

“As God Preserves Us, We Must Persevere”

Canons of Dort: Fifth Head, articles 13-15; Bible illustration: Hebrews 12:1-13
By Pastor Rand Lankheet, at New Horizon URC, Second sermon, on May 6, 2018

Introduction: In the mid-1800s, a man named Alfred Nobel invented dynamite (炸药). Mr. Nobel

had discovered a way to keep gunpowder (火药) in a more stable form. Dynamite was used to mine minerals (采矿) and precious metals (贵金属). But, within a few years, this invention of Mr. Nobel was being used primarily to make weapons. As a result of Mr. Nobel's invention, bombs (炸弹) and explosive missiles (导弹) became more destructive. More people were killed. Near the end of his life, after he made millions of dollars, Alfred Nobel established a prize for peace. Today it is known as the “Nobel Peace Prize.” / You see, any invention, any GOOD thing, can be put to a BAD use. Any GOOD thing can be used in a BAD way.

#1. So, also, a good biblical teaching can be used in a wrong way. In a bad way.

This can easily happen with the fifth head of doctrine, as the Synod of Dort (多特信经) called it. The doctrine known as “preservation of the saints.” (圣徒之保守) Or, as we described it last week: the teaching that once God saves us, He keeps us saved. “Once saved—always saved.”

Some people have abused (滥用) this biblical teaching.

Some people think they can commit any sin, for any length of time, and still be saved.

After all, they say: “once saved—always saved.” They claim to be followers of Jesus, but, they are living in sin.

Continual and unrepented (不悔改的) of sin. Yet, they claim God will keep them saved. No matter what, they say, they will always be forgiven by God.

The delegates at the Synod of Dort anticipated this kind of abuse. In article 15, of the Fifth Head

of Doctrine, the delegates said this: that “hypocritical (假冒伪善的) people abuse it.” They abuse this teaching. But these people are not true Christians—they are “hypocrites.” They claim to be true Christians, but they are not.

Just like the group in the New Testament gospels known as Pharisees (法利赛人). Jesus said about the Pharisees, that inwardly they are like tombs of dead people, with no life.

But they paint these tombs white. So, these hypocrites outwardly try to look so good, so clean, so “Christian.” But, in reality, they are not saved.

The point is, the teaching of the “perseverance of the saints” can easily be abused.

In article 14, the delegates at Dort said this doctrine must never cause us to “disregard (不顾, 不在乎) ...

piety (敬虔).” That is, we must never disregard how we as believers are to live holy, sanctified (成圣的) lives before our God. In Jesus, we are truly justified (被称义), as we trust in Him, as His righteousness (义) is credited to us.

But the Bible clearly teaches us that justification leads to sanctification. Once we are saved, then, out of thankfulness, we want to live holy lives.

So, while the Bible clearly teaches the “preservation of the saints,” the Bible also teaches that we

as believers must “persevere (坚韧的).” That is, we must press on, we must improve in our godly living. We must kill off (除去, 治死) the remaining sins in us. And we must, by the power of the Spirit, bring to life, more and more, that which is good and godly in us.

2. Let us look in more detail, what we have read in Hebrews chapter 12.

Hebrews chapter 12. Look at vs. 1. In the New King James Version it says: “Therefore, we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.” The New International Version puts it this way, Hebrews 12: 1. “Let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.” We must run the race WITH PERSEVERANCE. The word “perseverance” means “to be persistent (坚持不懈的), to continue to put forth effort.”

This is a theme found throughout the book of Hebrews. Evidently, many Jewish Christians in that

Day were being persecuted (被逼迫) . They were suffering because of their trust in Jesus as their Saviour. After suffering for so long, many of them were becoming tired. Some were tempted to give up on their faith. To fall back into their old beliefs, and their old way of life. Then they wouldn't have to suffer so much.

So already in chapter 4, we read this: "Let us be diligent to enter that rest [God's rest, in Jesus], lest anyone fall according to the ... example of disobedience." The example the writer gives is the Old Testament example of the Israelites in the time of Moses. As the Israelites left Egypt and were led through the desert wilderness. In that journey, many Israelites had rebelled against God. And God had punished them. Instead of traveling through the wilderness for a few months, God forced them to wander for forty years. Until the entire adult generation had died. So, says the writer to the Hebrews, we must be "diligent" today. To be diligent, means, basically, to persevere; to keep on putting forth effort.

The same teaching is found in Hebrews chapter 6, and chapter 10.

And here also in chapter 12. In chapter 12, the writer uses the illustration (举例说明) of a foot race.

In that day, the Greeks and the Romans competed in long distance races. Marathons (马拉松) . It is a word that comes from the ancient Greek empire. A long foot race.

A runner in a marathon, a long-distance race, must practice. They must train their bodies every day. They must not quit, when they feel the first moment of weakness, or feeling out of breath, or feeling pain in their leg muscles. In fact, today, marathon runners will talk about "pushing through it." That is, pushing through (经受) that wall of initial pain, that initial discomfort. Pushing through that wall. Not giving up.

In verse 2, the writer explains that this pushing forward, this persevering, includes "throwing off everything that hinders us." Anything that limits us, or slows us down. And the writer refers to "the sin that so easily entangles (缠绕) " us. In that day, people often wore long robes, or clothing with extra fabric. Obviously, for anyone running in a race, any extra fabric, any loose clothing, would get in the way. A runner could trip and fall, over his clothing. So runners had to get rid of any of that kind of loose clothing.

