

DISTINCTIVES OF GRACE

Bible Study Notes #10, November 13, 2005

PERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS PRESERVATION OF THE SAINTS

We have come to the fifth and final of Doctrines of Grace, or the Five Points of Calvinism. Like most of them, this point is misleading today and often misunderstood. The term *perseverance* causes misunderstanding, as it implies that the continuation of faith, obedience and even salvation itself is dependent upon and accomplished by the believer alone. Of course, the doctrinal position of the Synod of Dort (1618-1619) against the Remonstrance followers of Arminius was nothing like this misunderstanding. They were emphasizing the Biblical truths that all true Christians will persevere until the end *based upon the preserving power of God! **We persevere because He preserves us!*** They were explaining that the Bible teaches the sovereignty of God in *sanctification* just as it does in *justification*.

What do *you think* this teaching means? Is it synonymous with “once saved, always saved?” Is it the same as the doctrine of eternal security? Does it simply refer to the fact that all those who are truly saved will be saved until they die?

- As in all of these doctrines, we must first define the terms involved. **“Saints”** comes from the root word that simply means “separate” or “set apart.” (A “sanctuary” is a building set apart for special uses.) It does not refer to someone far above normal Christian maturity or obedience. That idea comes from the Roman church. In the Bible the term “saints” is used often to simply refer to the company of believers in an area, a city, a local church, or the whole church universal. *Saints are all God’s children who are all both separate and separated.*
- **“Perseverance”** refers to the saints’ continuance in the state of holiness, righteousness, salvation, and acceptance to God throughout their entire life. This does not refer to sinless perfection, but the defining nature of one’s post-salvation life and its inevitable conclusion. In the Bible, the root usually translated “perseverance” or “endurance” or “patience”, is *hupermeno*, from “under” and “to remain.” Therefore, in those passages it literally means to remain under, or continue to bear.

Romans 5:3-4 (NASB) And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about **perseverance**; [4] and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope;

Romans 8:25 (NASB) But if we hope for what we do not see, with **perseverance** we wait eagerly for it.

Rev. 2:2-3 (NASB) 'I know your deeds and your toil and **perseverance**, and that you cannot endure evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false; [3] and you have perseverance and have endured for My name's sake, and have not grown weary. (Jesus to Ephesus)

Rev. 2:19 (NASB) 'I know your deeds, and your love and faith and service and **perseverance**, and that your deeds of late are greater than at first. (Jesus to Thyatira)

Rev. 3:10 (NASB) 'Because you have kept the word of My **perseverance**, I also will keep you from the hour of testing, that hour which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell upon the earth. (Jesus to Philadelphia)

Rev. 13:10 (NASB) If anyone is destined for captivity, to captivity he goes; if anyone kills with the sword, with the sword he must be killed. Here is the **perseverance** and the faith of the saints.

Rev. 14:12 (NASB) Here is the **perseverance** of the saints who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus.

- ***The London Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689*** includes a chapter on this teaching which is entitled "Of the Perseverance of the Saints":

Chapter 17: Of The Perseverance of the Saints

1._____ **Those whom God hath accepted in the beloved, effectually called and sanctified by his Spirit, and given the precious faith of his elect unto, can neither totally nor finally fall from the state of grace, but shall certainly persevere therein to the end, and be eternally saved**, seeing the gifts and callings of God are without repentance, whence he still begets and nourisheth in them faith, repentance, love, joy, hope, and all the graces of the Spirit unto immortality; and though many storms and floods arise and beat against them, yet they shall never be able to take them off that foundation and rock which by faith they are fastened upon; notwithstanding, through unbelief and the temptations of Satan, the sensible sight of the light and love of God may for a time be clouded and obscured from them, yet he is still the same, and they shall be sure to be kept by the power of God unto salvation, where they shall enjoy their purchased possession, they being engraven upon the palm of his hands, and their names having been written in the book of life from all eternity.

