Grace That Perseveres

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[0:00] Turn again to the 17th chapter of the 1689 Baptist Confession as we continue our study of the doctrine of the perseverance of the perseverance of the saints.

! Last time, I made it only as far as the phrase, sanctified by His Spirit, and I'll pick up where I left off.
To summarize, the Confession reminds us that those who are joined to Christ, that is, accepted in the Beloved, and effectually called by God, are also sanctified.
They are set apart unto God. They are made holy. Now, unlike the ritual sanctifications we see throughout the Old Testament, God in the New Covenant sanctifies the very hearts of His people.
Through Ezekiel, the Lord says, 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.
[1:30] And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and be careful to obey my rules. That's Ezekiel 36, verse 26 and 27.

Well, as you can see from that promise, when God changes or sets apart a person's heart, His steps inevitably follow.
He becomes, as Paul tells the Corinthians, a new creation. In 2 Corinthians 5, he says, Obviously, if God has changed the very nature of a person, they will be different.
And we see this internal to external transformation in many places, such as Ephesians 2, which I read from last time. You'll notice the change Paul describes from verse 1 to verse 10.
He begins the passage by saying, 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 in the sons of disobedience.
[2:50] So, Paul says we begin by walking or living one way. We are walking in sin, following the course of this world, and so on. But then he says, But God, who is 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.

And once we have been made alive, what is the practical outworking of that? Well, verse 10. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.
So, we see that a change of heart results ultimately in a change of steps. If we're transformed on the inside by God's grace, our entire lives will be changed.
Our affections will be changed. Our thinking is changed. Our likes and dislikes are changed. It stands to reason, then, that we will not live quite the same way as we did before.
In short, if the Spirit sanctifies the inside, the outside will inevitably be sanctified as well.
[4:13] Now, having said that, I do want to be clear about the fact that the Bible does make a subtle distinction between two facets of our sanctification.

I mean, it's not as though the Apostle Paul or anyone else ever comes along and says, okay, brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant about this. There are two parts to our sanctification. But the distinction is there.
We see it primarily in the verb tenses that are used. One aspect of our sanctification is talked about in the past tense as a one-time monergistic work of God's Spirit.
Another aspect is talked about as a practical, ongoing work of the believer, really, who is striving for holiness. Let me show you. So, in some cases, sanctification is presented in the Bible as a one-time, past tense event.
Take, for instance, Paul's description of the believers in Corinth. At the start of his first letter to them, he writes, Clearly, these are believers.

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[5:36] They've been effectually called. They themselves have called upon the Lord for salvation. They are born again. They are justified. They are saved. And Paul says they were sanctified.

Past tense. It was done. It was finished at some point in the past. Now, later in chapter 6, verse 11, he says, Notice there how he wraps up sanctification with regeneration or the new birth and justification as though it all happens simultaneously or, at the very least, all belongs to the same salvation package, if you will, and was accomplished by the Spirit at a definite moment in the past. This is what some refer to as positional sanctification. And they call it positional because this is the moment our position changes, our status changes, if you will.
We move from the fallen, unredeemed family of Adam to the wholly redeemed family of God. According to John in his first epistle, there are really only two types of people.
There are children of the devil and there are children of God. And this one-time, past tense sanctification is the moment God changes our position from one to the other.
[7:17] He officially and definitively sets us apart unto himself. Now, personally, I'm not prone to use the terminology positional sanctification, mostly because of the unintended consequences.

But I'll come back to that in just a second. The second facet of our sanctification is sometimes called progressive sanctification. This is where the Bible presents our sanctification as an ongoing pursuit of holiness.
For instance, Hebrews 12, 14 says, Strive for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord. Or 2 Corinthians 7, 1.
Let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God. In this case, sanctification is presented as ongoing, not a one-time event.
It's also something we're told to actively pursue, not something God appears to have done one time and it's finished. So that's the subtle distinction the Bible makes regarding sanctification.
[8:37] Now, technically, we could add a third type of sanctification, which is always in the future. So God has sanctified us, we are being sanctified, and we will be utterly, completely, totally sanctified in the future.