-So, says the writer, we as believers, must likewise, get rid of any sin. Sin will slow us down; sin will cause us to stumble (跌拌) and fall. In the Christian race, following Jesus, we must get rid of all such sins.

How is that for you, today? Are you able to identify which sins there are yet in your life?

Obviously, God hates our sin. We grieve God when we sin. But, there are other many bad effects of sin. They cause us to stumble. They cause us to lose our joy and peace. They make us feel guilty.

So, let me ask: which sins cause you to stumble? Which sins slow you down?

Oh, it might not be that you struggle with things like drunkenness (酗酒) , or drug use (使用毒品) . But there are many sins, which might not at first seem so big. But they slow you down. They distract (使分心 , 干扰) you from running the race of living for Jesus. They reduce your joy and your peace in Jesus.

Maybe these are things as simple as wasting time. Not using the minutes and hours God gives you to live productive. To live in love for Him, and to help other people. How easy it is to waste time today. Especially with the internet and social media. You can look at your email, at your Facebook, at your Twitter account, or at You Tube videos. And before you know it, two hours have been wasted. Have you grown in your faith, in that time? No. Have you gained better knowledge of God's Word, or how to apply the Word to daily life? No. Have you been useful to other people, in that time? No. What a waste. What a distraction to running the race that Jesus has set before you. To love God above all, and to love your fellow human being.

3. Let's look at the examples of certain people in the Bible who had fallen into serious sin.

Last week we mentioned two of them: King David in the Old Testament, and the disciple Peter in the New Testament. David committed adultery, and murder. And Peter denied three times that he knew Jesus. Both David and Peter are also mentioned in this final section in the Canons of Dort. As believers who fell into serious sin. Once they became aware of their sin, what happened? Well, David eventually confessed his sin and repented of it, when he was confronted by God's prophet (先知) . And God led him to write Psalm 51. David writes, "Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion (同情心) , blot out my transgression... For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Against you, you only, O Lord, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight." And he writes, later in that

psalm: "Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast (不动摇的) spirit within me... restore to me the joy of your salvation, and grant me a willing spirit to sustain me."

That's a genuine humbling (谦卑), a sincere humbling before God, because of sin.

And this should be also for us. That we are led to make confession of our sin. Like David, we must hate our sin... and hate the many effects of our sin. We must humble ourselves before our God. And ask for his forgiveness, through the shed blood of Jesus. We shouldn't twist the biblical teaching of the "preservation of the saints."

We shouldn't say, like a hypocrite would say: "Well, God, you know that you have saved me. And I know you will keep me saved." No. That is a completely wrong attitude.

So, too, for Peter, after he realized that he sinned greatly against the Lord Jesus.

After his third denial, the gospel-writer Matthew records this. In chapter 27, Matthew tells us that Peter went out and he "wept bitterly." That is, he was grieving and mourning over his great sin. And he went on to make changes in his life. By God's grace. So when we sin. We must mourn and grieve, before God. We must hate that sin.

By God's grace, we must make changes. To do better next time.

3. And there's more. To be sure, we must get rid of all of our known sins. We must not be

entangled by those faults and failures that would slow us down. But, from verse 1, to verse 2, we read this: "Let us run with endurance [with perseverance] the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith..." Then from vs. 3: "Consider him [Jesus] who endured such hostility (敌意) from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary (疲乏) and discouraged in your souls."

We find added strength, as we look to Jesus.

Especially, as we consider how much He struggled, for us. While he was on this earth. How much He suffered, to save us. So that, as we are running our race, here on earth, we may be encouraged. Encouraged by Jesus. As His Holy Spirit lives in us and strengthens us.

So the point is this: Yes, God preserves us. God keeps us saved.

When we sin, God continues to forgive us, because of Jesus.

But let us not abuse this good teaching. Let us not become careless.

Let us not become like hypocrites, thinking or saying: "Well, it really DOESN'T matter how I live...because God keeps me saved." That's wrong. It DOES matter.

If we are truly saved by Jesus, truly saved by God's grace, through faith in Jesus, then, we will want to live before our God.

Thankfully. In our thoughts, words, and deeds, we want to say "thank you." Thank you to God, for saving us so wonderfully.

Conclusion: Some of you know the music of Johan Sabastian Bach.

He was a very famous German composer (作曲家), living in the 1700s. He was a follower of Jesus. He was trusting in Jesus as his Saviour. At the end of most of his pieces of music, Bach would write three letters. Three capital letters: S. D. G. Those letters stood for three words, in the Latin language: Soli Deo Gloria. Soli Deo Gloria. That is: "To God alone, be the glory."

So, with all these biblical doctrines of grace. T.U.L.I.P.

God has elected us, in Jesus. We couldn't save ourselves, because we were depraved (败坏的), by nature. With twisted thoughts, and hardened hearts. And God sent Jesus to atone (代赎) for all our sins, to make sure that each of those He has chosen, shall have the blood of Jesus applied. And then God works in our hearts of the elect (选民), bringing us to faith in Jesus. Irresistibly (不可抗拒地) working. And, as God has chosen us, from eternity...He will keep us saved.

He will preserve us, to the very end. And we should respond to all of this: S.D.G. Soli Deo Gloria. To God alone, be all the glory.

LET US PRAY.