([John 10:28, 29](#); [Philippians 1:6](#); [2 Timothy 2:19](#); [1 John 2:19](#); [Psalms 89:31, 32](#); [1 Corinthians 11:32](#); [Malachi 3:6](#))

2._____ **This perseverance of the saints depends not upon their own free will, but upon the immutability of the decree of election**, flowing from the free and unchangeable love of God the Father, upon the efficacy of the merit and intercession of Jesus Christ and union with him, the oath of God, the abiding of his Spirit, and the seed of God within them, and the nature of the covenant of grace; from all which ariseth also the certainty and infallibility thereof.([Romans 8:30](#) [Romans 9:11, 16](#); [Romans 5:9, 10](#); [John 14:19](#); [Hebrews 6:17, 18](#); [1 John 3:9](#); [Jeremiah 32:40](#))

3._____ **And though they may**, through the temptation of Satan and of the world, the prevalency of corruption remaining in them, and the neglect of means of their preservation, **fall into grievous sins, and for a time continue therein**, whereby they incur God's displeasure and grieve his Holy Spirit, come to have their graces and comforts impaired, have their hearts hardened, and their consciences wounded, hurt and scandalize others, and bring temporal judgments upon themselves, **yet shall they**

renew their repentance and be preserved through faith in Christ Jesus to the end.
 ([Matthew 26:70, 72, 74](#); [Isaiah 64:5, 9](#); [Ephesians 4:30](#); [Psalms 51:10, 12](#); [Psalms 32:3, 4](#); [2 Samuel 12:14](#); [Luke 22:32, 61, 62](#))

John Piper said, “Perseverance of the saints is the almighty work of God to keep us, through all affliction and suffering (*and faith and sanctification*), for an inheritance of pleasures at God’s right hand forever.”

- But immediately, we cringe in doubt of such a *sure* and inevitable doctrine like this, it’s implications for the need for continuing sanctification and holy living after salvation, and we wonder about the exceptions we may even know personally and experientially.
- What about the man who lived faithfully for Christ for decades, served in the church as a deacon, teacher, even pastor, then left his wife for another woman, changed his lifestyle dramatically toward worldliness and sinfulness, abandoned the faith and even renounced Christ and the gospel?
- Or are we saying that someone can walk the aisle at age 10, make a profession of faith, and then proceed to live anyway he wishes, and still go to heaven when he dies, because “once saved, always saved?”

Please understand that this doctrine is *much more* than simply “once saved, always saved!” In fact, that is “hyper-perseverance” view of modern evangelicals that impose God’s sovereign keeping power, but deny His sovereign saving and sanctifying power. It is as if they believe that God waits and depends upon man’s decisions and obedience, but then is bound to keep that which man initiates. Such a simplistic view is often used to defend “easy believism,” reject what is criticized as “Lordship salvation”, and teach that man’s decision and event is all that is needed for hell insurance and heaven assurance. Issues like God’s call and choice, regeneration, sanctification in the life of the believer, and steadfast continuance in the faith until the end are not included or embraced in most circles and teachings.

Example of Bill Clinton: Clinton grew up in Immanuel Baptist Church in Little Rock. The pastor then and for many years there was a gifted and eccentric expositor named W. O. Vaught. He studied under another expositor named R. B. Thieme in Houston. Dr. Thieme was a gifted student at Dallas Theological Seminary, was very committed to his Greek studies and the verse-by-verse exposition of the Scriptures. But he was so focused upon the simplicity of our faith and that any amount of belief was all that was necessary to be saved, and that repentance had nothing to do with faith. He also taught that a believer could commit any sin and live any way that an unbeliever could, and yet still be saved if he just “believed.” His teaching had a profound influence on W. O. Vaught, who taught in the same manner and the same doctrinal position. Bill Clinton grew up in this teaching and evidently embraced it. He even credited Vaught with teaching him a position on abortion that rationalized his pro-choice position. As we all know now, he did not see any connection with his actions or repentance and his salvation. He felt that his salvation was secure since he had been “saved” so he could live as he wished with no impact or bearing on his salvation. While both Thieme and Vaught were known as very conservative and committed Bible expositors, their position on this one doctrine brought many destructive errors into their teachings. The impact on

one young man who eventually became President of the U.S. has brought an even greater impact on the country and its view of cheap and easy salvation.