But having made this distinction, which is biblical and can be helpful, it also has unintended consequences if misunderstood.
So let's say one understands and readily accepts our positional sanctification, that God joins us to Christ through faith, adopts us into His family, sets us apart, and marks us as holy.
Well, that's all true, it's all biblical, but what if that same person doesn't understand and accept progressive sanctification?
That the true believer should, and better yet, will strive for practical holiness. In other words, he or she will increasingly despise sin and grow in their conformity to Christ.
[9:47] We might simply refer to this as bearing fruit of the Spirit. Well, sadly, many Christians do think this way. While they might understand that positional sanctification is necessary in salvation, they may also reject the notion that God's redeemed people will be progressively, practically sanctified.

And if you're wondering how this relates to the doctrine of perseverance, well, it's this very misunderstanding that leads people to reject the doctrine of perseverance and instead tout phrases like eternal security or once saved, always saved.
Put another way, they believe that Christians are positionally sanctified even if they are never practically sanctified in this life.
As I said, the Bible does make this subtle distinction between the various facets of our sanctification, but at the same time, it shows us that you really cannot have one without the other. I quoted from 1 Corinthians 6. You were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. Well, that verse seems to point to the past tense positional sanctification of the believers in Corinth, but notice what Paul says just before that.
[11:21] Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived, neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.

And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

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Well, let me ask you, is Paul referring exclusively to a change in position or status or did this past tense one-time sanctification produce a very practical change in the Corinthian believers?
Clearly, it's the latter. When the Corinthians were sanctified, they changed drastically. They repented of their sins, evidently. They stopped practicing sexual immorality and idolatry and adultery and so on.
Did they still have room to grow? Well, of course. This sanctification did not make them perfect instantly. As the confession says, this sanctification extends to every part of man, yet it remains incomplete in this life.
[12:51] Some remnants of corruption remain in every part, and from this arises a continual and irreconcilable war, that is, between the Spirit and the flesh.

And yet, this initial sanctification changed the course of their lives entirely. It put them on a path away from sin and toward holiness.
Isn't that what we read in Ephesians 2? We once walked following the course of this world, but God made us alive together with Christ. We were created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.
We walked one way. God sanctified us. And then we began walking another way. In short, positional sanctification is not merely about our position or our status.
It is the starting point of our progressive, ongoing, very practical sanctification that will continue throughout our lives.
[14:03] Think about what Paul said in Philippians 2, verse 12. Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.

He might have said, sanctify yourselves. Strive for that holiness without which no one will see the Lord. But we also want to notice what he said next. For it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.
As God works in a hatred for sin and a desire for holiness, we work it out. It's a fulfillment of that promise made through Ezekiel.
I will put my spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.
Or as Jesus said, my sheep hear my voice and I know them and they follow me.
Now getting back to the confession, I'll read this first statement again. Those whom God has accepted in the beloved, effectually called and sanctified by his spirit and given the precious faith of his elect can neither totally nor finally fall from the state of grace.
[15:21] they shall certainly persevere in it to the end and be eternally saved. Of course they will. That was the promise of the new covenant.

Going way back, the Lord's sheep will follow him. They will be progressively and practically sanctified bearing fruit of the spirit and Jesus says, I give them eternal life and they will never perish.
They will never fall from the state of grace. They will certainly persevere to the end. Well next, the Baptist Confession adds a phrase that's not found in the Westminster Confession.
It says, those who persevere will be given the precious faith of his elect. The framers seem to have borrowed this from the first London Baptist Confession published in 1644.
And once again, we see that the saints, Christians, believers, are the subjects of this text, but the framers are still emphasizing God's gracious work in their lives.
[16:38] This faith did not originate with the saints. It was given by God. As we've seen, Paul's epistle to the Ephesians was probably a front of mind for the authors of the Confession.

Again, we can turn to Ephesians 2 and see that faith is something that is in fact given to the believer. Paul writes in verses 8 and 9, for by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing.
It is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. In Philippians 1, Paul says, it has been granted to you for the sake of Christ to not only believe in him, but also suffer for his sake.
Their faith was granted to them. It was graciously given to them. And after everything else we've considered, this makes sense. If we were, if we begin as spiritually dead, hostile to God, slaves of sin with hearts of stone, how could we have the mind and will to turn to the Lord in faith?
Again, Jesus told some of the Jews, you do not believe because you are not among my sheep. My sheep hear my voice and I know them and they follow me.

