

Grounds of Perseverance

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[0 : 00] Well, if you have a copy of the 1689 Baptist Confession, please turn with me to chapter 17 on the perseverance of the perseverance of the saints.

! This is because the gifts and callings of God are without repentance.

Therefore, He continues to beget and nourish in them faith, repentance, love, joy, hope, and all the graces of the Spirit that lead to immortality.

Though many storms and floods arise and beat against them, they shall never be able to take them off that foundation and rock which by faith they are fastened upon.

Even though through unbelief and temptations the sight and sense of the light and love of God may be clouded and obscured for a time, yet God is still the same. They shall be sure to be kept by the power of God unto salvation, where they shall enjoy their purchased possession, for they are engraved upon the palms of His hands, and their names have been written in the book of life from all eternity.

[1 : 36] Today, we'll look at just the first two sentences of this paragraph, which can be divided into two parts. First, we'll see the subjects of perseverance.

In other words, who are the people who will persevere? And second, we'll see the promise that's given to those people. What is the reward of persevering? And we'll see how far we get.

So, this chapter begins, those whom God has accepted in the beloved. Now, this might seem like a strange way for the confession to begin.

In a chapter on perseverance, you might expect them to say something like, those who persevere to the end. You might expect them to echo Jesus who said, the one who endures to the end will be saved.

After all, we have many passages in Scripture. To this effect, Hebrews 3.14 says, For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end.

[2 : 43] In 2 Timothy 2.12, Paul writes, If we endure, we will also reign with Christ Jesus. If we're thinking about the topic of perseverance, it seems quite natural that our minds would immediately go to those people who are actively persevering.

I mean, it's right there in the title, of the perseverance of the saints. And yet, this chapter of the confession essentially begins with God, not with the persevering saint.

Those whom God has accepted. I believe this is very intentional on the part of the framers. You see, the Christian life is not first grounded in what we do for God or how we respond to God, but what God has done for us.

And in this case, He has accepted us. That's the language of divine favor. He has received us. He has welcomed us. He has reconciled us.

And if we're going to understand the saints' perseverance, we must understand first and foremost that no one perseveres without first being accepted by God.

[4 : 02] Well, that raises the question, on what grounds does God accept anyone? Now, obviously, this can't be universal or all-inclusive.

Otherwise, there wouldn't be any teachings in the Bible about hell or eternal judgment or the wrath of God. For example, in Matthew 25, Jesus spoke about His second coming when He will divide His sheep from the goats.

These are two distinct groups of people. As for the sheep, He'll say, Come, you who are blessed by My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.

But He'll say something starkly different to the goats. He'll say, Depart from Me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.

It's a popular notion that we're all God's children and He loves us all equally. And what is either intentionally or unintentionally insinuated is a subtle form of universalism.

[5 : 15] If we say everyone is God's child and He loves everyone precisely the same, what do you suppose most people will infer from that? Well, they'll assume then that everyone must be saved and will go to heaven, except maybe Hitler.

I suppose if you're terrible enough, God won't accept you, but most people should be okay. That's not what the Word of God teaches. We are not accepted by default.

Listen to what Paul writes in Ephesians 2. And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work and the sons of disobedience, among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

We were by nature children of wrath. Elsewhere, Paul says we were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds.

In Romans 5, he says, we begin under the wrath of God and are His enemies. And as Psalm 130, verse 3 says, if you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?

[6 : 47] Clearly, we do not begin in an accepted position. It's quite the contrary. So how then are we accepted by God?

Well, we are accepted in the beloved. What does that mean? Well, first of all, notice the preposition. We are accepted in.

In what? Well, it's not in ourselves. It's in the beloved. Well, who or what is the beloved? For that, turn in your Bible to Ephesians chapter 1.

Ephesians chapter 1. The framers of the confession are borrowing directly from the King James Version of Ephesians 1.

However, I'll read it from the ESV. Paul writes, Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him.

[8 : 01] In love, He predestined us for adoption to Himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of His will, to the praise of His glorious grace with which He has blessed us in the Beloved.

Now, the King James Version reads, wherein He hath made us accepted in the Beloved. Or, the phrase could read, He accepted us in the One whom He loves.

Do you remember what God the Father said about God the Son at His baptism? He said, This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased.

