

5. Final Perseverance

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Our subject is, ‘The Final Perseverance of the Saints’, this being the last in our series on the doctrines of grace. The dictionary says that perseverance means: ‘Continuance in a state of grace until it is succeeded by a state of glory.’ Some have chosen to call this subject ‘Final Preservation’, and this also would define the doctrine for the word preservation means: ‘To keep from injury or destruction; defend from evil; to protect or save.’ And so we believe that the child of God will continue in grace because his God keeps him from destruction, protects him, saves him, so that he will finally live in a state of eternal glory.

We read in our text, Job chapter seventeen, verse nine, ‘The righteous also shall hold on his way, and he that hath clean hands shall be stronger and stronger.’ The righteous, that is the one made righteous by Christ, shall, not may, but shall hold on his way. We want to consider from a scriptural standpoint,

What is Meant by Final Perseverance

First, we mean that those whom God has chosen, redeemed, and effectually called cannot totally nor finally fail, but shall be eternally saved. This doctrine is clearly stated in John’s gospel chapter ten and verse twenty-eight. ‘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.’ These are the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and He makes it as plain as possible that He gives eternal life to His sheep, to His people, and that there is no power which is able to pluck them out of His hand.

Secondly, we mean that though at times the child of grace may walk in the dark and not have a sensible sight of God’s love; still the Lord does never actually forsake His child. From the book of Isaiah chapter forty-nine and verse fourteen we read, ‘But Zion said, The Lord hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me.’ Notice the language, ‘Zion said’—the Lord had not really forsaken His people but they felt forsaken. There are seasons when the child of God walks in darkness, the clouds are hanging overhead and he is not able to look up and see the smiling face of his Saviour as in days that are past. He feels that all hope is gone, he feels forsaken. But the Lord replied by asking, ‘Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget,

yet will I not forget thee. Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands; thy walls are continually before me.' We could hardly imagine that a mother would forget her own little child that looks to her for nourishment and protection, and yet it says that it is possible for her to forget; but still the Lord will never forget or forsake His children.

David once declared, 'I said in my haste, I am cut off from before thine eyes' (Psalms 31:22). David felt that way, and you may have often felt that way, but have had to conclude with the Psalmist that you spoke in haste. The Lord had not really cut you off; He might have withdrawn His comforts for a time, but still He was there. He was protecting you and upholding you by His grace even when you were not sensible of His presence.

Thirdly, when we speak of the final perseverance of the saints, we mean that though through sin and disobedience the child of God may lose the joys of his salvation, that his relationship to the Father as a son cannot be severed. David prayed in the fifty-first Psalm, 'Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation'. He did not pray that his salvation might be given to him again, for he was still a child of God; but he had lost the joy of his salvation through disobedience. His heart was broken because of his sin, and he cried unto the Lord to wash him and cleanse and to restore to him the joy which he had lost.

The Certainty of this Perseverance

If we consider the certainty of this perseverance, we find that it is sure because of the covenant and decrees of God. Already we have considered election, seeing that God chose a people before the foundation of the world. But if some of those whom He has chosen could be finally lost, then the purpose and covenant of God would be without meaning. And if a single one for whom Christ died could be lost, then the death of the Saviour would also be meaningless. If the Spirit could call a man and then he be lost and not live with God in glory; then the calling of God would mean nothing either. But my dear friends, the covenant was ordered in all things and sure, so it shall be fulfilled and the whole redeemed family shall be brought unto glory.

So often in these articles we have made reference to the eighth chapter of Romans, but let us look at it once more to see the certainty of perseverance. We find that all the links in God's chain of grace are bound together so that they cannot be severed one from another. Those that He did foreknow, He did also predestinate; those whom He did predestinate, He did also call; whom He called, He also justified; and whom He justified, He also glorified. The covenant blessings reach through the great expanse of eternity, making all the arrangements necessary for the eternal happiness of those included in it. So there is no place for one in the covenant to lose his standing. Every one that was predestinated shall be glorified. It is as good as done in the mind and purpose of God.

Now we turn to Isaiah chapter forty-six and read beginning with verse nine, 'Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me, Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure.' If then it was the pleasure of God to have a people, if it was the pleasure of God to bruise His Son that He might have this elect family, if it was the pleasure of God to call a man by effectual grace, and if He will do all of His pleasure, and since He said He would we believe He will; we can be sure that the saints shall persevere and not a one of them shall be lost. The verse goes on, 'Calling a ravenous bird from the east, the man that executeth my counsel from a far country: yea, I have spoken it, I will also bring it to pass; I have purposed it, I will also do it.' I don't think that language could be any stronger than that. The God of heaven says, 'I have spoken it, I will also bring it to pass, I have purposed it, I will do it.' How could anyone question it? How could anyone think that a single soul that God loved and Christ redeemed could go down to destruction?

