this morning. We have come to Christ, we have believed in Christ, we have been saved, because God in His wonderful grace has called us and drawn us to Himself.

But now all of this leaves one further point that we want to consider together this morning. It is: How enduring is this salvation? It was planned by God from all eternity. The Lord Jesus Christ came to die for those whom the Father has chosen. The Father in His wonderful grace and all through history has been drawing His chosen ones to the Lord Jesus Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit. But will it last? How enduring is this salvation? If a person is once saved, can he ever be lost again? Can he lose this salvation which was designed by God, purchased by Christ, applied by the Holy Spirit?

The church historically has been divided on this subject. Some say, "No, a person who is truly saved can never lose his salvation." Others say, "Yes, if a child of God sins, he can lose what he has in Christ." But the question is, What does the Word of God say? Questions like this are not settled by a majority vote, are they? Nor are they settled by the one who may be saying the "yes" or "no." You know, there are some pastors and Bible teachers who are so popular and exercise such an influence on the lives of people who listen to them that if they wanted to say that black was white, there are people who would believe what they have to say. But it does not make any difference who the speaker may be, who the teacher may be. The point is, what does the Word of God have to say? I am not going to debate this question today. I simply want to present to you the teaching of the Word of God and trust that the Holy Spirit will be showing all of us what the Word means.

The Bible teaches two truths in regard to this question which are intimately related to each other. The first is the eternal security of the believer; the second is the perseverance of the saints--the perseverance of a true believer in the faith. I want to deal with both of these because I happen to belong to that group of people who say that it is impossible for a person, once he has come to know Jesus Christ, ever to lose his salvation. I want to deal with some of the passages on both sides because, as we have seen in dealing with practically all of these doctrines, the Word of God has been written in such a way that in some places it seems to teach both sides. Those who believe that they can lose their salvation have certain passages of Scripture that they go to just as those of us who

believe that salvation is eternal have certain passages that we go to.

Two or three weeks ago, or possibly longer, I mentioned two possible reasons as to why the Lord caused the Word to be written in this way. One is that we would search all of the Word of God, and not just take isolated passages of Scripture. When you take all of the Word of God, you find that it does not teach contradictory things. There is a marvelous unity in Scripture. The other reason is that, when we run into these things that are apparently contradictory, this is always a reminder that we need the Holy Spirit to teach us. We cannot understand these great truths merely by the exercise of our finite, human wisdom. We need to be depending upon the Spirit of God.

Let me begin by speaking of this doctrine of eternal security. Unfortunately there are people who do not like this expression. It is not an expression that is used in the Word. But I cannot understand why anyone would be disturbed by the thought that we have eternal security. We spend our lives looking for security, do we not? We want to be secure as a nation. We would like to be secure in our health. Those of you who have jobs would like to know that you are secure in your jobs. And if concerning any one of these areas I could come to you and say that you do not have anything to worry about because you are eternally secure in your job, or you are eternally secure in your health, or that you do not need to worry about what might happen to our nation because as a nation we are eternally secure, would you get mad at me? Certainly not! But it seems that when we talk to people about being eternally secure in the most important relationship that we can possibly have, our relationship to God, this makes some people mad. They would rather be eternally insecure. That has always been hard for me to understand. As I stand before you this morning, I still do not understand their thinking. So, if this term bothers you, I hope that by the time we have looked into some of these passages of Scripture you will love it and rejoice in it and believe that it is what the Word of God teaches.

I. ALL WHO BELIEVE IN CHRIST ARE SAVED FOREVER

Actually every passage in the Scriptures which speak of eternal life is a passage which teaches us that, once a person has come to know Jesus Christ as Saviour, he is saved eternally. The verse that is probably the most familiar verse in the Bible, at least among Christians, John 3:16, is one of those: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life"--a life that will never come to an end. The Lord Jesus also said in John 5:24, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life

argue with this, He added, ". . . and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life." He has everlasting life. He has passed out of death into life--forever!

