

# Perserverance of the Saints

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[ 0 : 00 ] Now as we look at this chapter I want us to think particularly about the verses 12 to 14 they'll be well known verses familiar to us and a familiar theme as well but they are amongst the most powerful verses in the New Testament verse 12 of Philippians 3 not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect, but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended, but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forth onto those things which are before I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus If we could sum up these verses in a single phrase, then it would probably be the perseverance of the saints. Now I know that we touched on this, we looked at this subject in January when we were working through that section of the confession of faith and that was one of the chapters of course, chapter 17 and where of course we would read, they whom God have accepted in his beloved effectually called and sanctified by his spirit can neither totally nor finally fall away from this state of grace, but shall certainly persevere there into the end and be eternally saved. And that's what Paul is talking about here. This is not going to be the same sermon as was preached in January, just in case you are wondering. But it is a theme which we do have to revisit at a regular intervals, I think it's fair to say, in our Christian lives. The perseverance, the need to keep going in the Christian walk, in the Christian faith. Because it's one thing to start well, but it's another to keep on going.

Most of you will be aware of that. The acronym which is used to sum up biblical Christianity or sometimes Calvinism as it's referred to, the TUIP acronym, T-U-L-I-P, total depravity. I would start off unconditional election, the means by which God calls. Limited atonement, the application of his precious blood and the application of salvation there.

Irresistible grace, that means by which God calls. And then this, the perseverance of the saints, which Paul is referring to here. I count not myself to have apprehended but this one thing I do. Forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forth unto those things which are before. I press the word, the mark by the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. It's the seal, if you like, of the whole doctrine.

All of which, all the bits of which fit into each other. Total depravity is a given. You know, that's where we start. That's the condition in which we are.

[ 3 : 05 ] That's why we need a saviour. It's the starting point for all of us. But unconditional election and limiting or particular atonement and irresistible grace and there are neither individually nor collectively much use if it were possible for saints having started still to fall away just because the odd one ran out of steam here and there.

That would mean that our salvation was ultimately dependent on us. It would be down to us and how far we could keep going and how much strength we had and then it wouldn't be a work of grace at all if it could all be thrown away at the end just because one or two believers here or there ran out of steam.

Our human frailty is such that this might be a distinct possibility were it not for the fact that such failure after all that God had done for us would be highly dishonouring to God and the Lord is not a God who suffers his name to be dishonoured.

He for the sake of his own glory does not permit his saved and redeemed people to be lost because that would bring dishonour on his name.

Now as I've mentioned many times in the past one of the major differences between reformed Christianity biblical Christianity reformed with a capital R on the one hand and other lesser expressions of Christianity or other false religions of any kind is the fact that true religion or biblical Christianity has God as the centre and soul of all things.

[ 4 : 54 ] All other forms of religion even some of which would call themselves Christian become skewed and distorted by putting man at the centre of things.

Man is for them as the sun around which all of God's plans and the universe must revolve. Man must have liberty to determine his own destiny.

Man must have a fair chance. Man should be the object of God's pity and indulgence which for some extent of course he is. And if God does not measure up to man's expectations then God must be dragged as it were before the bar of man's judgment.

A frequent expression of this man centre ideology is the belief that man should be in control of whether or not he himself should be saved.

It should be up to me. It should be down to what I do and how I behave and how I choose to believe. It should be in my hands. Well of course if it was in our hands.

[ 6 : 01 ] not a single one of us would ever be saved. Biblical Christianity puts God firmly at the centre of the universe sovereign over all things supreme in glory and the one to whom everything else and everyone else must be repent.

It is we who live our lives by his leave not the other way around. And this is a distortion that people often fall into the trap of me.

That's what I decide for God what I do and God has to measure up to my expectations and I enter into some kind of deal with God. No you don't. It is the Lord who is in control of all things.