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[18:08] They did not believe because they had not been graciously granted that faith. Just as the dead cannot rise on their own or the blind see on their own, the unbelieving heart cannot believe on its own.

This is why the story of Lydia in Acts 16 says, the Lord opened her heart. It could not be by her own doing. Faith itself is the gift of God.
And the confession calls it the precious faith of God's elect. They seem to be borrowing from Peter here in 2 Peter 1 according to the King James Version.
Peter writes, to them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Savior Jesus Christ. It's precious faith.
It's not just faith. It's precious faith. It's valuable, priceless even, because it is the means by which we receive Christ and salvation.
[19:15] John 1 says, to all who did receive Him, that is, Christ, who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God, who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

John 3.16 says, For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.
Galatians 2.16, we know that a person is not justified by works of the law, but through faith in Jesus Christ. So we also have believed in Christ Jesus in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law.
Or Romans 3. The righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.
For there is no distinction, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and are justified by His grace as a gift through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by His blood to be received by faith.
[20:37] This was to show God's righteousness because in His divine forbearance He had passed over former sins. It was to show His righteousness at the present time so that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

So the saints who persevere in addition to being accepted by the beloved or in the beloved, effectually called and sanctified are also given faith.
And as we've seen, faith is how we become children of God. It is how we are justified before God. All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God but we receive the benefits of Christ's atoning work.
We receive redemption itself through faith. Jesus is the justifier of the one who has faith in Him.
Now, all too often we stress the importance of faith.
We talk about the need for faith. We say one cannot be saved apart from faith because this is what the Bible teaches, of course, but we don't always make enough effort to explain what faith is.
[21:53] Maybe you've wondered, how can I know whether I have saving faith? Well, when attempting to define faith, most of us readily think of Hebrews 11.1, right?

Which says, faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. Simply put, faith is trusting what God has said and by trusting we gain assurance and conviction that what God has said is in fact true, whether we can yet see the reality of it or not.
So, for example, if God says we will be with Him when we die, faith is trusting or believing in that promise, that that promise will become a reality though we can't yet see it with our own eyes.
And yet, it produces a conviction and an assurance within us. Or to give you a very simple illustration, I'm always encouraging my children to trust me.
So, we've been at the pool before and my son is very, very cautious in water. He's cautious about everything but he's afraid to go beyond the steps, you know, where he can touch the bottom.
[23:07] And that's even when he's wearing floaties, it doesn't matter. But as I've said to him, I'll hold on to you, I won't let go so you can come out into deeper water with me.

Well, he can't see the outcome if I were to take him out farther. So, if he does let me take him out, that's essentially an act of faith on his part. He's convicted, he's convinced, he's assured without tangible evidence that I can be trusted to do what I say.
Or to give you a biblical example, think of childless Abraham lying under the stars as God says to him, look toward heaven and number the stars if you are able to number them.

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So shall your offspring be. The Bible says Abraham believed the Lord and he counted it to him as righteousness. Abraham believed that the Lord would give him descendants more numerous than the stars despite the fact that Abraham was an old man without any children.
Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. Now, I should clarify though that not all faith is saving faith, is true faith.
[24:36] Consider this line from an earlier chapter in the confession on saving faith. It says, the principal acts of saving faith focus directly on Christ, accepting, receiving, and resting upon him alone for justification, sanctification, and eternal life by virtue of the covenant of grace.

Notice how the confession defines saving faith as having a source, God's grace, and an object, Christ alone. And furthermore, it defines faith as something more than mere knowledge.
It is resting upon Christ alone for salvation. You see, the Bible mentions at least three types of non-saving faith, or perhaps we should call it so-called faith.
Okay? The first is a belief about God that does not submit to him. It does not actually trust in him. James tells us that even the demons believe.
Even the demons believe. They know who Jesus is. They know the facts of the gospel. They're well aware of the power of God and so on, but they don't love God.
[25:51] They don't trust God. They don't rest in him. They rebel against him. The second is a temporary faith.