This same view has also been reinforced to a lesser degree by others like Scofield, Ryrie and Hal Lindsey.

John Wesley in the 1700's was very committed to the Scriptures and holy living. He could not accept that God could accept that those who named the name of Christ unless their lives also were conformed to His teachings and commandments. He started a whole denomination from his teaching on these methods and manners of Christian living that were necessary to keep us saved.

So we can see the **two extremes of misinterpretation and wrong** responses to the Scriptures on this matter. One is to take the doctrine of perseverance too lightly and presume upon God's obligation to keep us saved no matter how or if we are changed by our "decision" for Him. It seems their concern is that it removes the liberty to live as we please. The other is to take the doctrine too heavily such that we have to persevere all alone to keep God satisfied with us. It seems their concern is that it removes any reason for holy living. This doctrine is rejected by one because it removes their sins of liberty and pride of choice and is rejected by the other because it removes their sins of legalism and pride of morality.

The usual objections are really based upon experience rather than Scriptural positions. That approach would lead us to conclude that David, Peter and many others were lost! As with all of these doctrines, the errors can be traced back to a wrong view of man and God. Since man is not dead and totally depraved, he can participate in his salvation, and therefore also lose it. Since God is not totally sovereign, He depends upon man to do his part and stay saved! We end up always questioning everyone's salvation.

But our response to a "brother" in sin should not be questioning his salvation! What should it be? (Matthew 18)

- But **what do the Scriptures say?** What is the **Biblical position** on these matters?

Even though we may sin from time to time and are far from perfect, we shall be saved to the end and the uttermost:

John 10:27-29 (NASB) (Jesus said) "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; [28] and **I give eternal** (without end) **life** to them, and **they shall never** (not in this life or the next) **perish**; and **no one shall snatch them out of My hand**. [29] "My Father, who has **given them to Me** (is no "Indian giver"), is greater than all; and **no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand**.

Philip. 1:6 (NASB) For I am confident of this very thing, that **He who began a good work in you will perfect it** until the day of Christ Jesus.

Hebrews 12:2 (NASB) fixing our eyes on **Jesus, the author** (beginner) **and perfecter** (finisher) **of** (our) **faith**, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

2 Tim. 2:19 (NASB) Nevertheless, the firm foundation of God stands, having **this seal**, "**The Lord knows those who are His**," and, "Let everyone who names the name of the Lord **abstain from wickedness**."

1 John 2:19 (NASB) **They went out from us, but they were not really of us** (the negative assertion that false believers will depart); for **if they had been of us, they would have remained with us** (the positive assertion that true believers will remain); but they went out, in order that it might be shown that they all are not of us.

Psalm 89:30-37 (NASB)

"If his sons **forsake My law**,
 And **do not walk in My judgments**,
 [31] If they **violate My statutes**,
 And **do not keep My commandments**,
 [32] Then I will visit their transgression with the rod,
 And their iniquity with stripes.
 [33] "**But I will not break off My lovingkindness from him**,
 Nor deal falsely in My faithfulness.
 [34] "**My covenant I will not violate**,
 Nor will I alter the utterance of My lips.
 [35] "Once I have sworn by My holiness;
 I will not lie to David.
 [36] "**His descendants shall endure forever**,
 And his throne as the sun before Me.
 [37] "It shall be established forever like the moon,
 And the witness in the sky is faithful."

1 Cor. 11:32 (NASB) But when we are judged, **we are disciplined by the Lord in order that we may not be condemned** along with the world.

Hebrews 12:6 (NASB) For those **WHOM THE Lord loves He DISCIPLINES**,
 And He scourges every SON WHOM He receives."