These are not the only passages that we could turn to. We have been looking in several of these messages at John chapter 10. In verse 27-30 we read, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand. I and my Father are one." Now notice that statement, "They shall never perish." If the Lord had stopped there, that would have been enough. But He went on to say, "Neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand." The person who does not believe that he is eternally secure in Christ is a person who really spends more time looking at his experience than he does looking at the promises of the Word, or at the power of the Son and the power of the Father. If our salvation can be taken away from us, it means that somebody has been able to cause the Father to loosen His grip upon us and to cause the Son to loosen His grip upon us, as well as to cancel out this clear promise that God has given to us: "I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish . . ."

Please turn to Romans chapter 8, the last two verses. I realize that I am reading verses which are very familiar to you, but I want you to see again what they have to say. In the last two verses of Romans chapter 8 where the Apostle Paul was talking about the love of God, he made it very clear that nothing can ever separate us from the love of God. Let me read those last two verses: "For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:38-39). You see, to be in the love of God is to be saved. If we could be separated from the love of God, then we could be lost again. But since that can never happen, once you are saved, you are always saved. Once you are saved, there is no possibility that you could ever be lost again.

Now let us look at the book of Ephesians. If I were to read all the passages that deal with this subject, we could be here all day. I am just giving you a sampling of these wonderful passages. Here in the thirteenth and fourteenth verses of the first chapter of Ephesians we read about the sealing of the Holy Spirit: "In whom (that is, in Christ) ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with the holy Spirit of promise, which is (or Who is) the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory." Now here is added one aspect to our salvation that ought to convince us even more. Not only is the believer in the hand of the Lord Jesus, as we read in John chapter 10, and the Lord Jesus Christ's hand is in the Father's hand, but here the Apostle Paul teaches us that the third person of the God-head, the Holy Spirit, has become to us the seal of our inheritance--the guarantee of our inheritance. So you see, if we are to lose our salvation, this means that God the Father must fail, God the Son must fail, and God the Holy Spirit must fail. Of course this is utterly impossible. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are involved in the guarantee of our salvation. And then you have that wonderful statement in 2 Timothy chapter 1 verse 12, where Paul said, "For I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded (there is your word again that we found in Romans chapter 8) that he is able to Doctrines of Grace -- #13

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keep that which I have committed unto him against that day." So these passages make it very, very clear that salvation is eternal.

II. THE PERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS

But there is a companion truth which always goes along with the doctrine of eternal security. This doctrine of grace is called, the perseverance of the saints. What does it mean? Well, it means that one who has truly believed in the Lord Jesus Christ will continue on in the faith. He will never, as I believe the Westminster Confession of Faith says, "He will never totally and finally turn away from Christ." A believer may sin. He may grieve the Holy Spirit. He may dishonor himself and dishonor the name of God. But he cannot lose what he has in Christ.

One of the problems that is obvious in every generation of Christians is that we have many people who profess faith in the Lord Jesus Christ who have not truly been saved. The Lord had this in His own day. If you would have asked the scribes and the Pharisees and the elders and the Saducees if they were the people of God, they would have responded in the affirmative. You ask many people today who are members of a church, or because they try to do the thing that is right, if they are Christians, and they will respond by saying, "Yes, I am a Christian." But the Word of God makes it clear that when a person receives Jesus Christ he becomes a new creature. And when he becomes a new creature, his life is changed. This does not mean that he becomes perfect all of sudden, and that all of his faults drop away. But it means that there is a change that takes place. It is impossible for a person to come to Jesus Christ, to come into a living relationship to Jesus Christ, and remain the same. He is going to be different. He is born from above. He has divine life. The Spirit of God has come to dwell in Him. It is utterly impossible, inconceivable that a person who has been brought

to Christ, drawn by the Father, regenerated by the power of the Holy Spirit, could ever remain the same. But we see those who are mere professors of faith, without actually possessing true faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, turning away all the time.