The universe is God centred not man centred. And yes God is incredibly patient with man. He is indulgent even to the point of sometimes spoiling man you would think with all the good that he does for us.

He has great pity. He has great mercy. But at the end of the day it is God who is in charge not man. Now reformed Christianity such as we would seek to follow means that which has been reformed in the light of God's word.

[ 7 : 25 ] It's not just about changing it here and changing it there reforming it to suit this taste of the flavor of the month. It is reformed in the light of God's word to make its doctrine and practice conformable to scripture.

Now many different kinds of Christian teaching would claim this but so many fall down in this failing to put God at the center.

If we put man at the center God is little more than a kind of spiritual gopher, a celestial slave to do our bidding and to be punished for failure by our refusing to believe in him.

He doesn't measure up to what we want and we say that's it God, I'm not going to believe in you. I choose not to believe in such a God who won't do this or who won't do that or who doesn't measure up to what I want.

I just won't believe in a God like that as though we're somehow meeting out punishment to God by refusing to believe in him. Poor little God supposedly desperate for our crumbs of ingratitude.

[ 8 : 33 ] But this of course is holy for us because it is taught nowhere in scripture. What is taught in scripture is a God who is over all things and supreme in power and majesty and authority and justice and glory.

You don't mess with God. He is almighty and yet of tender love who for the sake of his own glory will act in mercy and graciousness to those who deserve nothing of the kind because in doing so and this is the point of it all in doing so he glorifies his name as well as benefiting them.

What God does he does for his own glory. Ultimately we benefit from it but God does it for his glory and God is glorified in doing of the otherwise impossible.

If God does something that maybe man could do well it's no big deal in one sense. You know I remember how the Egyptian sorcerers and magicians attempted to imitate what Moses did by the power of one.

You know turn the Nile into blood. Oh we can do it as well. Or maybe his staff was saying oh look we've got snakes here too. And they tried to imitate what he did.

[ 10 : 01 ] But eventually the relentless action of God in plague after plague after plague. They could not stand for it. They couldn't imitate it.

They couldn't pretend anymore. God is glorified in doing that which is otherwise impossible save by his means. And that means that he will do various things.

He will show great patience when perhaps man doesn't deserve patience because he is glorified in showing how patient he is. If you think of Exodus again in chapter 32 where the Lord is

understandably crossed with the Israelites after they worshipped the golden calf.

Then the Lord spake unto Moses I have seen this people and behold it is a stiff neck people. Now therefore let me alone that my wrath may wax fought against them and that I may consume them and I will make of thee says to Moses a great nation.

And Moses besought the Lord his God and said Lord why did thy wrath wax fought against thy people which thou hast brought forth out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand.

[ 11 : 09 ] Wherefore should the Egyptians speak and say for mischief did he bring them out to slay them in the mountains and to consume them from the face of the earth. Turn from thy fierce wrath and repent of this evil against thy people.

Remember Abraham, Isaac and Israel thy servants to whom thou swearest by thine own self and said unto them I will multiply your seed as the stars of heaven and all this land that I have spoken of will I give unto your seed and they shall inherit it forever and the Lord repented of the evil which he thought to do unto his people.

And likewise again if we think of Ezekiel where we've got a similar kind of situation. Ezekiel 36 from verse 20 where we read when they entered into the heathen where they went.

They profaned my holy name said God when they said to them these are the people of the Lord and have gone forth out of his land but I had pity for my holy name which the house of Israel had profaned among the heathen where they went.

Therefore say unto the house of Israel thus said the Lord God I do not this for your sakes O house of Israel but for mine holy name's sake which ye have profaned among the heathen where they went.

[ 12 : 29 ] And I will sanctify my great name which was profaned among the heathen which ye have profaned in the midst of them. And the heathen shall know that I am the Lord said the Lord God when I shall be sanctified in you before their eyes.

But I will take you from among the heathen and gather you out of all countries and will bring you into your own land. You might think well that's God saying he's going to do something nice for his people.