Malachi 3:6 (NASB) "**For I, the Lord, do not change; therefore you, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed**."

Jeremiah 32:40 (NASB) "And **I will make an everlasting covenant** with them that **I will** not turn away from them, to do them good; and **I will** put the fear of Me in their hearts so that they will not turn away from Me.

What are the problems that arise without this understanding and belief of these truths?

1. **lack of assurance** – impedes growth and focus on God and others
2. **lack of confidence** – impedes faith and power
3. **lack of peace** – impedes calm and a sure hope
4. **lack of joy** – impedes contentment and satisfaction in God alone

5. **lack of gratitude** – impedes holy living to God's glory

This perseverance does not depend upon us, but the decrees, election and graces of God. The issue is **not what man does, but what Christ has done!** Yet because of what Christ has done, man must do certain things!

Romans 8:29-39 (NASB) For whom He foreknew, **He also predestined to become conformed** to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren; [30] and whom He predestined, these He also called; and **whom He called, these He also justified**; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.

[31] **What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us?** [32] He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things? [33] **Who will bring a charge against God's elect?** God is the one who justifies; [34] 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. [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] Just as it is written,

"For Thy sake we are being put to death all day long;

We were considered as sheep to be slaughtered."

[37] **But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us.** [38] For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, [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.

Romans 5:9-10 (NASB) Much more then, **having now been** justified by His blood, **we shall be saved from the wrath** of God through Him. [10] 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.**

1 John 3:9 (NASB)

No one **who is born of God practices sin**, because His seed abides in him; and **he cannot sin**, because he is born of God.

2 Peter 1:10-12 (NASB) 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; [11] for in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you.

[12] Therefore, I shall always be ready to remind you of these things, even though **you already know them, and have been established in the truth which is present with you.**

Philip. 2:12-13 (NASB) So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, **work out your salvation** with fear and trembling; [13] **for it is God who is at work in you**, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.

But concerning those who appear or profess to be saved, but are not inwardly changed or possessing a new a nature, did not Jesus say:

Matthew 7:21-23 (NASB) **"Not everyone who says** to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven; **but he who does** the will of My Father who is in heaven. [22] "Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' [23] "And then I will declare to them, **'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.'**

And did He not also teach:

Mark 4:5-6 (NASB) "And other seed fell on the rocky ground where it did not have much soil; and immediately it sprang up because **it had no depth** of soil. [6] "And after the sun had risen, it was scorched; and **because it had no root, it withered away.**

- But then *where do the **Arminians** get their **position*** on this doctrine? What "proof texts" do they misinterpret and use? (Rom. 11:17-22, 1Tim. 1:18-19, John 15:6)

Hebrews 6:4-8 (NASB) 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, [5] and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, [6] **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. [7] For **ground that drinks the rain** which often falls upon it and brings forth vegetation useful to those for whose sake it is also tilled, receives a blessing from God; [8] but if it yields thorns and thistles, it is worthless and close to being cursed, and it ends up being burned.

But what does this really mean? What are the options for who "those" might be? (truly saved or truly lost)

What about a third choice, (that the writer of Hebrews is using what Luther called "**evangelical usage of the law**" that such a call to strive as diligently as we can to meet the highest standards of the law drives us to an ever increasing dependence upon grace)?

How does the passage end? What does he say that is his position and perspective?

Hebrews 6:9-19 (NASB) **But, beloved, we are convinced of better things concerning you, and things that accompany salvation, though we are speaking in this way.** [10] For God is not unjust so as to forget your work and the love which you have shown toward His name, in having ministered and in still ministering to the saints. [11] And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence so as **to realize the full assurance of hope until the end**, [12] that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of **those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.**

[13] For when God made the promise to Abraham, since He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself, [14] saying, "I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply you." [15] And thus, **having patiently waited, he obtained the promise.** [16] For men swear by one greater than themselves, and with them an oath given as confirmation is an end of every dispute. [17] In the same way God, desiring even more

to show to **the heirs of the promise the unchangeableness of His purpose** (*that is us!*), **interposed with an oath**, [18] in order that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, **we may have strong encouragement**, we who have fled for refuge in laying hold of the hope set before us. [19] **This hope we have as an anchor of the soul**, a hope **both sure and steadfast** and one which **enters** within the veil,

What about **the Example of Peter**? Did he persevere in sanctification? What were some of his failings and sins?