And what did He say about His Son at the transfiguration? This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased. So, when the Apostle Paul refers to the Beloved, he's talking very specifically about the Lord Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, the second person in the Trinity.

And notice what both Paul and the Confession state. Sinners are accepted by God only in Jesus Christ, the Beloved, not through or by, but in.

[9 : 26] What does that mean? Well, it's pretty easy to miss, but it happens to be one of Paul's favorite ways of talking about believers or Christians.

Over and over and over again, some have estimated more than 150 times throughout his epistles, Paul loves to use that phrase in Christ or in Him.

And he uses that phrase as a kind of shorthand for the believer's union with Christ, this profoundly intimate relationship with Him.

Every saving benefit of redemption can be ours only if we are in Christ. Listen to what John Calvin said.

As long as Christ remains outside of us and we are separated from Him, all that He has suffered and done for the salvation of the human race remains useless and of no value to us.

[10 : 29] In other words, it's not enough that Christ was incarnated. It's not enough that He lived a sinless life. It's not enough that He died. It's not even enough that He rose again.

If we are to benefit from His incarnation, His life, His death, and His resurrection, we must first be united to Him. We must be joined to Him for all of the benefits that He procured to benefit us personally.

Put another way, His righteousness must become our righteousness. His death must become our death. His resurrection must become our resurrection.

It's only in Him that His inheritance becomes our inheritance. This is what we sometimes call federal headship. Think of Romans 5.19 where Paul writes, For as by the one man's disobedience, Adam, the many were made sinners.

So by the one man's obedience, Jesus, the many will be made righteous. We are born in Adam, which is why we are, by nature, children of wrath.

[11 : 43] But, if we are united to Christ, if we are in Christ, well, by the one man's obedience, the many will be made righteous. Now the obvious question then is, how do we become united to Christ?

We'll look again in Ephesians 1. God blesses us in Christ by choosing us before the world even began, predestinating that He would adopt us into His family, thereby accepting or receiving us not on the basis of our worth or merit, but on the basis of Christ's worth and merit.

God is accepting us only because He accepts His perfect Son. And by His own sovereign decree, He joins us to His Son in this vital, eternal union.

How so? Look down at verse 11. In Him, there's that phrase again, we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of Him, who works all things according to the counsel of His will, so that we, who were the first to hope of Christ, might be to the praise of His glory.

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, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it to the praise of His glory.

[13 : 25] Believing, faith, this is God's ordained means for bringing His elect people into union with His beloved. Faith is how we're joined to Christ.

And once we're joined to Christ, He becomes ours. Everything that He has becomes ours. His righteousness, His death, His resurrection, His inheritance. That's why Paul can write to the Romans, children, that is, children of God, then heirs, heirs of God, and fellow heirs with Christ.

His history becomes our history, if you will, and His future becomes our future. We're joined to Him. And by the way, without this union with Christ, without God accepting us in His Son, there is no perseverance.

You can't finish a race you haven't even started running. And that's why the chapter begins this way. And following the pattern of Paul's teaching in Ephesians 1, the framers of the confession are very quick to stress God's role in this union rather than the saints' role in this union because that's precisely what Paul does.

God blessed us. God chose us. God predestined us. God's grace provided the means of forgiveness. You see it all there in Ephesians 1. It was according to God's purpose.

[14 : 51] It was God's plan. Some of it is even repeated before Paul ever gets around to mentioning that, oh, by the way, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in Him, of course the saint is involved in this union, but let's not put the cart before the horse.

Let's give credit where credit is due, if not for God and His blessing and choosing and predestinating and grace and so on, there are no believers accepted by God in His Son.

That's why this chapter of the confession begins the way it does. Now, if you spend enough time studying through the confession, you'll find that it's far more saturated with Scripture than the few Bible references in the footnotes would indicate.

This chapter starts with God, not necessarily the saints who persevere, because the Bible itself starts with God. Plus, you do not have persevering saints apart from God doing all that was necessary to first make us accepted in the Beloved.

And just as a side point before we move on, if you ever find yourself struggling with assurance of your salvation, don't look to yourself.

[16 : 19] You know, Paul writes, nothing will be able to separate us from the love of God. Why? Because the love of God, he says, is in Christ Jesus, our Lord.

He loves us, not because we're inherently lovable, but because He loves His Son. And we are united as believers to His Son.

So if we struggle with any kind of doubts or fears, the best thing we can do is look outward by looking to Jesus, who eternally secured God's love for us.