Surely that's a good thing. Yes God does lots of good things. He does lots of nice things. He does things that benefit us that bless us but he doesn't do it ultimately for us.

Yes he does it because he loves us. Yes he helps us because he loves us. He answers our prayers because he loves us but ultimately what he does is for his own glory because God is glorified.

God is glorified in bringing souls back from the brink of a lost eternity to translate them to glory.

[ 13 : 31 ] God is glorified in healing those who had no means of healing and bringing back from the dead like Lazarus those who have been dead in the grave for days.

God is glorified in the resurrection. God is glorified in the ascension. God is glorified in Christ coming again. All that he does he does for his glory.

We enter into that. We get the benefit the blessing of that because he desires to save sinners such as we are but ultimately it is for his glory that he acts.

grace. It cannot be to the glory of God's great name then to have his elect begin in faith only to end in perdition but rather as Philippians if we're to go back to chapter 1 we see verse 6 being confident of this very thing that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.

Now we've often made reference in the past to the parable of the sower and how almost every kind of soil produced growth or nutrition of some kind you know either for the birds or the birds of the air came and pecked up all the stuff that fell by the wayside but at least the birds got some good out of it you know they got fed by it they got benefit from it the sower didn't get any benefit but the birds got some feeding out of it you know or if it sprang up a little you know there was some little side of growth in the shallower rocky soil you know making a start is comparatively easy keeping on is more difficult the seed was ever the same but the soils were different but as we've mentioned many times in the past good soil was that upon which the farmer had labored it is not the beginning but the completing the perfecting of the growth which is seen to be the work of

[ 15 : 35 ] God none come to fullness of fruition without him Hebrews 3 we read at verse 14 for we are made partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end it's one thing to begin but it is quite another to complete the work which God has begun only he is able to do it only he is glorified in the

perseverance of the saints in the completion of the course which we run the perseverance of the saints is not dependent upon our efforts but like you know almost all the other heads of what we mentioned just there you know biblical Christianity the tulip doctrine you know almost all the others are likewise a work of grace total depravity isn't a work of grace that's that's all us that's all down to ourselves but yes unconditional election is a work of grace limited atonement is a work of grace irresistible grace is grace for solidify the perseverance of the saints is likewise a work of grace it's a work of the Lord as with you know flying if people say oh did you go to Glasgow or did you go to England and did you fly and they don't mean did you jump out of the air and flap your arms and hope for the best and did you get on a plane and did you go to the airport and did you do it that way as with flying the plane flies we don't fly but you know we we say that we fly when we travel in it we go up the steps we get in the plane and shut the doors the air hostess does all the safety announcement the pilot starts it all goes along the runway up it goes and it flies and because we are in it we say oh yeah flew but it wasn't us that flew it was the plane and it's going to fly with or without us it's going to schedule it's going to time table it's going to keep to its journey it's going to complete its program whether we're on board or not and it's so much like grace that the lord is going to be glorified whether we accept this free offer of salvation or not the plane will fly with or without us and if we climb aboard we say it's we who fly but the means by which we fly is elsewhere it's not really down to us is it it's down to the plane it is Christ who makes it possible for us to be saved Hebrews 10 verse 14 for by one offering he hath perfected forever them that are sanctified now the only aspect of you know biblical doctrine biblical Christianity isn't a work of grace is the person it's total depravity that's totally of us that's a work of man the rest though is God's response to it God's dealing with our depravity God's grace dealing with our reality the fact that we are saved it's all what the Lord does likewise in perseverance the only hiccups and falterings are due to our sin and failure and these the Lord will certainly just die you know when we get to communion times and we've not long had a communion of course and we would have read in 1st Corinthians chapter 11 verse 32 when we are judged we are chastened of the Lord that we should not be condemned with the world when we're judged we're chastened of the Lord he deals with our our mistakes our sins our faults our failures he does chastise us he does discipline us in love and likewise it's believers of whom we read 1st Peter chapter 1 verses 5 and 9 it's believers who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time it's believers who are receiving the end of your faith even the salvation of your souls it's all the work of God but wait a minute haven't we got a response to make well of course we do as with flying or sailing or going on a ferry or whatever we must be obedient to the commands and instructions of the captain and his crew we must do nothing to jeopardise the vessel or the aircraft or the other passengers and if we do what happens not only will we be ejected or put down at the next port of call and put off the aircraft or the ferry but we will simply be banned from travelling we won't be allowed to get on their ferries or their planes anymore if we are marked down with somebody who habitually causes trouble for other passengers or refuses to obey the instructions of the staff or the crew it's simply too dangerous for them to allow people like us to jeopardise the lives and the safety of others and will simply not be allowed to travel we will lose the privilege and the opportunity that was ours if we look at Hebrews 3 we go back to that chapter we read verse 14 of a minute ago when all we are made partakers of Christ we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end that chapter is talking about the Israelites whose carcasses fell in the wilderness they'd come out of Egypt and yet through their disobedience through their rebellion almost all of them didn't get into the promised land only two of them Joshua the son of man and Caleb the son of Jephunneh they got in but nobody else did not even Moses set foot west of the Jordan all the rest fell in the wilderness they perished in the wilderness now why they made a brilliant start they made a spectacular start a spectacular beginning a red seed parted for them to go out through the middle of it and they went out in the wake of these ten plagues and hail and fire falling from heaven and the plague of the firstborn and the darkness and the Passover and all they had and they spoiled the Egyptians and they laid them with gold and pearls and precious stones and they went out way down with all the riches of Egypt they made a spectacular beginning but all but two of them perished by the wayside because of hardness of heart unbelief they gave up on God they got tired of waiting we see in verse 19 of [ 22 : 36 ] Hebrews 3 so we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief and this is what happens when the weariness or the tired of waiting sets in unbelief begins to creep in and as it

