

The foundations of God's persevering deliverance

sermonaudio.com

By Pastor Eric Moerdyk

Bible Text: Romans 6:1-7:6
Preached on: Sunday, August 15, 2021

Free Reformed Church of St Thomas

145 Saint George Street
St. Thomas, ON N5P 2M3

Website: stthomasfrc.com
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/stthomasfrc

Beloved congregation of the Lord, imagine you're driving with your whole family in the car, you're having a fun family outing and suddenly another car comes from the side out of the middle of nowhere and runs into yours and totals your car and knocks your car off the road, and the children in the back are crying and screaming as is totally understandable, and once the car stops moving, what is your priority as father? You have two: in the first place, you want to know that your family is safe and that no one is seriously injured; and secondly, you want your children to know that they are safe and that they are going to be all right. And God as heavenly Father, is no different, and that's why when we talk about the perseverance or the preservation of the saints, both words are fitting, it begins with a sense of security in the love of the Triune God.

Fathers, don't you want your children to know that they're your dear children? Is there any father listening who says, "I want my children to live in doubt from day to day as to whether I'm their dad or not. I think they'll be better kids if they have to work to earn sonship or daughterhood and if they're constantly afraid of losing their dad." You want them to know that no matter what, you're their dad; no matter what their failures or shortcomings or struggles, you will care for them, provide for them, comfort them, teach them and lead them. We are like this as sinful earthly fathers because we are a faint copy of the heavenly Father who's the pattern of all fatherhood, and these doctrines of grace builds up to this grand crescendo and climax in the life of the saints, they're designed to strip us of all pride and self-confidence and yet to fill every believing child of God with an unshakable confidence in your Savior.

That's why, really, chapter 5 in the Canon says basically just an echo of Romans 6-8, "What can separate us from the love of God? Nothing. No one." Or an expanded version of Psalm 23, "The LORD is my shepherd. He feeds me, leads me, restores me, defends me from enemies, and therefore surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life and I," not I might, "I shall dwell in the house of the LORD for ever." And this fifth head in our Canon is simply the exclamation mark on the doctrines of grace as God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, always finish what they started. God perseveres and preserves his saints and therefore his saints can press on and persevere through his perseverance.

Here's our theme, "The foundations of God's persevering deliverance." The foundations of God's persevering deliverance. We see the importance of this foundation, then the foundational identity of believers, and the foundational deliverance of believers.

Now when you start your discussion of perseverance or preservation in the right place, you begin with expecting great things from God and that's why the entire chapter here is summarized by this title, the perseverance of the saints. This is what keeps saints going. God's renewed children remain believers all their lifelong after conversion. They repent of their sins, of their seasons of coldness, and that lasts all their life and they stick with it until the end. They're like runners in a race who cross the finish line, like soldiers in an army who survive to enjoy complete victory.

Saints persevere. What's a saint? Now in the Roman Catholic system, a saint is someone who's done the good works they need to earn their justification along with Christ's work and they've done extra, and that means that you can pray to them and ask them to give their extra to you, and the funny thing is that as we, as Reformed people, sometimes use the word "saint" the exact same way without thinking about what we're saying. If someone is extra helpful and kind and gracious and generous and diligent in serving God, then someone else will say about that person, we say these things too, don't we, "That person is a saint." And then we think of a Mother Teresa, maybe some of you don't remember Mother Teresa, you younger ones, but Mother Teresa was someone who gave away every penny she ever had and she lived her life as a nun with the street children in India in the poorest slum she could find, giving everything she had. We look at her and we say, "That's a saint." But should we? The word "saint" simply means "holy, set apart by God for God." The weakest believer is as much a saint as the holiest child of God in the world.

You become a saint by an act of God, not by your doing, and you remain a saint by the act of God as well, and if sainthood is grace-based by an act of God, then your continuing to be a saint depends also on the same gracious act of God and that's why Article 1, laying the foundation, doesn't say one word about what you and I do. God the Father calls according to his purpose. He brings people into communion, that means into sharing with and knowing Jesus Christ so that all Christ has is yours. You read about being born-again through the work of the Spirit and delivered from the slavery of sin, all these things are God's doing. And which such a God and Savior, the greatest of sinners can live a saint and die a saint, and can sing with confidence, "The Lord is my shepherd now and for ever."

Another reason why this foundation of perseverance or preservation is so important, not just because it gives you the right focus but because this doctrine is hated. Satan hates it. He can't rob Christ of a single one of his sheep. John 10, "I lay down my life for the sheep and no one can snatch them from my hand." But that doesn't mean Satan leaves Christ's sheep alone. He wants to rob Christ's sheep of the assurance of this faithful persevering grace of God. He wants to take away the enjoyment of it, to send doubts and fears that drive out joy and hope and courage, and he exploits our every weakness shamelessly.

