

Text

To read Rom 8 and ps 77

1 Cor 15:10

¹⁰ But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.

Main Point

The Saints Persevere

Introduction (300)

Hook

In the world of long-distance running there is a mindset of never giving up.

This mindset can be said in this way:

“If you are not running, you are walking; if you are not walking, you are crawling”

The key is to get to the finish line no matter what it takes.

The key is to keep moving forward.

The key is to persevere.

This idea of persevering is highlighted in long-distance running, but it comes up in everything we do.

- To become a good musician, one must persevere through music practices
- To graduate, one must persevere through school or university
- To get paid, one must persevere through work
- To advance in a career, one must persevere through the ranks

Perseverance implies that the thing at hand is hard, gruelling, ongoing and difficult.

Perseverance speaks of overcoming that difficulty, of never giving up, of finishing what was started.

Outline

Today, our study through the 1689 takes us to the topic of the Perseverance of the saints. This is chapter 17 of the confession.

To help us work through it we will divide it up into three parts:

1. The Question of Perseverance
2. The Basis of Perseverance
3. The Practice of Perseverance

Part 1 – The Question of Perseverance

Define the question

So let us begin with our first part: The question of perseverance.

And the basic question is rather simple:

Will the Saints persevere?

Last week we learned about “good works” and how God has ordained that good works is the path between justification and glorification.

The question we ask now is, will all of those who begin that path cross the finish line?

Or will there be some who grow weary and give up?

Will there be some that take a wrong turn and never get back on the right path?

Valid question - Experience

For many of us, our own experiences and interactions make us ask this question.

Many of us personally know people who professed to be a follower of Christ, who were active in serving the church, even doing awkward and difficult things like evangelism, and yet those same people are presently denying Christ and living for themselves.

These situations are tragic, and their frequency only adds to the weight of sorrow. There is nothing uncommon about this turn of events.

As we look at these experiences, it is only right to ask the question “Will the Saints persevere?”

Valid Question - History

But it is not only our own experience which begs this question, but also the facts of history. There are countless people in history who profess Christ and, from what we know of them, show some genuine fruit, but at some point in their life, they end up denying Jesus as their Lord and saviour, and finish their life doing their own thing, embracing a lifestyle of sin.

Think of the biblical example of Judas. He followed Christ. He served Christ. He left security and his job to follow Christ. He even performed miracles in the name of Christ.

And yet how did he finish?

He betrays Christ for silver.

The Bible makes it abundantly clear that Judas never repented of his denial of Christ. He continued to reject Jesus Christ as Saviour. In fact, his guilt of betraying the Lord Jesus Christ drove him to take his own life.

He did not persevere.

Valid Question – Bible Passages

Our experiences beg the question. History begs the question. And added to that several passages in the bible seem to beg the question too.

Think of Hebrews 6:4-6, which we have recently studied in the morning service. Remember how it forces us to ask the question “Will the saints persevere?”

Let me read it for you.

For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, ⁵ and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, ⁶ and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt.

And what about these words from our Lord. As he finishes what we know as “the sermon on the mount”:

Matthew 7:21-23

²¹ “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. ²² On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ ²³ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness

Anyone reading these texts are forced to ask “will the saints persevere?”

Now the aim of our time tonight is not to do a full explosion of these verses.

Enough for now to remind ourselves that the Hebrew passage is addressing the visible church which is made up of genuine and false Christians.

And the hint in the Matthew passage is that Jesus “never” knew them. Not that he does not know them any more.

Application – Let the bible answer the question

The point is that these verses force us to ask the question “Will the saints persevere?”

And if all we had was our experience, the record of history, and verses like Hebrews 6:4-6 and Matthew 7:21-23 we may conclude in the negative.

- That the answer to the question is NO.
- That the saints do NOT persevere.

But we praise God that this is not all we have to base truth on. We have the whole Bible, and we must let the whole bible instruct us.

- Our experience never accounts for all the facts;
- The record of history can be full of holes,
- and we cannot and must not allow ourselves to form a doctrine on a few verses. Much less a few verses which are difficult to interpret.