creeps in it has a sort of frosting effect a colding effect on the warmth of our hearts and so we begin to grow cold in our love for the Lord and what is it Jesus says because iniquity shall abound the love of many shall wax cold soon gets in and it does its damage and that's the truth of it we see they made a great beginning but they didn't carry on to conclusion because of unbelief hardness of heart they gave up on God they didn't persevere to the end and that's what we must never do as they did we must never grow weary of following the Lord weary of trusting in him we mustn't allow our love to grow cold we mustn't cease to put one foot in front of the other to keep on persevering but rather what we read in 2nd Peter in chapter 1 verse 5 besides this giving all diligence add to your faith virtue and to virtue knowledge and to knowledge temperance and to temperance patience and to patience godliness and to godliness brotherly kindness and to brotherly kindness charity for these things be in you and abound in it you that ye shall not be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord

Jesus Christ but he that lacketh these things is blind and can't see a far off and have forgotten that he was purged from his old sins where father father other brethren give diligence to make your calling and election sure but if you do these things you shall never fall and these things that people disguise are not superhuman virtues add to your faith virtue your strength your virtue knowledge increase your knowledge keep in with the word of God the knowledge temperance self-control the temperance patience taking time waiting for one another not just jumping to hasty conclusions the patience godliness again taking time with the Lord the godliness brotherly kindness seeking to help fellow Christians the brotherly kindness charity seeking to help those who aren't Christians but out with the brother and sister bond of God of Christianity if these things be in you and abound in it you you'll never fail each one seems insignificant in itself I used the illustration in the past I remember of course about the games we sometimes play in the congregation on the wrapping up with the toilet rolls and the mummy making mummies of people that way and you know how thin and how easily broken the paper of these toilet rolls is but when you make layer upon layer upon layer around something it becomes stronger difficult to break out of you just keep on wrapping thin layer upon thin layer upon thin layer this is what