In the book of Jeremiah chapter thirty-two and verse forty, we again see that the covenant is secure. 'And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them, to do them good', the Lord will not turn from His people, and notice what else He has promised in the covenant, 'I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me.' So there are the two sides of the covenant. The Lord promising not to forsake His people, and promising to put His fear in their hearts that they shall not turn from Him.

Next let us see that this perseverance is certain because the promises of God declare it. In Psalm ninety-four and the fourteenth verse we find these words, 'For the Lord will not cast off his people, neither will he forsake his inheritance.' Isn't that comforting? Does it not console us in the time of trial and tribulation to realize that the Lord will not cast off His people? Now that is what God has promised and God cannot lie; so we know that regardless of what trouble may come, He will not cast off His people—His inheritance.

In the one hundred and twenty-fifth Psalm and the first two verses it says,

‘They that trust in the Lord shall be as mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth for ever. As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the Lord is round about his people from henceforth even for ever.’ As the mountains about Jerusalem should not be moved, the mighty mountains of grace around the children of God shall not be moved. They are protected—they are safe.

Back in Romans eight again; we see that Paul dealt with all the things that might sometimes cause fear and anxiety on the part of God’s children. He asks, ‘Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril or sword?... Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. 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.’ If then things in the past, things at the present, and things in the future cannot separate us from the love of God; where shall arise any force to sever us from His love? If the powers of hell, if the enemies of the earth cannot separate us from His love; Oh my friends, then we have the blessed assurance that we are kept by His grace and there is no power, no creature, no principality, that can separate us from His love.

Now in the book of 1 Corinthians chapter one and the eighth and ninth verses, the writer was talking about the Lord Jesus Christ saying, ‘Who shall also confirm you unto the end, that ye may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord.’ Surely you can see how certain these promises are. There is not one condition for man to meet, but it is God who ‘shall confirm’ His people to the end.

Philippians chapter one and verse six says, ‘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.’ God certainly would not begin a work and then fail to complete it. It is God who begins the work, God who carries it on, and God who finishes it. In 1 Peter chapter one and the fifth verse there is another promise concerning the certainty of perseverance, ‘Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.’ These are kept not by their own strength, but by God’s power, so there is no danger of their falling.

Furthermore we see that the certainty of perseverance is confirmed by the types and shadows. Christ is represented as being head of the church and His people as being members of His body. If you were to lose a portion of your body it would no longer be complete, and so if any member of the body of Christ could be lost then Christ would have only part of the body. But knowing that the body is joined to the head, we are sure that Christ shall have every member of His body and that they shall all be raised up on that glorious morning.

God's people are also pictured as a spiritual building. He seeks out these stones, making them living stones. They are built up until at last the headstone shall be brought forth with shoutings crying, 'Grace, grace unto it.' If just one little stone was missing it would not be a complete building; but every one of these stones hewn out by divine grace, marked out by His love shall be quickened and called here in time and built up unto this house.

There is also a lovely picture of this doctrine set forth in the experience of that lame-footed son of Jonathan by the name of Mephibosheth. You will remember that there was a covenant made between Jonathan and David because of the great love they had one for the other. They had promised the one still living after the first had died would show kindness to the descendants of the other. Jonathan had died so David inquired to see if there were any left of the house of Saul that he could show them kindness of Jonathan's sake. He sent Ziba, his servant, to fetch this lame son, Mephibosheth, and brought him to his own house. Yes, Mephibosheth was to eat bread at the king's table continually. This was not just a temporary arrangement, it was not just as long as Mephibosheth obeyed all the rules; but he was to be there continually. I can imagine that he possibly did not know all the manners and customs of the king's palace; so some might have suggested that he be put out because he did not follow the rules of etiquette. However, it must be remembered that Mephibosheth did not obtain this position because of his knowledge or his conduct. He was brought in because the king loved his father and so no one could throw him out for the blessings were all of grace. This presents to us exactly what God does for His people. We were every one as the lame-footed son of Jonathan, not having the ability to do anything of ourselves. But the King of Glory loved us for Jesus' sake and brought us into His banqueting house and His banner over us is love. Some might say, 'But this one does not deserve that position, they are imperfect, they have many faults.' Ah yes, but remember; God's children were not brought in because of their works or their merit. It is all by free grace so that they shall 'eat bread continually'.