What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him graciously give us all things?

Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? 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.

[17 : 28] Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Always, always look to Christ. Next, the confession further elaborates on those whom God has accepted in the Beloved.

And once again, the saints, God's people, are the subjects here, but the framers are still highlighting what God has done. Those whom God has accepted in the Beloved and effectually called.

Now, you'll notice the confession doesn't have any Bible references for this first line. There are no references to look up and see what they mean by accepted in the Beloved or effectually called or sanctified by the Spirit or given the precious faith of the elect.

And I think that's primarily because they've already addressed these issues. You and I are starting with chapter 17, which means we're skipping over the first 16 chapters of the confession.

But if we were to go back and read the previous chapters, we'd see all of these subjects addressed in great detail with Bible references included. So keep that in mind if you happen to study the confession more on your own.

[18 : 49] Well, what does the confession mean by effectually called? Well, we don't have to guess because the confession has an entire chapter on the effectual call of God.

And here's what it says. Those whom God has predestinated to life, He is pleased in His appointed and accepted time effectually to call by His Word and Spirit out of that state of sin and death in which they are by nature.

He calls them to grace and salvation by Jesus Christ. He enlightens their minds spiritually and savingly to understand the things of God. He takes away their heart of stone and gives them a heart of flesh.

He renews their wills and by His almighty power determines them to that which is good. He effectually draws them to Jesus Christ yet in such a way that they come most freely being made willing by His grace.

By using the word effectual, the confession is doing two things. First, it's highlighting that this particular call of God is positively effective.

[20 : 05] It always accomplishes its intended result. That's what the word effectual means. And second, the confession is distinguishing between God's always effective call and His general call.

Let me show you what I mean. In Matthew 22, Jesus tells the parable of a wedding feast. He says, the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son and sent his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding feast, but they would not come.

Then the king sends out more servants to call those very same people to come to the wedding, but they still won't come. Now, skipping over some of the details, the king finally says, well, forget about those who were originally invited.

I want you to go out and find people anywhere you can. I don't care who they are and invite them to come, which some do. And Jesus concludes the parable this way, for many are called, but few are chosen.

If we were to find a random group of people somewhere, maybe we walk into the local Walmart and we begin preaching the gospel, the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ, how many people would respond in repentance and faith?

[21 : 34] How many do you think would confess their sins and turn to Christ? After all, that's what we're calling them to do, right? Would none of them respond? Would some of them respond?

Would all of them respond? would some of them respond? You don't have to be a reformed Baptist. You don't even have to be a Calvinist to know that people will not inevitably respond just because you issue a gospel call.

The Lord himself preached this message. Whoever hears my word and believes in him who sent me has eternal life. But the apostle John then looks back over the Lord's ministry and he says he came to his own people and his own people did not receive him.

Yet, the Bible also makes it clear that there is a call that is always effective. It is always effectual. It is a divine summons from God that always brings about what it commands.

Always. This is the call we find mentioned in Romans 8. Those whom God predestined he also called. And those whom he called he also justified.

[22 : 51] And those whom he justified he also glorified. Clearly, the calling mentioned there must be an effectual call because it inevitably, according to Paul, leads to justification and ultimately, glorification.

It cannot be a general call because not everyone who hears the gospel believes and is justified. Right? You see, the mistake many people make is in thinking that God leaves us to initiate whatever is necessary for personal salvation.

It's presented as though God just sits back and he waits for us to come to him when the reality is we would never come to him unless he first compelled us to come through an effectual calling.

In John 6, verse 44, Jesus said, no one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.

Now, to be clear, that word draw does not mean to merely invite someone. This is not a general call that God sends out indiscriminately.

[24 : 10] It's not an indiscriminate invitation to all the world to repent and turn to Christ for salvation. No, this word means to pull or to drag. It's used to describe what fishermen are doing when they're dragging their full nets to shore.

It's really a word that suggests power, not mere persuasion. And this becomes even clearer when you read the entire verse.

The full verse says, no one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him and I will raise him on the last day. Like Romans 8, this call, this drawing has a definitive conclusion.

Paul says the calling inevitably leads to one's glorification. Jesus says this drawing leads to one's resurrection on the last day. In other words, to be called in this way is to be utterly saved.