What are some of the ways he does so that we need to be aware of? Well, here's the bullets he fires. Bullet 1: that your salvation depends on you persevering. God starts it, you finish it. Only if you persevere to the end you will be saved; maybe some of us recognize that as a quote of Matthew 10:22, the problem is it's a quote ripped out of its context. Why do believers persevere to the end? Because God perseveres in them. You know this is intensely practical stuff. If you don't believe this, you should be living in constant terror of whether or not God is your Savior.

I attended an Arminian college, I think I was the only Reformed person on campus or one of the few anyway, and one young man I was talking to one day told me that his grandfather took his Arminianism very seriously and he believed that every time he sinned he lost his salvation. That's what you have to believe if you're Arminian because if it violates your so-called free will for God to bring you in, then it also violates your will for him to keep you in.

So every time when he sinned, he would hurry away and repent and make it right and be saved again. What do you think of that? On the one hand, there's something beautiful about keeping such short accounts with the Lord, is there not? To turn from sin hastily, that's the way it should be but this poor man did so only because of fear, and it's a comfortless doctrine and the joy of, and the knowledge of, and the experience of salvation is a far better foundation from which to keep those short accounts with God. He wasn't singing and living to the tune of Romans 8, "Nothing shall separate me from the love of God."

Another bullet Satan loves to fire at God's people: if you're not mostly perfect, you're not saved. Satan loves to get us to run stuck with our bosom sins. He knows those chambers and corners of the heart and he says, "That sin you don't mention to other people, the ruts of sin in your life, if others would know would they say is that person really converted?" What a fiery arrow that can be because there's a half-truth buried in it. The things in our hearts are far from what they ought to be, and if you begin with your own sins and shortcomings, it's no wonder that joy and hope evaporate.

A third bullet Satan uses is: false, phony assurance. He loves to either try to rob people of the real thing or to give people the fake version. Jesus and it's not just one place, it's a number. Matthew 7 mentions people on the day of judgment who are so confident that they're the servants of God that they even say, "Lord, good to see you. We're coming home. We're yours." And he says, "I have no idea who you are," meaning, "You're not one of mine." There is such a thing, to quote Isaiah in a number of places, as saying to people, "Peace, peace, when there is no peace," and we'll get to that in this chapter of the Canons too. Salvation for the person with an unbiblical assurance begins with being convicted by the Holy Spirit that your assurance is wrong. You need a biblical assurance of salvation. It's too important, too much is at stake. You've got to get this right. You need to see the difference clearly.

A fourth bullet that makes it necessary to lay the foundations of assurance and perseverance and hope, this one is weariness. We'll get next time to the daily struggle that believers have with sin and the backslidings and scandalous falls that God's children can have in their lives. Believers have to row upstream every single day against the current of our corruptions and sins. You've got to battle the whitewater of this world. This sin is constantly pressuring you, trying to push you and sweep you away and you can get so tired of the battle because you never get a day off, and you can never take a vacation from the war with sin. How do you keep going? When you know at the start that the war has already been won, that God will save his people from their sins past, present and future. Are you sometimes sick and tired of yourself? Then you need the triumphant foundations of a biblical hope that lies as the anchor and the spring and the fountain of assurance and perseverance because of the grace of God.

Do you see how important getting these things right is? But what, then, is the foundation of this doctrine and that's our second point: the foundational identity of believers. Did you notice when Article 1 describes saved people, the saints of the Lord, that it's all about identity? Who are you? Who is the Lord for you? What would you say? Where do you start? When someone asks you, "Who are you," do you know where most people end and begin, also sometimes on family visits, with how you're doing, not with who you are. And they start talking about whether they're having a good week or not, and they talk about their experiences and feelings and moods and successes and failures. In a sense, and I didn't read it for you tonight, you can do that yourself later, we want to start with Article 2 with the daily struggles and battles and wars of the children of God before we get to Article 1. We want to speak about performance before we get to identity. We want to get to the spots that cling to the best works of the saints, to quote Article 2, but the order of the Canons is correct. God's people must know who they are and only then can you begin to talk about how you're doing. Who you are is more important than how you're doing. Who you are remains true in your saddest falls into sin, and your longest backslidings, and your greatest seasons of coldness in your walk with God. Who you are is the foundation that gives you hope to turn back to the Lord for help.