I am going to be dealing with a passage in the service tonight which says, "From that time, many of his disciples turned and walked no more with him." Obviously this had to be people who had not experienced regeneration, who had not experienced salvation. So, consequently, it was possible for them to turn away from the Lord, and to stay away.

John, for example, in writing 1 John chapter 2, verse 19, said this (and he was talking about people who had left the church, people who were showing no more interest in the things of God): "They went out from us, but they were not of us: for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us, but they went out that it might be made manifest that they were not all of us." To persevere is to continue. John said that if they had been of us they would have continued with us, but they went out so that it might be known that they were not of us. He was not talking about people who would make a temporary lapse. There are people, of course, as I have said, who get away from the Lord, but eventually come back because the Lord is working in their heart. But he was talking about those who turn and walk no more with the people of God. Therefore you see that when the Lord draws us to Himself and saves us, he continues His work in our hearts. And although we may falter and fail at certain times, yet when you look at our lives you are going to see that there is a moving on in the things of the Lord. Page 6

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The only explanation from Scripture as to why the people of God continue to go on and persevere in their faith is the fact that God is doing a work in their hearts.

For example, when you read of all the trouble that the early Christians got into and how many of them were martyred for their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, you realize that, if God had not done something in their hearts, it would have been the easiest thing for them to just give it all up so as to avoid martyrdom. The apostles in the early chapters of the book of Acts were threatened not to speak or teach any more in the name of Jesus. The natural thing would be not to speak or teach any more in the name of Jesus. But do you remember what the apostles said? They said, "Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:19, 20). You see, there was a power impelling their testimony so that they could not keep quiet if they had chosen to be quiet. What Peter was actually saying to them is, "It is not in our hands. God has done a work in our hearts and we are so motivated by what God has done that even though it costs us our lives, we are going to speak and teach and preach in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." That is what the perseverance of the saints is.

I like that statement of Jeremiah's in the Old Testament. Jeremiah, as a prophet of God, a servant of the Lord, was so disillusioned by the things that were going on and so disappointed with God, confused because God had not really taken a stronger hand in his ministry. And so what did Jeremiah say? He said, "I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more in his name" (Jer. 20:9). What does that mean? That meant that Jeremiah was through. He was not going to preach any more. He was not going to warn people any more. Regardless of what he said he did not feel that God was standing with him. And so he was going to give up the whole thing. He was going to turn in his credentials as a prophet. But then he said this: "But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay" (Jer. 20:9).

What did that mean? That meant that God was saying to Jeremiah that he was not going to quit. The Lord would not let him quit. So you see the perseverance of the saints is really the perseverance of God in His work in the hearts of the saints so that they continue on in the faith.

Now turn to the book of Colossians chapter 1. I want you to look at a passage that often gives people some problems in connection with this doctrine of the perseverance of the saints. Paul said in Colossians chapter 1, verse 21-22, "And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unproveable in his sight." This is an excellent description of a Christian: formerly alienated; now reconciled. This is through the death of the Lord Jesus Christ. God is going to do this for all believers. This is our heavenly hope. But look at verse 23: "If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled." This is where some of our friends who believe that you can lose your salvation are quick to say, "Aha! Here is a passage of Scripture that teaches the opposite thing. It says that if you do not continue in the faith grounded and settled, then you are no longer going to be reconciled, nor is God going to present you holy and unblameable and unproveable in His sight!" Is that what Paul was saying? Absolutely not! What Paul was saying is that the genuineness of our faith, the proof that we are truly reconciled, the proof that we truly belong to God, is that we will "continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved

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away from the hope of the gospel." You see, I do not continue in order to hang on to my salvation. I continue, I persevere, because I am saved. The proof that I am saved is that I continue in the faith.

