



# GRACE

Reformed Baptist Church

Soli ◇ Deo ◇ Gloria

## HOW GREAT A SALVATION, Part 7 Understanding the *Ordo Salutis* [Order of Salvation] of God The Doctrine of Perseverance

Romans 8:28-30

August 10, 2008

- 1.) The Covenant of Redemption [Decrees of God]
- 2.) Election
- 3.) The Outward Gospel Call
- 4.) Regeneration
- 5.) Conversion [Faith / Repentance]
- 6.) Justification
- 7.) Adoption
- 8.) Sanctification

9.) Perseverance

- 10.) Death
- 11.) Glorification

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- We come to a doctrine this morning that is hardly controversial in the Western Church today. In fact, the vast majority of evangelicals affirm the biblical truth of Perseverance of the Saints, or as is often said, “once saved – always saved.”
- Yet, as we examine the doctrine of Perseverance, we see that our hope in this biblical truth rests, once again, in God’s sovereign and Providential care of His people – those whom **He** chose...and this takes us back to the unchangeable decrees of God, specifically, our election.
- Consequently, it is difficult [if not impossible] to consistently affirm a biblical doctrine of perseverance without a solid understanding of God’s sovereignty and election.

2 Peter 1:10:

“Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble;”

Or, as the English Standard Version states,

“Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to make your calling and election sure, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall.”

- Thus, Perseverance cannot, biblically, be separated from election.

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- Yet, one must first distinguish between **Perseverance** and **Preservation**.
  - **PRESERVATION** is the divine act whereby God preserves His people, ensuring we do not fall away.

1 Peter 1:1-5:

“Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood: May grace and peace be yours in the fullest measure. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.”

Psalm 37:23-24:

The steps of a man are established by the LORD,  
And He delights in his way.  
When he falls, he will not be hurled headlong,  
Because the LORD is the One who holds his hand.

Psalm 73:1-2, 23:

Surely God is good to Israel,  
To those who are pure in heart!  
But as for me, my feet came close to stumbling,  
My steps had almost slipped.

23 Nevertheless I am continually with You;  
You have taken hold of my right hand.

John 6:37-40:

“All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of My Father,

that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day.”

John 10:28-29:

“Jesus answered them, ‘I told you, and you do not believe; the works that I do in My Father's name, these testify of Me. But you do not believe because you are not of My sheep. My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are one.’”

Romans 5:8-10:

“But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.”

- Therefore, we must go back to the **very nature of salvation:**

We are saved BY **GRACE** *through* FAITH. [NOT by faith through grace.]

- When the Scriptures state that we are saved by grace, it is referring, not only to our regeneration, but ALL ASPECTS of our salvation, to include our preservation.
- Thus, as Robert Culver writes, in his *Systematic Theology* [p. 767]:

<b>“God preserves us [by grace] so that we may persevere [through faith].”</b>
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- So, once again, we are NOT saved, or preserved, ultimately by faith. The effectual cause of all aspects of our salvation is God’s grace.
- Notice the Scripture passages that speak of our preservation by God. The image given is that He has reached down and taken hold of us. It is NOT an image of our reaching up to grab hold of Him. He holds and preserves us.
- Furthermore, our preservation is a work of Christ [John 6:37-40].
- If, then, it were possible for genuine Christians to “fall away”, then Christ has failed.

- Also, to deny the preservation of the saints is to deny the significance of the work of Christ in His life, death, burial, resurrection, and intercession. For, on the cross, Christ exhausted the wrath of the Father towards all the Father gave Him. Thus, we can now say that “there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ.”
- Finally, we must see that our preservation by Christ is a function of our Union with Him. We, who believe, are united with Christ. Our life, our salvation, is to be found in Him and what He has done for us, not in our ability to maintain a relationship with Him.

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- Yet, despite the clear biblical testimony of perseverance, some attempt to use Scripture to refute this central doctrine.

<p><b>1. Some passages of Scripture seem to indicate that the Christian is secure only if he perseveres in faith to the end.</b></p>
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Matthew 24:13:

“But the one who endures to the end, he will be saved.”

Mark 13:13:

“You will be hated by all because of My name, but the one who endures to the end, he will be saved.”

Luke 21:19:

“By your endurance you will gain your lives.”

Romans 2:7:

“...to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life;”

John 8:31:

“So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, ‘If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine;”

John 15:6:

“If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned.”

1 Corinthians 15:1-2:

“Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain.”

Colossians 1:22-23:

“yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach—if indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard, which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, was made a minister.”