If we hope to answer this question honestly and faithfully, we must allow the clear passages to inform the unclear passages. We must hear how the whole Bible talks to this matter.

Link

Furthermore, we do well to get the help of those who have gone before us. To interpret in conversation with godly saints, which is exactly what we do as we hear how the 1689 articulates the answer to this question.

This brings us to our second section: The Basis of Perseverance

Part 2 – The Basis of Perseverance

From the Confession

If you do have a copy of the confession with you look at the second paragraph of chapter 17. The paragraph begins with:

This perseverance of the saints depends not upon their own free will,

The basis, or the foundation, or the ultimate cause of perseverance is **not** in the will of any individual. It does **not** depend ultimately on the self-control and determination of the saints.

What does it depend on?

It depends on character and work of the triune God. As we consider the work of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit in creating a saint, the perseverance of the saints is absolutely certain.

Listen to how the confession puts it:

This perseverance of the saints depends not upon their own free will, but upon the immutability [unchanging] of the decree of election, flowing from the free and unchangeable love of God the Father,

upon the efficacy [effectiveness] 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.

Father – Love and election

The confession highlights two works of the Father: The decree of election and his unchangeable love.

A “Saint” is one whom the Father has decided to show a special saving love.

And this decision is not on a whim. It is decreed. God has established a decree of election to save sinners and make them into Saints. This election is the beginning of His work.

And the Bible emphatically, with the strongest language possible, tells us that God will finish what he started. With God, there are no unfinished projects, no books that were started but never completed, no unfinished story.

A verse that clearly talks of God finishing his work of salvation in the Saints is Romans 8:28-30.

Let’s turn there together.

This is often referred to as the golden chain of salvation. And a chain is a good picture. Think of a chain holding a boat to an anchor, not a chain necklace. The links of this chain cannot be broken.

You can see the confession echoing the language of this passage:

²⁸ And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good,^[h] for those who are called according to his purpose. ²⁹ For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. ³⁰ And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.

How do we know that those who are justified will be glorified? How do we know they will persevere? Because God finishes what he started.

The Son – Merit and Intercession

But that is not all. The work of the Son is also the basis for our perseverance.

Again, the confession highlights two works of the Son of God. His merit and his intercession.

The work of Jesus on the cross was effective. It has power and is sure to succeed. In what way is it effective?

- His death on the cross **does** actually pay for your sins.
- Furthermore, his perfect life of obedience **does** actually grant you the righteousness needed for heaven.

You have been justified by His effective merit.

But not only that, but the Son of God is currently interceding on your behalf. He is applying all that he purchased to you through his work as a mediating high priest.

If you are still in Romans 8 look down to verse 33 and 34 which really highlight the effective merit and intercession of the Son of God.

³³ Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. ³⁴ Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.^[i]

Why will the saints persevere? Because of the effective merit and intercession of Christ.

The Holy Spirit – Indwelling and Seal

It would be enough to know the work of the Father was the basis of our perseverance, but added to that we have the work of the Son, which provides additional foundation, but in superabundance of grace we also have the work of the Holy Spirit which forms the foundation of our perseverance.

The confession states that our perseverance depends “upon the abiding of his Spirit”

When a sinner is justified by God, he receives the Spirit of God. In a manner beyond our understanding, the Spirit lives in us.

Look again at Rom 8:15:

*¹⁵ For you did not **receive** the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but **you have received** the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!” ¹⁶ The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God,*

And the Spirit serves as a seal, or as a down payment or a deposit. The Spirit is the guarantee that God will see us to the end.

Remember Ephesians 1:13-14

¹³ In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, ¹⁴ who is the guarantee^[e] of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it,^[f] to the praise of his glory.

Summary and link

So let us think back at our question. “Will the Saints persevere?” The Biblical answer is an emphatic YES!

It is YES, because a “Saint” is one whom God the Father has loved and elected, whom God the Son has purchased and is interceding on their behalf, and a Saint is one in whom the Holy Spirit dwells and serves as a guarantee of glorification.