Let me give you a simple example. Imagine a toddler coming out of the babysit, for some of our toddlers that's going to be a new experience but they're navigating a sea of pants in the foyer and he sees one pair of pants that he thinks matches dad's, and he goes there and he tugs on the leg to be picked up and then his eyes travel up the pants toward the face and he realizes that the wrong face is attached to that set of pants, and startled he lets go quickly and he starts searching for the right one. Do you see God as your Father and Savior or do you think that only when you feel spiritual or are doing well in your own eyes that you can go to the Lord and expect his help? And that when you're not acting in a spiritual way, when you're walking in sin that the door is locked and closed to you until you get your act together? Will you be like that little toddler who lifts up his hands towards his dad in faith and hope wanting to be picked up, or are you going to think he's off-limits?

Do you see what a difference it makes? And that's why our Canons do something profoundly biblical, the whole discussion about the perseverance of believers starts with

identity, not with performance. Who are you, not how are you doing. By acts of God, not acts of men. By the powerful grace of a faithful God, not the struggling failings of weak people so that the children of God in their daily falls and scandalous failures will lift up their arms like little children to God expectantly looking for his grace and help in the warfare.

What is this identity? First, this, the saints are called according to the purpose of Almighty God, and that's simply a quote of Romans 8:28, "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to those who are the called according to his purpose." You should translate it like this, "God works, not everything works itself out. No, God works all things together for good to those who love him, who are called according to his purpose." God's purpose expressed in the call of the gospel that reached into your life and made you a new creation is your identity, believer in him. And the whole world and the evil one can try to shake you and destroy you and be against you, but with such a God working all this for your good, your identity is secure. He's the unmoving rock on which the moving boat of your life is anchored. He has said, "I'm going to save that person I called and no one will stop me."

How can you tell you're the called according to God's purpose? Well, the second part of the identity of the saints who persevere. Notice if you read Article 1 carefully, these are two parts of one sentence, "God calls according to his purpose into the communion of his Son." God's call is shown in this, that he brings people into union, meaning being connected to Jesus Christ, and communion, living with and for Jesus Christ, interacting, relating to Jesus Christ.

The best illustration of this has to be marriage. When two people get married, they share everything: your last name, your home, your bank account. Nothing is mine anymore. Everything is ours. If one gets a cold and the flu, it's no longer mine, it's ours. You're going to take turns. Your wife's gifts, men, are your treasure. Your shortcomings are a thorn in her flesh. If you commit a crime, she's burdened by the consequences. When you get married, the debts are now ours, not mine. When I married my wife, my debts became her debts, and her bank account became my bank account. Everything in life is ours. Nothing is mine. And when God saves you, he calls you into union with his Son Jesus Christ and into communion with everything he is and has and has done. Everything you have is no longer yours. It's not mine anymore, it's his too. My gifts are from him. My sins, I say it reverently, aren't just my problem, they're his too. I did them but he's responsible to clean them up and to bear me up under the consequences and set me free from them. Oh, if only the people of God would always remember this. When you are convicted and grieving and broken, Christ is united to you by the purpose of God and there is nothing in this world that can rip the two of you apart. All that Christ did, he did for you. All that he is, his almighty power, his holiness, his love, his wisdom, his grace, his faithfulness, all he is, he is for you.

Oh, how eagerly we would flee to Christ with our sins if we began with the union in which God places his people rather than with our shameful sins and falls. His cross is the death of your sins. You rose with him, you died with him, Romans 6. You sit at God's

right hand with him, Ephesians 2, not just someday but today because he sits there and he's yours and you're connected to him. Therefore you sit there even now and that's the whole point of Romans 6 and it's this union that leads to sharing in all Christ has done. Therefore the Apostle Paul can say this in Romans 6:2, "we who are dead to sin." I wonder how many of you would say if I asked you, "Who are you," you would start by saying, "I'm dead to sin"? Those are startling words. Do you think that that's you? Are you dead to sin? He explains in verses 3 to 4 that, by the way, being baptized here is not a reference to water baptism but to the inner work of the Holy Spirit which is illustrated in water baptism, being baptized into Christ means this, you were baptized into his death. You were raised with him. That's why verse 11 says, just like Christ, consider yourself as really genuinely dead to sin and alive to God because of Jesus Christ.