Peter's talking about day by day each individual day in your Christian life will seem insignificant and the devil will whisper in you it doesn't really matter if you read your Bible today you can do it tomorrow but he will make sure that tomorrow something else will get in the way something else will disturb will prevent will obstruct you from seeking the Lord and making time and having the opportunity and he will always tell you can do it tomorrow you can do it later he's not so stupid as to say to you no never read your Bible again all he'll say is you don't have to pray just now you just don't have to do it tonight today you know time and after morning just just let today go past do it do it another time just just keep putting it off and once you establish that negligence that day it's easier to have the negligence the next day likewise if you make sure you know Satan gets banished and you go diligently to the prayer and to the word and you seek to build and spread just a little thin layer that's all it is a little thin layer day by day layer upon layer line upon line precept upon precept binds you the more closely into the Lord makes it harder for

Satan to get in there between you and the Lord but each little day of negligence just opens up the gap a wee bit more one day is not going to threaten your salvation that is absolutely true one day is not going to undo a lifetime of faithfulness but it can be the beginning of loosening off the screws of chipping the cement out between the bricks little by little drip drip drip effect of weakening what once was strong just do it while it's easy you know it's easier to cut the grass when it's still short or is it is it easier to do it when you let it become a jungle just keep it down okay this is me talking here but even so keep it down do it while it's easy little by little stage by stage line by line this is what Peter's talking about add to your faith virtue and to virtue knowledge to knowledge temperance to temperance patience to patience godliness to godliness brotherly kindness brotherly kindness charity if these things be in you and abound they make you shall neither be barren nor unfruitful you'll persevere you'll keep going little by little layer upon layer day by day work at it hold fast to it study to show thyself approved and above all persevere because you do it not in your own strength but in the strength of the one who said this

Jesus tells us in john 10 verse 28 i give unto them eternal life and they shall never perish neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand my father which gave them me is greater than all and no man is able to pluck them out of my father's hand it is not you who labor ultimately it is the lord it is not your work it is his so hold fast to it stick with the lord if you are in christ then keep on persevering

for the greatest of all incentives because you know you are going to win now if an athlete or a competitor knows in advance that they're going to win let's say you're you're doing a marathon or something and you're you finally left all the other competitors behind it and here you can see the you can see the finishing tape up ahead of you and you're just about finished and you've got almost no strength left but you know your nearest competitor is a mile behind you and there's the finishing tape you know you're going to win so does that make you think oh jeez well i better just stop here for a for a wee minute and have a rest and oh just i've just got no strength there or does the knowledge that the finishing tape is just there and that you are going to win all it takes now is cross it does that not good that extra little boost of pride and hope and determination to go on with every last ounce you've got because you know that all that you expend all that you give is going to be successful is going to be gloriously victorious you know you're going to win that's why we persevere does that knowledge make you more or less desiring and determined to compete we're not there yet we haven't finished the roots yet but by god's grace we are on the way and by that same election and atonement and grace we shall persevere we're not there yet but just as paul described not as though i had already attained either were already perfect but i follow after if that i may apprehend that for which also i am apprehended of christ jesus brethren i count not myself no apprehended but this one thing i do forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forth onto those things which are before i press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of god in christ jesus that is what it is all about now yesterday in the lord's day morning we looked briefly we touched only on the subject of heaven but if we are going to be there we have to persevere upon the earth that's what it's all about seeing him as he is and being with him in glory unspeakable the prize of the high calling of god in christ jesus it's heaven it's the new jesus it's the prize of seeing him as he is of being with him for all eternity in glory unspeakable and love everlasting forever and forever that's what we press on for that is the ultimate reason for the perseverance of the saints that is great of the disciples you and joining the lord of our who have been WiFi because he's all of us fighting for over tou dots and to onto the middle side and for that the people in the right and by his way

[ 32 : 41 ] he's all um of theεΙα what is yourtimer i'm for therian ■■■■ that's exactly right i