This is the kind of faith that is merely emotional and circumstantial. That's what we see illustrated in the parable of the sower. In Luke 8, Jesus said, when they hear the word, they receive it with joy, but these have no root.
They believe for a while and in time of testing, fall away. In sports, this is what we call fair weather fans. As long as the team is doing great, they'll root for it, but as soon as it's not, will they move on? Well, some people readily accept Christ given the right circumstances, but they fall away as soon as those circumstances change.
especially when they become difficult. And the third type of non-saving faith is shallow and self-serving. In John 2, verse 23, John writes, now when Jesus was in Jerusalem at the Passover feast, many believed in his name when they saw the signs he was doing.
[27:09] But Jesus, on his part, did not entrust himself to them. There's an interesting turn of phrase there. Believed and entrust are the same word in Greek.

So it could read, many had faith in his name, but Jesus did not have faith in them. Or, many trusted in his name, but Jesus did not trust in them.
Well, if salvation is through faith, and these people believed, as the text says, why did Christ essentially reject them?
Well, it's because they didn't have true, saving faith. They were excited by the miracles they saw Jesus performing, but they were not trusting in him, resting in him for their salvation.
their faith was shallow, it was self-serving, like those who wanted to make Jesus a king after he fed thousands of people by way of a miracle. Well, as soon as those people heard what that miracle was truly about, you remember Jesus said, I am the bread of life.
[28:23] Whoever comes to me shall never hunger. Well, we're told many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him. You see, if he wasn't offering physical food, physical healing, they weren't interested.

And that is not genuine faith. Over the years, I've compiled a number of definitions of faith by various pastors and theologians, and most of them can be summed up in three parts.
Knowledge, assent, and trust. So first, one must know who Christ is and what he has done. That's knowledge.
Romans 10, 17, faith comes from hearing and hearing through the word of Christ. We have to learn something, right? We have to have a knowledge of something.
Second, one must agree that the gospel is true, and not just in their minds as historical facts, but in their hearts.
[29:32] That's assent. Think of Titus 1, 16, where Paul says, some profess to know God, but they deny him by their works. Or think of when God says through the prophet Isaiah, this people draw near with their mouths, but their hearts are far from me.

They may say the right things, but their hearts don't sincerely believe the truth of the gospel. And third, one must rest in Christ alone for forgiveness and for life, that is, trust, which is to

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wholeheartedly believe that there is no other way of salvation, period.
So we say along with Peter, there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven by which men must be saved. We acknowledge that we cannot save ourselves, and we cannot be saved by anything or anyone other than Christ alone.
So, faith has a source, God and His grace. Faith is a gift, not something we conjure up on our own. Faith also has a very firm object, Jesus Christ.
We are trusting, we are resting in Christ alone. And lastly, faith has what I'll call an instrument. And that instrument is empty hands.
[31:08] Empty hands. In genuine, saving faith, we contribute nothing. We have nothing to offer God for our forgiveness.

We have nothing we can add to our salvation. All we can do is go to God empty handed and plead for his mercy. God be merciful to me a sinner.
And only then will Jesus say, I tell you, this man went down to his house justified. Luke 18. So, that's what the confession means by precious faith.
But you'll also notice that phrase, of his elect. It's quite remarkable how much theology the framers could pack into one sentence.
Well, of course, this is a reference to the you in Tulip, unconditional election. Ephesians 1.4 says, God chose us in him before the foundation of the world.
[32:11] Romans 9.11 says, Jacob was chosen and favored by God rather than Esau, though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad, in order that God's purpose of election might continue.

Not because of works, but because of him who calls. In Acts 13, we're told, as many as were appointed or ordained to eternal life, believed.
They believed because God had chosen them, even before the world began. then Paul writes in 1 Thessalonians 1, verses 4 and 5, for we know, brothers, loved by God, that he has chosen you, because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit, and with full conviction.
God chose or elected them, and the proof was that the gospel had a powerful effect among them. like those in Acts 13. They believed because God had appointed them to eternal life.
So in summary, those who persevere are those chosen by God, effectually called by God, given faith by God, joined by God to his Son, and accepted in his Son, and sanctified by God.
[33:45] And again, following the pattern of Scripture, the confession begins by highlighting not what the saints do in terms of perseverance, but what God has done so that his saints can and will persevere.