How often do believers consider this their identity? Someone will say, "I don't feel dead to sin at all." That's not what you're being asked. You see, you're answering not with what God has done in uniting you to Christ in permanent spiritual marriage, the truth is whatever it means, it does not mean that believers don't sin anymore. Whatever it means, it doesn't mean you're suddenly immune to temptations and the workings and boilings over of sin in your heart and life. But what it does mean is this: the secret to your being cleansed, restored, healed and forgiven every day until heaven is that you are united to Jesus Christ and the power of his sin-killing death and the power of his holiness igniting resurrection are connected to you and always will be. Your sin must die because of him. It's guilt he carried away on the cross. It's power he broke through his resurrection. He is the death of your sins and because you are united to him, you're to consider yourself dead to sin because of him. Sin has been defeated. The war has been won. It's over. Now you can fight the last battles knowing Christ's glory and grace must defeat all your sins at last.

Now I'll admit that that's not easy to understand. I've been studying it all my life and making it a matter of special study in the last few years, constantly in the book of Philippians, sometimes I feel like I'm just starting to figure it out. And we're not the only ones who say that because when Peter read the letters of Paul, he said there are things in Paul which are hard to understand. But then why does the Holy Spirit through the mouth of Paul still say them? And remember that half the congregation were uneducated slaves and many of them couldn't read and write. Why does God give hard stuff for his people to chew on? Why this grand theme of union with Christ? So that you would begin to see the riches of God's grace. This truth, even when you just begin to understand a hint of it, is the most liberating and empowering truth there is. A believer and a saint of the Lord may and should say often, "Nothing in my life is mine anymore. It's his too. We are in this together no matter what. I can only bring to Christ guilt and failure and shortcoming and weakness and need and unbelief and unfaithfulness, but his glory and grace are so big that he overcomes them all. It's his responsibility and pleasure to do this for his spiritual bride daily until he saves them all to sin no more."

I once sat at the deathbed some years ago of a dear saint in the Lord. If you like "Pilgrim's Progress," this was a genuine Great-heart. I sat at his bedside singing Dutch Psalms with him and we were singing a Psalm that talks about God's people leaping for joy because their heart's desire has been granted to be with the Lord forever. And this

dear man, the tears of joy were rolling down his cheeks but he was too weak to wipe them away, and his wife was there in a flash to wipe them away for him, to give him a sip of water, to brush a loving hand over his forehead. And that's how Christ cares for his own every day, even when you least notice it and feel the furthest from him.

This is how the Savior cares not just for the physical weaknesses of his own but for the spiritual failures and sins of each of his own. There's nothing in his saints that can get him to stop doing this. You can't stop him from doing this anymore than you can blow a hurricane out of the way with the breath in your lungs. But someone says, "Well, why do I feel the frowns of God, then, when I sin?" Those are the frowns of love meant to call you back to him in repentance and faith, not meant to drive you from him in despair. Don't misread them. Don't let Satan tempt you to mislabel them. They are invitations. His frowns are invitations, not expulsions.

So the two parts of the identity of the people of God, called according to God's purpose, brought into union and communion with Jesus Christ, and the third part is the renewing work of the Holy Spirit. Now we just covered this at some length and the point here now is simply this: the almighty power of the Holy Spirit created new life in you spiritually and that new life didn't start with you believing but with God's calling into existence in your life the desire to trust him and love him and serve him. That new life is there not by your choice but by God's act and your choice is simply the echo of God's choice. Can such people ever go lost? Can people who are pursued and called by God's holy purpose brought into unbreakable union with Jesus Christ and made alive by the life-giving Holy Spirit, can such people be abandoned? Never. God doesn't do half-jobs. God's choice and purpose cannot be reversed.

Do you see what this identity does once you get this? And Arminians would say, yeah, but there are people who were saved and who decided to stop being Christians, people who abandoned Jesus Christ, and people who joined churches and served God zealously maybe for years, even ordained ministers, Joshua Harris, and people were amazed at their zeal and at their insights and then they threw it all away, and in every generation of the church that has happened. We might have thought they were saved at one time but they never really were. No person of whom these three things are true ever goes lost. Not one. John himself tells us in his third epistle, "They went out from us because they were never really one of us." They just looked like Jesus' sheep for a while.

All whom God calls, all who are united to Christ, all who are given real spiritual life also enter a battlefield, a tremendous combat with sin but you may do so in hope for you must also consider, and that's our last point, the foundational deliverance of believers. Notice these beautiful words taken straight from Romans 6 in our Canons, "He," God, "delivers also from the dominion and slavery of sin but not yet completely from the body of sin and from the weaknesses of the flesh in this life." Romans 6:14, "For sin shall not have dominion over you." Romans 6:17, "God be thanked, you used to be the slaves of sin but now you have obeyed from the heart God."