Objections to this Position Considered

That brings me to consider some of the objections to this position. When we talk about the certainty of perseverance, showing that God's people are preserved by His grace, some object saying that this doctrine leads to an ungodly life. Oh! but if there ever was anything that should promote holiness of life, that should cause us to want to serve God and live for His

glory, it is the doctrines of grace that I have been sharing with you in this series. Do you think that Mephibosheth would have reasoned that because his position was secure it didn't make any difference how he conducted himself? Do you think that he would intentionally bring disgrace upon the king's house after such kindness was shown him? I can't feel that he would. I believe that he had a desire to learn the rules and live according to the laws to show his appreciation for David's mercy. I feel that every failing would grieve his heart, but that every victory in learning to conform himself to the practice followed by those in the palace would add to his joys. And my friends, I believe that is the attitude found in the heart of God's people. They will not say, 'I will go my way and do as I please because I am secure in grace,' but they will say, 'Because the God of glory has manifested His mercy to one so unworthy, I will seek to obey Him and honour Him. Though I did not obtain this position by works, I will yet serve Him forever because I love Him.' This attitude itself is an evidence of grace.

The Apostle Paul answered the objections made to this doctrine in very unmistakable terms. In Romans chapter six when some had been charging that this doctrine led to licentiousness, he said, 'What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid, How shall we that are dead to sin, live any longer therein? Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God.' So Paul calls on us to live godly and righteously here in this present evil world. This is the man that declared so forcefully that salvation is by grace and that the saints shall persevere, and yet he admonished those who had a hope in this grace to live holy lives.

Then there are some who object to the doctrine saying that there are some scriptures which hint that it is possible for one to fall from grace and be eternally lost. Galatians chapter five and the fourth verse is one that is usually cited. 'Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace.' Rather than teaching that one of God's elect can be eternally lost, this verse teaches that when the children of God have been led by false prophets to think they can be justified by the law, they have fallen from grace or fallen away from the doctrines or principles of grace. In the book of 1 Corinthians chapter six and verse three, it talks about some receiving the grace of God in vain. This does not mean however, that one who is an elect can refuse the call of the Spirit; but that one who has already been born again may not use the ability God has given him or may conduct himself in such a way that he loses the joy of his salvation so that it can be said he has received grace in vain.

Now let us look at 2 Timothy chapter two and the sixteenth verse: 'But shun profane and vain babblings: for they will increase unto more

ungodliness. And their word will eat as doth a canker: of whom is Hymenaeus and Philetus; Who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already; and overthrow the faith of some.’ Though their faith was overthrown, they were still the children of God for it goes on to say, ‘Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity.’ These people would certainly lose the joy of their salvation because they had been led from the truth into error; but this would not cause the purpose of God to fail. If it meant that they lost their salvation then a sheep would have to become a goat, a child of God would have to become a child of the devil, and the covenant of God would be made void. But we are glad to know that all of this is impossible and that the foundation of God standeth sure for it says, ‘If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself.’

We have seen then that the child of God may endure many tribulations, he may pass through many valleys and be made to walk in the darkness; but the Lord will never forsake him. It is possible for one to miss blessings here in this life and lose the blessings of the church; but every one loved of God, purchased by the Son, and called by the Spirit, shall at last be safe home in that upper and better world— the righteous shall hold on his way. One of the old hymns states it this way:

Ye pilgrims of Zion, and chosen of God,
Whose spirits are filled with dismay,
Since ye have eternal redemption thro’ blood.
Ye cannot but hold on your way.
As Jesus in covenant love did engage
A fulness of grace to display,
The powers of darkness in malice may rage,
The righteous shall hold on his way.
This truth, like its Author, eternal shall stand,
Though all things in nature decay;
Upheld by Jehovah’s omnipotent hand,
The righteous shall hold on his way.
They may on the main of temptation be tossed,
Their sorrows may swell as the sea,
But none of the ransomed shall ever be lost,
The righteous shall hold on his way.
Surrounded with sorrows, temptations, and cares,
This truth with delight we survey,
And sing, as we pass through this valley of tears,
The righteous shall hold on his way.

May the Lord bless you to receive these glorious truths and let us ever give thanks that salvation is of the Lord.

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