

**"Perseverance of the Saints"
(John 6:35-40)
Pastor Peter Yi
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(John 6:35–40 NIV11-GK)

³⁵ Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. ³⁶ But as I told you, you have seen me and still you do not believe. ³⁷ All those the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away. ³⁸ For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. ³⁹ And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all those he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. ⁴⁰ For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day."

<Introduction>

Today we're talking about the last of 5 points or 5 sermons on the Reformed doctrine of salvation, sometimes called the 5 Points of Calvinism and other times called The Doctrines of Grace.

The Doctrines of Grace begin with the subject of Total Depravity or Moral Inability, which tells us that sin has so corrupted our nature that we are unable to do any morally acceptable act before God. Because of that we are incapable of contributing anything towards our own salvation. Let me give you an example. There is one very well-known pastor in the States, whom I admire. I listen to his podcasts and I've attended his conferences and read his books. Here's how he presents the Christian doctrine of salvation. He presents a moral scale on a piece of paper where 100% is God in his perfection and he tells us that in order to reach God or get to heaven, we all have to reach God's level of perfection, 100%. Then he would say to you, let's consider Mother Teresa, probably one of the holiest people to have ever lived. And let's rank her at 50%. Let's also consider Billy Graham, the famous evangelist who recently turned 97 years old, let's say he's at 40%. And then he'd ask you...where do you think you rank? He'd explain sin...what it is...sins of commission, omission. Sins of thought, motives, words, deeds and actions. Then he'd ask you. Where would you rank yourself? Of course the person wouldn't be so presumptuous to rank themselves above Mother Teresa or Billy Graham. But he's not a Hitler, who would probably have ranked in the single digits. So let's say he ranks himself at 25%.

So, what this pastor would do next is say that Jesus, his life, death and resurrection came to die for our sins and give to us his righteousness and top off whatever we were lacking. Now, I don't think I have misrepresented this pastor, but the Bible is undeniably clear that all humanity, because of the sin of Adam, have inherited a sin nature and that has made us guilty and totally depraved before God. You may have heard the statements. "Because we sin we are sinners" and the flipside, "because we are sinners we sin." Both are absolutely true, but if you were to ask the "what came first, the chicken or the egg" question, the bible would be unmistakably clear that the statement "because we are sinners we sin" comes first. The problem is more than behavior, it is nature.

So, if we return to the Mother Teresa, Billy Graham illustration, the bible would teach us that we are not at 20 or 30 or 40%, and we're not even at 0%. We are actually in the red. How do we know that? The bible tells us that when Jesus came to this earth, he didn't merely come to die for our sins, but he also came to live. If he came just to die, I suppose that God could have beamed him down as a 30 year old adult, he spends a few years with his disciples and then dies on the cross and rises again, but that's not what happened. He came as an embryo conceived by the Holy Spirit in the Virgin Mary. He was born as a baby, grew up as a child, teenager, and young adult and all throughout his life the bible says, he was tempted in every way, but never sinned.

If sin is measured in accounting figures, then our sin, every sin, and our sin nature, places us in the red, in the negative. In fact total depravity tells us we are 100% in the negative. And where we need to be in order to get to heaven is 100% in the positive.

How do we get there? Let's take it in two steps. When Jesus died, he paid the penalty for our sins and erased all the moral debt that was standing in our account. So he took us from minus-100% to zero. But that means we're only half way there. What we need is to be 100% in the positive? How does that happen? Well, we know it cannot happen on our own. Then how? The perfect life that Christ lives, his perfect obedience to God, gets transferred to our account, so that when God looks at us through the lens and salvation of Christ, he no longer sees a person 100% in the hole; nor does he see a person who's neutral at zero, rather he sees in every Christian the perfections of Christ. In theological terms, it's called imputation. When we become Christians, the righteousness of Christ becomes imputed or imparted to us.

After Total Depravity comes Unconditional Election, where God, before the foundation of the earth, chose some to receive the gift of salvation. Many have issues with this. Why did God save some and not all? We don't know the reasons and we don't have the answers, but what we do know is this: RC Sproul says this: When God condemns sinners they receive justice. When God saves sinners they receive mercy. No one receives injustice. I'd love to linger, but we have to move on.