Hebrews 3:6, 14:

“but Christ was faithful as a Son over His house--whose house we are, if we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end. For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end,”

Hebrews 10:36, 39:

“For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised.”

39 “But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul.”

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- Yet, what these Scriptures indicate is that God has ordained the ends [that He will preserve us] as well as the means – that we, whom He has called, will persevere in faith to the end.

“the Calvinist takes seriously the fact that God ordains not only the end but also all the means to the end, and one of the means to his final salvation is the Christian’s perseverance in the faith to the end, without which means the end is neither achieved nor is it achievable. The Calvinist clearly perceives that one of the ways whereby God effects this means of perseverance in the elect is to warn them of the consequences of their not persevering to the end.”

Robert Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, p. 787

- An example of this truth [although not related to eternal salvation] is found in Acts 27 where Paul is told that all men on his ship will be saved; yet, Paul warns the centurion on the ship not to let any men leave the ship. Paul’s warning, then [even though he knew the end result] existed as the *means* whereby God saved all of the men aboard the ship.

Acts 27:18-32 (emphasis added):

“The next day as we were being violently storm-tossed, they began to jettison the cargo; and on the third day they threw the ship's tackle overboard with their own hands. Since neither sun nor stars appeared for many days, and no small storm was assailing us, from then on all hope of our being saved was gradually abandoned. When they had gone a long time without food, then Paul stood up in their midst and said, ‘Men, you ought to have followed my advice and not to have set sail from Crete and incurred this damage and loss. Yet now I urge you to keep up your courage, for **there will be no loss of life among you**, but only of the ship. For this very night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve stood before me, saying, ‘Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before Caesar; and behold, God has granted you all those who are sailing with you.’ Therefore, keep up your courage, men, for I believe God that it will turn out exactly as I have been told. But we must run aground on a certain island.’ But when the fourteenth night came, as we were being driven about in the Adriatic Sea, about midnight the sailors began to surmise that they were approaching some land. They took soundings and found it to be twenty fathoms; and a little farther on they took another sounding and found it to be fifteen fathoms. Fearing that we might run aground somewhere on the rocks, they cast four anchors from the stern and wished for daybreak. But as the sailors were trying to escape from the ship and had let down the ship's boat into the sea, on the pretense of intending to lay out anchors from the bow, Paul said to the centurion and to the soldiers, ‘**Unless these men remain in the ship, you yourselves cannot be saved.**’ Then the soldiers cut away the ropes of the ship's boat and let it fall away.”

**2. Still other passages seem to indicate that it is possible for believers to “fall away” from the faith.**

Matthew 24:10, 12:

At that time many will fall away and will betray one another and hate one another.

12 Because lawlessness is increased, most people's love will grow cold.

1 Timothy 1:19:

keeping faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith.

1 Timothy 4:1:

But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons,

2 Timothy 4:10:

for Demas, having loved this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica; Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia.

Hebrews 6:4-6:

“For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame.”

2 Peter 2:20-22:

“For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world by the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and are overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. For it would be better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn away from the holy commandment handed on to them. It has happened to them according to the true proverb, ‘A DOG RETURNS TO ITS OWN VOMIT,’ and, ‘A sow, after washing, returns to wallowing in the mire.’”

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- These passages simply teach the truth that there is such a thing as a “temporary faith” that is really no faith at all.

“We must appreciate the lengths and the heights to which a temporary faith may carry those who have it...[This temporary experience] is brought to our attention in the language of the epistle to the Hebrews when it speaks of those ‘who were once enlightened and tasted of the heavenly gift and were made partakers of the Holy Spirit and tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come’ (Hebrews 6:5-6)...It is this same [experience] that Peter deals with in 2 Peter 2:20-22 [where] Peter has in view persons who had the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who had known the way of righteousness, and who had thereby escaped the pollutions of the world but who had again become entangled in these pollutions and had turned from the holy commandment delivered unto them so that ‘it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to here wallowing in the mire.’ The Scripture itself, therefore, leads us to the conclusion that it is possible to have very uplifting, ennobling, reforming, and exhilarating experience of the power and truth of the gospel, to come into such close contact with the supernatural forces which are operative in God’s kingdom of grace that these forces produce effects in us which to human observation are hardly distinguishable from those produced by God’s regenerating and sanctifying grace and yet be not partakers of Christ and heirs of eternal life.” John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*

- Tragically, however, in an age of “easy-believism” where someone can just “walk an aisle and pray a prayer” when the “mood is right”, countless false conversions are confirmed as true, without any examination as to what the Bible says concerning true faith and belief.