If one is effectually called, he or she will be resurrected on the last day. He or she will be glorified. End of story. Neither Jesus nor Paul leaves room for someone who is called in this way and yet not resurrected and glorified.

[25 : 29] Think of Lazarus. He had been dead for four days when Jesus arrived at his grave and then Jesus stands outside the tomb and shouts, Lazarus, come out!

And he came out. It was an effectual call. It was a divine command that could not fail. Now, someone might argue, wait a minute, that's not the same thing.

Jesus was performing a miracle by bringing a dead man to life. When he calls sinners to repentance and faith, we're not dead. We're walking, talking, breathing, living human beings.

It's not the same thing. Oh, but it is the same thing. There's a reason God has to draw us before we'll come to Christ.

Until he does, until he says, sinner, come out, we are spiritually dead. We need his miraculous power just as much as Lazarus did.

[26 : 31] Listen again to Paul from Ephesians 2. And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked. But God, being rich in mercy because of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ.

By grace you have been saved. You see, we were absolutely dead. And while God works through the general call of the gospel, that is the invitation that's offered to all creatures everywhere, an invitation alone cannot raise the dead.

God So unless God issues a divine summons for the sinner to come out of the spiritual grave, if you will, he won't come. He can't come. But if God does issue that summons, he will come without fail.

And that's the difference between the general call and the effectual call. The general call can be rejected. It can be rejected all day long. But the effectual call can never be rejected.

When the same God who said, let there be light, says, let there be faith, guess what? There is faith. While talking with some of the Jews in John 10, Jesus said, I told you and you do not believe.

[28 : 05] The works that I do in my Father's name bear witness about me, but you do not believe because you are not among my sheep. My sheep hear my voice and I know them and they follow me.

I give them eternal life and they will never perish and no one will snatch them out of my hand. If you look back at the text, the Jews asked him to say it plainly and I don't know whether he could have said it any more plainly than that.

This is what theologians call monergism. meaning the work of one. It's God alone who initiates salvation.

It is God alone who brings the dead sinner to life. It's God alone who draws us to Christ. That's what Paul meant when he said God saved us and called us to a holy calling not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began.

Well that puts to rest any notion that we contribute the first step toward salvation. God purposed to call us before we had faith, in fact, before we took our first breath, in fact, even before time itself.

[29 : 31] Now getting back to the topic at hand, perseverance, the point the confession makes here is twofold. Those who persevere have been effectually called by God.

And those who have been effectually called by God will persevere. Obviously, again, one can't finish a race that he hasn't started, that is, unless God has first called him to life.

And on the flip side of that, God will not leave his redemptive work incomplete. He will not call a sinner to life and allow him somehow to lose that life along the way.

As Philippians 1.6 says, he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion. He will finish it. next, the confession reminds us that those accepted in the beloved are not only effectually called, but also sanctified by the Spirit or by his Spirit.

The word sanctified comes from the Latin sanctus, meaning holy. So, to sanctify is to make holy. It's to set apart something or someone unto God.

[30 : 55] Think back to the Old Testament when the vessels for the temple or the garments of the priesthood were sanctified. In fact, the whole nation of Israel was sanctified. They were set apart from every other nation unto God.

Well, under the new covenant, the Lord goes much further than external rituals or ceremonial separation. He sanctifies hearts and minds and souls.

I mean, he changes people from the inside out. You may remember the promise of the new covenant that was given through the prophet Ezekiel. The Lord said, I will give you a new heart and a new spirit I will put within you.

And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and listen to this last part, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.

You see, after so many generations failed to sanctify themselves or to keep themselves sanctified, that is, set apart from the rest of the ungodly world, God comes along and says, you know, I'll take care of the problem at the root.

[32 : 13] I'll change my people's hearts. And when I change their hearts, when I sanctify the very core of them by my spirit, they will be different in every way.

They will walk in my statutes, and they will be careful to obey my rules, which they were not able to do on their own. In other words, when God saves someone, he doesn't walk away saying, okay, then I guess I'll see you in heaven.

You know, bide your time, have some fun, I'd really like to see you doing some things in this life that would honor me, but if you don't, well, I guess I've already chosen you, my son died for you, and you said you believed, so my hands are tied, once saved, always saved.

In light of the church's ongoing debates over perseverance or once saved, always saved, it's really important that we understand this.

And it's really helpful that the confession includes this mention of sanctification. In fact, let's turn back a few chapters and see what the confession has to say about sanctification.