Unconditional Election takes us to Limited Atonement or two better phrases, Particular Redemption or Definite Atonement. This asks and answers the question. When God decreed for Christ to come and die for sinners, did he do that so that all humanity could have the possibility of being saved, but also with the possibility that none would respond and so none might be saved? OR, did he send his Son Jesus to live and die, in order to secure once and for all, the salvation of those that God had already elected in eternity past? And we had answered that it was the latter. Christ came to die for the elect, for those the father gave him, for his precious bride.

That brought us to last week's topic on Irresistible Grace or what's also called Efficacious Grace, which is the doctrine that teaches that when the gospel call goes out to God's elect, it will accomplish its purpose in saving the sinner. It is always effective or efficacious for the elect.

Today we're talking about the Perseverance of the Saints or as some call it the Preservation of the Saints.

This last doctrine is so important for us because of at least two reasons. First, all of us know someone who once was a Christian, but has fallen away from Christ, and some who have publicly, out rightly denied that they are Christians. So we want to know, are they saved? Will they be in heaven? Second, for ourselves. We know how frail we are. We might be doing well with God now, but what about ten, twenty, thirty, forty, fifty years from now? Will I still be in the game? Or will I be like the seed that fell on the path, or the rocky soil, or the thorny soil that eventually withers and dies?

So let's take a closer look:

<The Doctrine>

Here's what the doctrine states and how it relates to the other 4 previous points.

[W]e believe that those who once become true Christians cannot totally fall away and be lost, — that while they may fall into sin temporarily, they will eventually return and be saved.

Lorraine Boettner

Here's how RC Sproul states it.

The idea here is, "Once in grace, always in grace." Another way of stating it is, "If you have it, you never lose it; if you lose it, you never had it."

Our confidence in the perseverance of the saints does not rest upon our confidence in the saints' ability, in themselves to persevere.

The reason true Christians do not fall from grace is that God graciously keeps them from falling. Perseverance is what we do. Preservation is what God does. We persevere because God preserves. (ch. 8; Chosen By God)

Now, here's how it relates to the other points of Calvinism:

Unconditional election: If God's election is based on his sovereign choice and not on my good deeds, then my perseverance will be because of God, not because of me.

Limited Atonement: If God sent his Son to fully and completely secure my salvation, as one of his elect, then that completion implies that I will make it to the end.

Irresistible Grace: If when God calls a sinner to salvation, the sinner is always saved, that salvation will not only be experienced initially, but finally and eternally.

Perseverance of the Saints is the logical, beautiful, comforting, and wonderful conclusion to a God who is absolutely sovereign in our salvation.

<Supporting Scriptures>

Wonderfully, there are so many scriptures that deal with our eternal security. The passage we read at the beginning speaks to our preservation in God, in particular the last two verses.

³⁹ And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all those he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. ⁴⁰ For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day."

Jesus tells us he will lose none of all those God has given to him for salvation and he'll finish our preservation by raising us up on the last day. And then he says in verse 40 that those who look to the Son and believe in him, shall have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day? When does eternal life begin? The moment a person trusts in Christ. When is the last day? It is the day when Christ returns to gather his own home with him. What can happen in between those two events? A lot of stuff. A lot of tough, challenging, faith shaking stuff. We can experience terrible trials. We can fall into grievous sins. We can be persecuted even to death for our faith. But not one of God's elect will fail to be raised up. That means that every single person that has been saved by Christ, will complete the journey, will reach the finish line, and will enter heaven.

Here are some other verses:

³ I thank my God every time I remember you. ⁴ In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy ⁵ because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, 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. (Phil 1:3-6 NIV11-GK)

Is this merely wishful thinking on Paul's part? He seems pretty confident that for the Christians in Philippi and for himself and for every believer, they will finish the race. How or why is he so confident? Because you guys are such swell Christians? No. It's because of God. The one who began the good work in us will bring it to completion.

³⁰ And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified. (Rom 8:30 NIV11-GK)

This passage is very similar to the words of Jesus in John 6. It's the last word, 'glorified' that shows us that God will finish the work of salvation in us. He will bring us home. We will be reunited with a new heavenly body and will dwell with God for all eternity.

³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? ³⁶ As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered." **37** No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹ 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. (Rom 8:35–39 NIV11)

If a person doesn't believe that they will be eternally preserved by God, I don't know how they would make heads or tails of this passage? These are perhaps one of the most comfort giving, faith inspiring, perseverance growing verses in all the bible. If you think you can lose your salvation, how do you interpret this?