Yes, the saints will persevere.

There are some who appear to be saints from the outside, but on the inside, they are not saints. These may be self-deceived or deceiving others, and when they do “leave the faith” they show that they were never part of the Faith.

RC Sproul summarised it this way, talking of salvation: *“If you have it, you never lose it; if you lose it, you never had it”*

Or using biblical language, John 2:19 says:

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 it might become plain that they all are not of us.

So the pretend saint will not persevere, but the real saint will persevere.

And we let the character of God and the Work of God form the basis for that truth.

And yet the Saints are not passive in perseverance. Which brings us to our third and final section: The Practice of Perseverance

Part 3 – The Practice of Perseverance

We need perseverance

We call it perseverance for a reason. We must persevere because the Christian life is difficult, gruelling, and ongoing.

- The life of holiness is hard.
- The life of fighting sin is hard.
- The life of denying self is hard.
- The life of loving others is hard.

The Bible is honest about the need for perseverance, and the confession echoes that honesty.

We must keep in mind that the threefold enemy of the Saint also persevere: The World, The Flesh and The Devil are the ongoing factors we fight. And the fight is relentless.

From the Confession

Paragraph 3 makes this statement:

And though they [Talking of the Saints] may, through the temptation of Satan and of the world, the prevalency of corruption remaining in them [indwelling sin or the Flesh], 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,

Need to persevere

We need to persevere!

Satan, the world and the flesh are as persistent as Gravity. They will relentlessly seek to drag us down.

Like on a bike, we need to keep moving forward, or we will fall.

If we are not running, we are walking. If we are not walking, we are crawling. We must persevere to gain victory.

Listen to how our Lord calls us to persevere: Matt 10:21-22

*²¹ Brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death, ²² and you will be hated by all for my name's sake. But the **one who endures** to the end will be saved.*

And then in Matthew 24:12-13

¹² And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. ¹³ But the one who endures to the end will be saved.

Or John 8:31

³¹ So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples,

Persevere in the means

Our lord tells us we must endure, we must abide in His word. We must persevere.

- We must fight sin and pursue holiness.
- We must put off the old tendencies and put on the new tendencies.

- We must be diligent as we read and pray God's word.
- We must repent seriously and every time we sin
- We must seek every opportunity to strengthen our faith.
- We must work hard for His purposes

In short, we must make use of the means of Grace and persevere in them. Not just try them out, but persevere in them.

Yes there are those days where we feel like we are “running” in our life of holiness. Thanks to taking part in the means of grace we have the spiritual energy to run, and sin is far behind.

But there are times where we may neglect the means of grace. Our spiritual energy is lower then. We have slowed down. We are walking now, and the influences of Satan and the World are catching up.

And if we continue to neglect the means of grace, there will be days, even seasons, when we are crawling. Spiritual energy is very, very weak. Satan and the world seem to be right with us. Our flesh speaks loudly.

These seasons of neglecting the means of grace take their tole and have their consequences. Listen to how the confession puts it:

[they] 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

they shall renew their repentance and be preserved through faith in Christ Jesus to the end.

The consequences of sin are many and can be life-changing. From the outside, a saint may even deny Christ and act like an unbeliever, but a Saint will continue to crawl. They will persevere. By God's grace, "they shall renew their repentance" and persevere to victory.

To stop persevering in the means of grace has devastating consequences.

Conclusion – Don't give up

Therefore, don't give up.

Be diligent.

Endure through the hardship.

Fight hard.

Persevere in the Means God has provided for you.

Our Lord Jesus Christ is the goal. And that goal enables us to persevere through any hardship.

Whether we are running, walking or crawling.

The one whom God justifies; He will also glorify. He will finish what he started, and the means God has ordained to go from justification to glorification is for us to persevere.

So we must persevere.

Because the basis of our perseverance is the Character and Work of the Triune God we know the Saints will see victory, and so we press on.

We press on with all our might so that we can say, with the Apostle Paul:

¹⁰ But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me. (1 Cor 15:10)

Pray