[33 : 27] Here's what they write. Those who are united to Christ, effectually called and regenerated, having a new heart and a new spirit created in them through the virtue of Christ's death and resurrection, are also further sanctified in a real and personal way.

This sanctification is through the same power by His word and spirit dwelling in them. The dominion of the whole body of sin is destroyed, and the various evil desires that arise from it are more and more weakened and put to death.

At the same time, the graces that accompany salvation are more and more strengthened and developed, leading to true holiness. without this holiness, no one will see the Lord.

This sanctification extends to every part of man, yet it remains complete in this life. Some remnants of corruption remain in every part, and from this arises a continual and irreconcilable war, the flesh warring against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh.

In this war, the remaining corruption may for a time prevail, yet through the continual supply of strength from the sanctifying spirit of Christ, the regenerate part overcomes.

[34 : 51] Therefore, the saints grow in grace, perfecting holiness in the fear of God, pressing on to a heavenly life in obedience to all the commands which Christ as head and king has given them in his word.

So you'll notice that the confession is very careful not to suggest that God's indwelling spirit destroys sin within us entirely. It says the dominion of sin is destroyed.

And consequently, this weakens the evil desires of the flesh within us and strengthens our desire to grow in grace and holiness. So the spirit's sanctifying work doesn't mean we suddenly stop sinning altogether, we do not instantly become perfect, but it does mean we are free from sin.

Here's how Paul put it in Romans 6. Thanks be to God that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed and having been set free from sin have become slaves of righteousness.

Before conversion and before the spirit's sanctifying work, we had no choice. Sin was our master. We were slaves to sin. And we will continue to struggle with sin.

[36 : 17] But as the confession says, yet through the continual supply of strength from the sanctifying spirit of Christ, the regenerate part, the born again part, the living part, overcomes.

So as our flesh wars against the spirit within us, the spirit will ultimately prove victorious. Sadly, many Christians, many Baptists in particular, have held on to some of the essential doctrines of their Protestant heritage while abandoning others.

For example, they may still believe in justification by faith alone, but they may not believe in the ongoing progressive sanctification of God's people, which is why they use terminology like eternal security or once saved, always saved, rather than perseverance of the saints.

You see, they've held on to the notion that God will not let one of his saved people be lost, which is biblical, but they've abandoned the doctrine of sanctification, which is to say a believer might profess faith without repentance from sin and without ever growing in holiness.

Now, keep in mind that sanctification, it's not a cherry on top for the believer. This is not a bonus thing. This is not an occasional sometimes thing for some believers.

[37 : 54] This is one of the explicit reasons given in Scripture for God saving us in the first place. Let me read from Romans 8 again.

For those whom God foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son. And those whom he predestined, he also called, and those whom he called, he also justified, and those whom he justified, he also glorified.

So of all the reasons that might be cited for why God saved us, among them must be this, so that we would be conformed to the image of Christ.

That is, in a word, sanctified, set apart unto God, made holy, changed to be like Christ.

In other words, sanctification is not a mere possibility for the believer. It defines the believer. If there's no evidence of sanctification in our lives, a profession of faith is not enough to give us assurance of salvation.

[39 : 11] Paul tells the Corinthians, 2 Corinthians 3, 17, where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom, and we all are being transformed into the same image.

That is, the image of Christ from one degree of glory to another. If God has accepted us in the beloved and effectually called us, he will sanctify us.

In 1 Thessalonians 4, Paul says, for God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness. Now, I'm pretty much out of time.

I didn't get quite as far as I thought I would, but let me quickly connect this back to the subject of perseverance. Again, Jesus said, the one who endures to the end will be saved.

Paul writes, if we endure, we will also reign with Christ. In short, enduring, particularly enduring to the end, implies some degree of sanctification, doesn't it?

[40 : 17] because it suggests that the believer is actively following Christ and walking in faith. We'll continue this next time.

Let's pray. Father, we thank you that our hope does not rest in ourselves, but in Christ, the beloved. God, you have accepted us in him, you have called us by your spirit, you have set us apart for yourself.

So I ask that you would strengthen our faith to persevere and to continue to sanctify us, that our lives might truly reflect the image of your Son. Keep us looking to Christ alone for our assurance and our hope until the day that you bring us safely home.

It's in Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen.