



**The Preservation of the Saints
Romans 8:31-39**

31 What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?

32 He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?

33 Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies.

34 Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us.

35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?

36 As it is written: "For Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter."

37 Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.

38 For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come,

39 nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Many Christians are haunted by doubts that they are in Christ, but many more fear that they might fall away from him and be lost. They are hobbled by doubts: what if their sins become so great that God “disinherits” them and lets them go? What if they are deceived by a false prophet and end up in cult or false religion? What if they cannot endure persecution and ridicule? What if they simply lose their zeal and fall away from the faith? So they go on from day to day, doubtful, fearful, and often unfruitful. They are like the Apostles on the lake in the midst of the storm. They see the wind and the waves, and they fear their faith will sink at any moment. The apostles forgot the sovereignty of God in providence, they forget the sovereignty of God in their salvation. Here Paul, wants to give comfort to Christians who might fear that they will lose their salvation. He wants them to know that those who have been redeemed by the blood of Christ will never be lost, so he eloquently spells out the reasons for **“being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ;”** (Phil. 1:6)

Now many of you will already be familiar with the doctrine that Paul is teaching here. Some of you are no doubt already thinking **“ah, we are talking about the “P” in the TULIP acrostic”** – *the perseverance of the saints*. While that is the doctrine Paul is teaching here, I have to admit I’m not a huge fan of the word “perseverance” here. Perseverance conjures up images of the student doggedly persevering on in his studies until he completes his work. It implies that it is the saints efforts that cause them to persevere, which isn’t the case. Therefore, the phrase “preservation of the saints” seems

more appropriate, because as R.C. Sproul puts it **“Indeed the believer does persevere in faith and godliness, but this is due to the gracious work of God in his behalf. ...We persevere because we are preserved by God. If left to our own strength, none of us would persevere. Only because we are preserved by grace are we able to persevere at all.”**

So for instance, Jesus gives his assurance that he will preserve all of the elect and lose none of them:

John 6:39 "This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day.

40 "And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day."

The practical implications of that truth, Christ preserves the elect, in what he said to Peter just before his time of testing in the courtyard:

Luke 22:31 And the Lord said, "Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat.

32 "But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren."

Why did Peter not fall away, because of Peter's diligent efforts? Hardly! It was because none of Christ's prayers for His sheep could ever fail. So He is able to say to Peter, **WHEN** you have returned, not **IF** your return.

The Apostles took this teaching to heart, and concluded that if someone who seemed to be following Christ did fall away and never returned it could only be because they had never *truly* been converted. Hence John wrote:

1 John 2:19 They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us.

A false professor like Judas might fall away, but a true believer like Peter never would.

So Paul, who never failed to be amazed by the grace of God and the love of Christ the love of Christ which passes knowledge, starts out with this wonderful question, **“If God is for us, who can be against us?”**

Think about that, considering we were once rebels and enemies with God, it would have been amazing if Paul had written, “if God is no longer angry with us” but he doesn't, because of what Christ has done, it is not just that we are no longer enemies with God, God is for us! God is in covenant with his people, and as Matthew Henry put it, **“All that he is, and has, and does, is for his people. He performs all things for them. He is for them, even when he seems to act against them. And, if so, who can be against us, so as to prevail against us, so as to hinder our happiness?”**

And if the Creator of the universe is with YOU, what created thing can prevail over you? Paul could have left it at that, but he goes on, he reminds them of the great evidence that God is for us and will never forsake us, namely his willingness to sacrifice His only begotten son JESUS for us. If He loved

us that much when we were enemies, now that we are FRIENDS more than that Children will He let us go? As George Smeaton puts it: ***“He would have spared His Son had He wished to execute upon us the punishment we had incurred. He would have spared His Son, and removed the cup of suffering from Him, had He not purposed to confer upon us all conceivable good. But, in love to us, He spared not His own Son. He removed not the cup from Him, that it might never be presented to us. This scripture connects the Christian’s safety under divine protection with the fact that God spared not His own Son,—a phrase which implies that He spared not the Surety, that He might rescue us.”***

Remember, it is GOD the Father who delivered up His Son for US. God doesn’t start the rescue at the highest possible cost, and then suddenly call it off before it is concluded.

But what if, we might ask, someone, like the Devil were to point out all our sins before God. I mean we are sinners, what if he were to charge us? Men are always trying to justify themselves, they are full of appeals to their own righteousness. The Pharisees for instance, and we know that they were still condemned. But believers, says Paul, your salvation doesn’t depend upon your own works, your own pitiful righteousness. It is the judge himself who is doing the Justifying. The same King whose law you broke has intervened by sending his Son Jesus to die in your place. The reason why there is no condemnation is because of the completed work of Jesus Christ. Christ died for your sins, rose again on the third day, and even now is at the right hand of God. Let the devil bring any accusation he wants, Christ’s wounds answer **“paid in full.”** But I’m such a sinner, you cry out. Paid for in full, all of them. Kids, let me try to make sure you understand. The villain may come and try to foreclose on the house, but once the hero has paid off the debt in full, the villain is thwarted. HE can’t come back and try to foreclose, there is no more debt.

But what if something tears us out of the hands of Christ? Something in the future, some persecution? Well Paul puts it plainly there is nothing in creation that can do that! What not even being put to death? If we are killed for our faith isn’t that an indication that we are not beloved. Nope not even that. And here I believe Paul quotes the Old Testament for a reason in quoting Psalm 44:22 **“Yet for Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.”** He shows that the persecution of Christian for their faith is nothing new, the Old Testament saints were also put to death by the unbelievers. But for them the sting of death has been removed, all that death can do to the Christian is bring you into the joy of your master. Persecution more often than not is actually a sign of God’s love not of his hate. In fact if we go back to the first brothers, Cain and Abel we see the first act of persecution for the sake of God. Cain hated Abel, why? Because Abel was beloved of God. Saints have always been persecuted and put to death by those hate Christ and His Kingdom. And the Lord assures us that He will never forget us or forsake us even in that persecution.

It is interesting that this evening we will be going over the plot to kill Jeremiah that arose among the priests of who lived in his home town of Anathoth. “Jeremiah described himself as “as like a docile lamb brought to the slaughter” There too we will see the way that Jeremiah’s relief didn’t come from men, but from the Lord.

Whatever persecuting enemies may rob us of, they cannot rob us of the love of Christ, it is impossible. There is no earthly power, says Paul that can take us out of the Love of Christ, and no spiritual power either: Angels – the good angels who serve God never would
Powers – Matthew 24:24 “For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect.”

In all of these things we are *more* than conquerors.

First Application: What a contrast, Alexander the Great who died in Babylon at the age of 32 after conquering the entire Mediterranean world and yet was never satisfied. What did he gain that had eternal value? The epitaph that he wrote for himself - **“A tomb now suffices him for whom the whole world was not sufficient.”**

What a contrast with the death of Robert Bruce, one of the finest pastors and theologians Scotland has ever produced. Despite his piety and gifts as a minister, because he would not bend to King James’ will and accept episcopacy he was forbidden to preach and finished his years under what amounted to house arrest. “Hold, daughter; my Master calls me.” With these words, his sight failed him, and calling for his family Bible, but finding he could not see, he said “Cast up to me the eighth chapter of the epistle to the Romans, and set my finger on these words, ‘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’. Now,” said he, “is my finger upon them?” and being told it was, he said, “Now, God be with you, my children; I have breakfasted with you, and shall dine with my Lord Jesus Christ this night.”

He endured tribulation persecution in this life, and yet in it all he was more than a conqueror. What Bruce strove for was not the fading earthly crown of a worldly conqueror like Alexander, but the imperishable crown of which the Apostle Paul spoke in his final letter, 2 Tim. 4:8 **“Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.”**

Believers if you are in Christ, you will endure tribulation and hardship, but nothing in this world can rob you of that Crown, because it is the gift of the Lord Jesus Christ who won it on Calvary for all of His elect Children. And if you know that you will be enabled to endure suffering and even death. And not just tough guys, but little children! Because you know

1) That your salvation cannot be lost - 2 Tim 1:12 For this reason I also suffer these things; nevertheless I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day.

And

2) That the GLORY of what is to come will make the suffering seem like nothing!: Romans 8:18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.