I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand. (John 10:28 NIV11)

Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them. (Heb 7:25 NIV11)

No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it. (1 Cor 10:13 NIV11)

What greater temptation, what sin could be worse than the sin of apostasy, which is the sin of forsaking and abandoning your faith? But here it is in Scripture, that no temptation will run its ultimate course. Sure, we all know we fall into temptation and sin, and we may even doubt Christ and his gospel and be fallen away for a season. Those events can and do occur, but they won't be final, they won't be ultimate.

<What about those who've fallen away>

Well, what about those people who were once what appeared to be Christians, but fell away. These are the friends and family that were in youth group and college group together. They were the ones that served alongside us, went to mission trips with us. They were even baptized and confirmed. What happens to them? Here's what the Apostle John writes in 1 John 2.

¹⁹ They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us. (1 John 2:18–19 NIV11-GK)

What John is trying to say is that the proof is the persevering. Those who stay the course, those who last to the end are those who have been truly saved. If they have left the faith, if they have forsaken the Savior, it proves they were never saved to begin with.

Could a person who was saved by God at some point in their past, fall away so much that there are no visible evidences of their faith, and let's say that person ultimately dies in their fallenness, will they be saved? The answer again will be one of two. Either they were never saved, or they were saved but died in their fallenness. Only God knows, but we should lovingly warn them.

For Christians, it is important for us to remain in Christ, in obedience and dependence. We must forsake our idols and sin and pursue holiness. This, what we call spiritual growth, strengthens assurance, whereas falling into sin and disobedience shakes our assurance.

Application:

To be confident in our salvation, not in myself but in God.

There is no presumption in answering confidently that I am saved. Because it's not me who's doing the saving. And it's not me who's ultimately preserving my life and soul. I am in the unshakable hands of God.

What should eternal security do for you? What kind of person should it make you into? I think it can make us into one of two types of persons. Security can either make you incredibly lazy or radically crazy. Lazy or crazy! Isn't that true? If you know that you cannot lose your salvation, that once saved always saved, then you can end up doing religion, but not really doing life. You can go through all the motions, but never really awaken to the potential and adventure of living for God. Your greatest accomplishment is that you were a church-goer.

Or eternal security can make you radically crazy. If you know that whatever you do the end result will be living eternally with God in heaven, what kind of life should that draw out of us? It should make us to live lives of radical faith, extreme boldness in our witness, unbelievable generosity, unconditional in our love, seeking holiness at all costs.

Friends, Christians, by definition, have to be risk-takers, by definition! We are to be people who are always doing what shouldn't be done, what people say can't be done. Christians, by definition, have to be adventure seekers, going places we're not supposed to go, and taking chances normal people wouldn't take.

Do you know who's on the front lines of the Ebola epidemic crisis in West Africa? Christians! Do you know who the people are that intentionally leave the wealth and security here at home to go live amongst the poor, the widows and orphans? It is Christians. Do you know who it is that is often times the first responders to the world's global crises like war and floods and earthquakes? Christians. Do you know who were at the front lines standing for justice in places where people can't ever expect to receive justice? It's Christians. Who is it, more than any other group on the planet or in history that in every frontier they've gone, they've brought these three things: health care, education, and the gospel? Christians.

Even if you stay here in Toronto, which the vast majority of you will, if you have eternal security, Jesus says, it'll dramatically change the way you spend your money, your time, your resources and your relationships. Parents it'll to change the focus of your parenting. Singles, it'll change the purpose of your singleness. Married people, it'll effect the way you look at marriage.

Here's one of the last things Jesus said to his disciples before he went back to heaven:

"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations...and surely I am with you always, to very end of the age."

The mission to go and make disciples is book-ended by two faith-growing, risk and adventure inspiring promises. Christ has all authority and Christ will never leave us.

There's a wonderful hymn called, "I Know Not Why God's Wondrous Grace" whose lyrics speak to this. It's a 5 verse hymn, but verse 4 and the chorus in particular addresses the life of the person who has this great assurance.

"I know not what of good or ill
May be reserved for me,
Of weary ways or golden days,
Before His face I see."

"I know whom I have believed and
Am persuaded that he able
To keep that which I've committed
Unto him until that day."