- In fact, over the last twenty or thirty years, a debate has arisen within evangelicalism whereby some have claimed that it is possible for Jesus Christ to be one's "Savior but not his Lord."
- The reason for this debate is that so many individuals make "decisions for Christ" yet never demonstrate a change of nature or behavior.
- Central to this controversy is a belief that it is possible to live as a "carnal, backslidden Christian" after making a genuine and sincere profession of faith in Jesus Christ.
- However, John MacArthur has rightly challenged this view, stating that it is impossible, biblically, to separate the truth that Jesus Christ is BOTH Savior AND Lord of all who believe in Him.
- In an article entitled, *A Grace Community Distinctive: Lordship Salvation*, John MacArthur writes:

"What, then, are the distinctive of lordship salvation? What does Scripture teach that is embraced by those who affirm lordship salvation but rejected by proponents of 'easy-believism'?"

- MacArthur goes on to list and explain nine distinctive of a biblical understanding of salvation and the gospel. Of these distinctives, several are certainly noteworthy:
  1. Scripture teaches that the gospel calls sinners to faith and repentance, both of which are gifts of God wrought by a change in nature of the regenerate believer. Furthermore, genuine repentance involves a turning from and hatred of sin.
  2. Genuine faith will produce a changed life (2 Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 2:20; Romans 6:6).
  3. True believers will love the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Peter 1:8-9; Romans 8:28-30; 1 Corinthians 16:22). This love will necessarily lead to a life marked by obedience to the commands of Christ.
  4. Scripture teaches that one's behavior is a valid test of faith. Obedience is evidence that one's faith is genuine (1 John 2:3). In contrast, 'easy-believism' teaches that disobedience and prolonged sin are no reason to doubt the reality of one's faith.
  5. Scripture teaches that genuine believers may stumble and fall, but they will persevere in the faith to the end (1 Corinthians 1:8).

- As one of the early American Baptist confessions of faith, the *New Hampshire Confession of 1833* states:

“We believe that such only are real believers as endure unto the end; that their persevering attachment to Christ is the grand mark which distinguishes them from superficial professors; that a special Providence watches over their welfare; and they are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation.”

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- Yet, a Biblical understanding of preservation and perseverance leads to a biblical sense of assurance [that is, the confidence that our salvation is secure in the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ] for all who are truly saved by God’s grace.

2 Timothy 1:12:

“For this reason I also suffer these things, but I am not ashamed; for I know whom I have believed and I am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until that day.”

1 John 2:3:

“By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments.”

1 John 3:14:

“We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death.”

1 John 4:13:

“By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit.”

1 John 5:13:

“These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.”

John 17:3:

“This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.”

John 14:15:

“If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.”

John 15:10:

“If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love.”

Romans 8:31-39:

“What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things? Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us. Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Just as it is written,

‘FOR YOUR SAKE WE ARE BEING PUT TO DEATH ALL DAY LONG;  
WE WERE CONSIDERED AS SHEEP TO BE SLAUGHTERED.’

But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

- So, biblically, how can one have assurance that he or she is truly saved?
  1. First of all, for all genuine believers, their relationship with sin fundamentally changes after conversion. In other words, genuine believers will hate sin, not because of the potential consequences, but because it is a real affront to God.
    - This certainly does not mean that believers never sin, for we all will until we are glorified with Christ. However, it does mean that when we do sin, we are grieved because of the offense of the sin in the sight of God. To put it another way, “we are not sorry simply when we get caught.”
  2. Secondly, the nature of faith is fundamentally different in the life of a believer than in the life of an unbeliever. The faith of a genuine believer has a **specific object** – the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ.
    - I often here professing Christians speak of their faith “in God”; yet, never mentioning the Lord Jesus Christ. Yet, without this affection towards our Savior, no one can biblically claim to be saved.
  3. Thirdly, true believers seek fellowship with other believers. The idea of a believer who never “goes to church” is foreign to the New Testament.
  4. A true believer will love God’s Word. Again, this does not mean that he or she never fails in reading the Scriptures. However, it does mean that he or she will love God’s Word, and seek to know the Lord through it.
  5. Finally, a true believer will live a life of obedience to God and His Word... a life that will bear fruit. It does not mean that the believer is perfect; however, it does mean that the pattern in which a true believer lives will be one that seeks to honor God and His Word. Thus, one who lives in a pattern or state of

disobedience to God and His Word cannot rightfully, biblically, call himself or herself a Christian.

- There seems to be no question; however, that God's intent for His people is to know the assurance of salvation that comes through Him and Him alone!
- As Charles Spurgeon once said, "The believer, like a man on shipboard, may fall again and again on the deck, but he will never fall overboard."

Romans 8:39:

"For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."