When the Lord Jesus was talking about the things that will go on during the time of the Great Tribulation, when "the love of many shall wax cold" (Matt. 24:12), He indicated that there will be many who profess to belong to the people of God who will turn away during that time. But then He said this: "But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved" (Matt. 24:13). We are not saved because we endure, but we endure because we are saved. The evidence that God has done a genuine work in our hearts is that we continue on in the faith.

Now let me conclude this morning by referring to my text. Again, I am getting around to the text at the end of my message. Please do not tell anyone that I am doing things backwards. The usual procedure in preaching and teaching is to go to the text immediately, and stay with it. However, in a subject like the doctrines of grace there are many passages to be considered, and so I trust that you will pardon me for being so slow in getting to the text.

I am particularly concerned about the last three verses of our text in Philippians chapter 3, beginning with verse 12. Here Paul said, "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after." This is perseverance. "But I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus." The word "apprehend" means to lay hold of. I mentioned this morning that the way the Lord lays hold of us is that He draws us to Himself. He calls us effectually to Himself. And His purpose in laying hold of us is not only to save us from our sins, but to make us like the Lord Jesus Christ. So Paul was saying, in effect, "I am pursuing, I am persevering, I am following after, so that I can lay hold of the very thing for which the Lord has laid hold of me. I want what the Lord wants. He wants me to be like Jesus Christ, and I want to be like Jesus Christ."

Now verse 13, "Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended." He was not there yet. He was not yet what the Lord wanted him to be. He had not experienced what he was going to be at the resurrection of the dead. "But this one thing I do." If all of Paul's life could be characterized by one thing, here it is: "Forgetting those things which are behind, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." Now that is the perseverance of the saints.

You and I, as believers, are to say the same thing. We are pressing on, pressing on toward the goal, pressing on to lay hold of that for which God laid hold of us. Now let me ask this: Why was it that the Apostle Paul was pressing on? Turn back to the first chapter of Philippians, and verse 6, for

some help in answering this question. There we read this: "Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ." You see, the Lord is persevering in that work of salvation which you experienced when you received the Lord Jesus Christ as your Saviour, when you were born again. And because the Lord is pursuing that work in your heart, you are going to be persevering in the faith that you have in the Lord Jesus Christ. You see, our perseverance is dependent upon His perseverance. It is because the Lord is at work in our hearts that we are persevering to the end. And the fact that we are persevering is the glorious evidence that God in His wonderful grace (we are Page 8
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talking about the doctrines of grace) has done a transforming work in our hearts. You see, when we are talking about salvation, we are not talking about decisions alone. We are not talking about joining a church. We are not talking about trying to do the best you can. We are talking about the regenerating work of God in our hearts whereby we are made new creatures in Christ. And the work that God begins in our hearts He will perform until the day of Jesus Christ.

You see, this is the reason that Abraham did not give up even though he and Sarah were too old to have a child. He did not cast off the promise of God. This is the reason that Joseph did not give up in despair when his brothers sold him as a slave into the land of Egypt. Wherever he was, he was serving God and accomplishing an effective ministry. This is why Jonah finally went to Nineveh--because God was working in his heart. This is why Daniel did not stop praying when there was the danger of being cast into the lion's den. This is why Peter wept bitterly, instead of taking his life as Judas did, after he had disowned the Lord. This is why the martyrs of the Church have died rather than to renounce the Lord Jesus Christ. And this is why you and I continue to walk with the Lord in spite of all the testings and trials that we experience in this life. God perseveres in saving us. And so you and I persevere in the faith because of what the Lord is doing in our heart. And so we do not get the glory for persevering. The glory belongs to God. And we can say with the Apostle Paul as he was headed for Jerusalem and had been told by the Holy Spirit many times that "bonds and afflictions" were waiting for him there, "But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God" (Acts 20:24). When you see that spirit in your heart, that you are abiding with the Lord and persevering in the faith, what a wonderful cause for thanksgiving to God that He has done such a work of transformation in your own heart.