Did not Jesus even say:

Luke 22:31-34 (NASB) "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat; [32] **but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail**; and you, **when once you have turned again**, strengthen your brothers." [33] And he said to Him, "Lord, with You I am ready to go both to prison and to death!" [34] And He said, "I say to you, Peter, the cock will not crow today until you have denied three times that you know Me."

This teaching and truth is even more strongly presented for Peter and all of us in Jesus' **High Priestly Prayer**:

John 17:9-21 (NASB) "**I ask on their behalf; I do not ask on behalf of the world**, but of those **whom Thou hast given Me**; for they are Thine; [10] and all things that are Mine are Thine, and Thine are Mine; and I have been glorified in them. [11] "And I am no more in the world; and **yet they themselves are in the world**, and I come to Thee. Holy Father, keep them in Thy name, the name which Thou hast given Me, that they may be one, even as We are. [12] "While I was with them, I was keeping them in Thy name which Thou hast given Me; and I guarded them, and not one of them perished but the son of perdition, that the Scripture might be fulfilled. [13] "But now I come to Thee; and these things I speak in the world, that they may have My joy made full in themselves. [14] "I have given them Thy word; and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. [15] "**I do not ask Thee to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one**. [16] "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. [17] "**Sanctify them** in the truth; Thy word is truth. [18] "As Thou didst send Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. [19] "And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, **that they themselves also may be sanctified** in truth. [20] "I do not ask in behalf of these alone, but for **those also who believe** in Me through their word; [21] **that they may all be one; even as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be in Us**; that the world may believe that Thou didst send Me.

Perhaps it is then clear why Peter was the one God inspired to write **the glorious promise** so clearly to the persecuted church of his day:

1 Peter 1:3-9 (NASB) 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, [4] to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, [5] who

are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. [6] In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, [7] that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ; [8] and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, [9] obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls.

Peter wrote this epistle to encourage the persecuted believers. He reminded them that they were aliens in this world, citizens of heaven, children of God, living stones, a royal priesthood, and a people for God's own possession. Notice in this passage that he wanted them to know that they could not and would not ever lose what they had in Christ. Note that:

1. Their heavenly inheritance was guaranteed as they were born again to a living hope that was the (threefold) opposite of all earthly treasures. (vv.3-4)
2. They were kept and protected by God's Own power. (v.5)
3. They were protected by their faith as the instrument of God's keeping power. (v.5)
4. They were strengthened by their testing, but would persevere through their trials and would be found worthy at the end. (vv. 6-7)
5. They would continue to be motivated by love for Christ. (v.8)
6. They would have joy through it all. (v.8)
7. They would be saved and preserved by God for full glory. (v.8-9)

What a great hope, encouragement and promise! Such great truths "**set us free!**" John 8:31-32 (NASB) Jesus therefore was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, "**If you abide in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine**; (evangelical use of the law) [32] and **you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.**" (grace to rest in when driven there)

Discuss example from women's retreat: Janet Pope talking about how so many (professing) Christians do not even have an idea what is in the Bible (and do not really even care)!

Illustrations: Father and Son walking a dangerous path. The Father grips the boy and the boy grips the Father. One grip is secure and steadfast, no matter if the other slips or even falls for a purpose of the Father.

Ship outside the harbor but with an anchor line inside to the anchor rock. (Heb. 6:19) May be beaten and tossed, but will be safely pulled into the security of the harbor.

Benediction:

Jude 1:24-25 (NASB) Now to **Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy**, [25] to the only God **our Savior**, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever. **Amen.**