As Paul writes in Ephesians 1, 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. Next, the confession shows us the outcome. We've seen the grace of God in the lives of the subjects of perseverance, that is, the saints who persevere, and now we see the end, we see the result of what God has done.
Those whom God has accepted in the beloved, effectually called and sanctified by his Spirit, and given the precious faith of his elect, can neither totally nor finally fall from the state of grace.
Now, we'll certainly come back to this because the confession does, but the framers do not mean that Christians will never wander or never fall into sin.
[35:05] sin. We have many, many examples of that in the Bible. I mean, David was a man after God's own heart, right? And yet he fell into terrible sin.

He committed lust and adultery and deception and even murder. Peter, after vowing to never forsake Jesus, I will never forsake you, Lord, did precisely that.
But as Psalm 37, verse 24 says, though he fall, he shall not be cast headlong, for the Lord upholds his hand.
The confession doesn't claim that saints will never fall. It says they can neither totally nor finally fall. fall. They cannot totally fall, meaning they cannot be utterly and completely lost.
Christ will always be interceding for them. The Spirit will always be dwelling within them, teaching them, guiding them, sanctifying them, often convicting them of their sins.
[36:16] Remember what Ephesians 1 says, believers are sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it.

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believers cannot totally fall away, and they cannot finally fall away, which means the end is certain. It's absolute. And that's precisely what Jesus said in John 10. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.
I give them eternal, not temporary, eternal life, and they will never perish. And no one will snatch them out of my hand.
My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are one. So God, by His grace, has this boundary set for believers.
[37:16] He may let us fall into sin for a time, but He will not let us fall totally or finally. In the end, God's people will be held in what the confession calls the state of grace.

I mentioned Peter. He's a tremendous example of this. Despite his horrendous sin in denying Jesus, Jesus had already interceded for him, saying, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail.
And I love this. And when you have turned again, not if, but when you have turned again, no one, not the devil, not even Peter himself, was able to snatch him out of the Lord's hand.
Listen to what Paul says to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians chapter 1. I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus, that in every way you were enriched in him in all speech and all knowledge, even as the testimony about Christ was confirmed among you, so that you are not lacking in any gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Now, what does it mean to neither totally nor finally fall from the state of grace?
[39:13] Next, the confession says, they shall certainly persevere in it, that is in the state of grace, to the end and be eternally saved.

Because you were chosen by God, because you were effectually called by God, given faith by God, accepted in his Son, sanctified by God, you will ultimately remain in his grace and be saved.
Notice that word, certainly. There is no room for doubt or exceptions. He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.
Now, we'll come back to this, but so far the confession has told us what God has done. This is the first mention here of what the saints will do.
They will certainly persevere, or as Jesus said, the one who endures to the end will be saved. But even here, even as the confession speaks of our perseverance, it points back to what God has done and what he is doing.
[40:30] They shall certainly persevere in it, in what? In the state of God's grace, his wonderfully loving, unmerited favor.

God does not choose us, accept us, and all the rest, then leave us to somehow, you know, secure salvation in the end for ourselves.
No, the believer is a believer by God's grace, and he or she remains a believer by God's grace. God's grace. Now, there are many details to be covered, many questions to be answered yet, and that's what the rest of this chapter presents to us.
So we'll come back to it. Let's pray. Father, we thank you that our salvation rests not on our own strength, but on your unchanging grace.
God's grace. You chose us before the foundation of the world. You called us by your spirit. You gave us the precious gift of faith, and you set us apart for yourself.
[41:41] So help us to always remember that the same power that saved us will keep us to the end. When we stumble, Lord, lift us up. When we grow weary, I pray that you would renew our strength.

when our doubts arise, remind us that you are faithful. Help us, Lord, to walk in holiness. Help us to rest in Christ alone until that day that we see him face to face.
And it's in Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen.

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