Everybody is a slave in this world. That means there's something that rules and drives and controls you. As creatures it can't be any other way, the question is, is it sin or righteousness? Every unrenewed person thinks you're free. You think that you need to get away from God and Christ to be free and you're not. Your tyrant and dictator is sin. You are chained to foul lusts that whisper sweet nothings in your ear and then betray you with shame and emptiness in the end, and you're the worst when you give in to them but when you're called by God and united to Jesus Christ and made spiritually alive, their dominion is broken, the iron bars of sin are shattered like clay, you're not a slave anymore.

Now that doesn't mean you never act like or feel like a slave anymore. That doesn't mean you immediately erase all the ruts of sin that you easily slipped into. It doesn't mean the battle is over, in some ways the battle becomes fierce, a new battle like you never knew before. Once you loved and pursued sin even though you also hated its cheap betrayals but now God plants the seeds of new life in you. Now you hate sin. Now you want to please him even though the old lingering lusts of sin are still there too, and you become two people: the sinful nature that still hates God and rebels against him and lusts after sin, and the new nature that loves God and wants to obey him and wants to have communion with him and wants to be holy. And those new desires created by God are going to win out in the end because those desires flow out of Jesus Christ and you have been plugged into him forever. And even when those old sinful desires try to sabotage the work of God, they fight like terrorists, they play dirty, they plant sin-bombs in your life, they want to betray you even then, that new life of God is indestructible.

Let me show you how true this is even when it doesn't always feel like it. Imagine someone born and raised a slave of an extremely cruel tyrant. He whipped you. He abused you. He took advantage of you. He was always lashing you with cruel words. You were afraid of him. He forced you to serve him in ways that broke you. You thought his commands led you to guilty twisted pleasure but also to cheap emptiness, feeling so used. But one day you were redeemed and bought by a new master. He threw away the chains in which you'd lived all your life and he set you free. So there you are working for him on his yard and the old boss walks into the yard and you feel a twinge of fear and dislike, and he barks orders and you even start to obey out of a fearful reflex and old fear, and you remember with sickening thought the guilty pleasures of the old master and something even in you, in a sick way, still has a twinge of desire. But the new master walks in and says to the old one, "Get out of here. You don't belong here. You have nothing to say to him anymore." And Christ does this for his own. Everyone united to Christ is no longer a slave. You're a servant now of a good master who teaches you the pure pleasures of godliness, not mixed with envy, regret or ruin.

Do you see the hope here? Even for someone still trying to unlearn bondage and slavery and trying to figure out this whole freedom thing, even with the lingering rebel of sin still brewing and rotting inside of you daily, you can still hope in God through Jesus Christ because the dominion of sin has been broken and sin will not and cannot have the last word in any saint of God. God has broken the power of that sin. He didn't just forgive you, he set you free from the rebellion of sin. And even the very struggle that you daily

have to engage in may never be discussed unless you do so from the foundation of a new identity and the real freedom that is found in Jesus Christ.

Remember the toddler navigating the sea of pants in the foyer. He's tripped. He's skinned his knee on the carpet. He wants his dad. He comes running. He finds the right leg, finds the right face, and he lifts up his hands through his tears. So as his dad, you pick him up and he tells you he fell, and you kiss him and you reassure him, and you wipe away his tears and you apply a band-aid, and you promise him it'll get better, that he'll figure this whole walking thing out. The struggle to walk spiritually can be just as full of tripping and falling. God's children, in some ways, remain toddlers all their lives, learning to walk again and again, and God himself says, "I'll be there with an ocean of grace, with comfort, healing, help and restoration, and I'll make sure that the time will come when you will never fall again."

Is there someone listening who if you're honest deep down, have to say, "I really don't have this comfort. I really don't know what it is to be set free, to have new desires planted inside me"? You know what that means, right? It means you're the slave of sin. Now you might, in your mind, have covered your sin with gold and called it freedom, you might have painted it yellow so that you can say it's gold, but you're still a slave. You're ruled by sin. Neat and tidy sins are gutter sins but it's sin. You can trade one sin for another but you can't stop sinning by yourself and nothing you do can change that fact.

That's who you are, but for such people Christ Jesus came into this world, and this wonderful identity we've been speaking of tonight of being united to Christ can still become true of you as well. The call of the gospel this day is to everyone listening. This beautiful inheritance, O people of God, glory in it with amazement. And those of you who still need it, realize that God is still bringing people into saving union with his Son even now.

What a salvation this salvation is, a salvation that no amount of sin and no amount of temptation and hostility can cancel. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, repent of your sin, receive this fullness and having received it, walk in it with spiritual pleasure, with eager expectation, with childlike hope knowing God must finish what he started. Amen.