

Following Jesus Requires Endurance

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[0 : 00] Well, we've come to the end of this series, and I can hardly think of a better way to end a series on following Jesus than to discuss the matter of following Jesus to the end.

When Christ himself spoke about the troubles his disciples would face in this world, he said in Matthew 24, But the one who endures to the end will be saved.

In the parallel passage in Mark's gospel, he says, Brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death, and you will be hated by all for my name's sake, but the one who endures to the end will be saved.

Jesus doesn't exactly paint a rosy picture of the Christian life, does he? But it would be even more accurate to say the Bible doesn't paint a rosy picture of the Christian life, at least not in terms of physical safety and well-being.

In fact, the Bible sets us up to anticipate hardship. I often think about the way Jesus spoke to would-be disciples. He didn't tell them, Follow me, and I can guarantee you health, wealth, and prosperity.

[1 : 54] Your life will be easy from here on out. No, he said things like, If you would come after me, Let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.

For whoever would lose his life would find it or save it. On another occasion, he was speaking to a crowd of people in Luke 14, and he said, If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.

Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it?

Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, This man began to build and was not able to finish. Or what king, going out to encounter another king in war, will not sit down first and deliberate whether he is able, with 10,000, to meet him who comes against him with 20,000?

And if not, while the other is yet a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace. So therefore, anyone of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.

[3 : 28] In that passage, Jesus alerts us to the fact that, number one, discipleship can be hard. It requires self-sacrificial devotion to him.

He compares it to going to battle against an army twice the size of yours. It won't be easy. And number two, he alerts us to the fact that it's all for nothing if we don't finish what we started.

In the first example, we'd be like a man who set out to build a tower only to leave it unfinished. What's the point of starting? In the second example, we'd be like a king sending out troops to the battlefield, getting all the way there to confront the enemy, but then realizing this was a mistake.

So instead of fighting, the king attempts to make peace with his enemy. So the Bible sets us up with an expectation of suffering and hardship in this world.

Yes, there is immense joy to be found in Christ despite the difficulties, but the Bible paints a very realistic picture regarding the Christian life in this fallen world.

[4 : 39] It doesn't give us reasons to anticipate an easy life. quite the opposite. And you know, I feel like I've had this conversation a lot over the last few years, especially since 2020.

I think the church grew very comfortable over the years, perhaps even complacent, living in a predominantly Christian culture. Then as we've watched the culture deteriorate and to some degree or another turn against us, many people have begun to panic.

They feel the hostility rising and frantically ask, what do we do now? And I have often replied with something Jesus said to his disciples just before his death in John 16, 33.

He said, I have said these things to you that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation.

But take heart. I have overcome the world. There's no need to panic. First of all, the Bible has been very clear about the tribulations that Christians would face in this world.

[5 : 52] Perhaps we've been overlooking these warnings because they seemed irrelevant to us. They seem, we seem so far removed from what the Bible is talking about when it talks about persecution and hostility from the world and so on.

Perhaps we've failed to realize that we've been living in an anomaly. The Lord has richly blessed us with peace and prosperity but it hasn't been this way for the church through most of history.

It's still not this way for many Christians throughout the world today. So we shouldn't be surprised by anything we see happening in our nation. And second, I'll say we don't need to panic because Christ has overcome the world.

Yes, in the world we will have tribulation but in Christ we may have peace. Now it may not be physical peace but even better, we have divine supernatural peace.

It's the kind of peace that led martyrs of the past to literally sing God's praises as they burned at the stake. What can possibly explain how a man can sing songs of joy while being burned alive?

[7 : 08] Well, only the peace of Christ can accomplish that. But we've talked, we talked about suffering last time. Today, our subject is perseverance.

How do we follow Jesus all the way to the end? Again, Jesus himself said, the one who endures to the end will be saved. So this excludes the person who seemingly receives the gospel with joy only to fall away when tribulation comes.

It excludes the person whose apparent faith gets choked out by the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches. Jesus is talking about those who persist in the faith, those who persevere, those who overcome the many trials and struggles of this life and remain trusting, following, and resting in Christ until the very end.

Horatius Bonar, probably best known for the hymns he wrote, once preached these words, The road to the kingdom is not so pleasant and comfortable and easy and flowery as many dream.

It is not a bright, sunny avenue of palms. It is not paved with triumph, though it is to end in victory. Determination is glory, honor, and immortality, but on the way there is the thorn in the flesh, the sackcloth, and the cross.

[8 : 42] Recompose later, but labor here. Rest later, but weariness here. Joy and security later, but here endurance and watchfulness, the race, the battle, the burden, the stumbling block, and oftentimes the heavy heart.

As Jesus said, the end is salvation, but what about everything before the end? What about everything leading up to it? He said that would require endurance. That's a word that means to bear up under some kind of weight.

It's to hold firmly when forces are working against you. Again, Jesus is not implying the Christian life will be easy. He's suggesting the opposite. As Bonar says, recompense later, but labor here.

Rest later, but weariness here. Joy and security later, but here endurance. In short, we're talking about the biblical teaching that we often refer to as the doctrine of perseverance, or the perseverance of the saints.

Now, I grew up in a church that held to the five points of Calvinism. Those are the doctrines encapsulated by the TULIP acronym. Total depravity, unconditional election, limited atonement, or definite atonement as I prefer, irresistible grace, and perseverance of the saints.

[10:10] However, they had made a subtle change to that fifth point. Over the years, they stopped listing it as perseverance of the saints and changed it to preservation of the saints.

Why? As we read through the Bible, we might detect a degree of tension from one passage to the next. We might perceive apparent contradictions.

To be clear, these contradictions don't actually exist, but we might see them, at least at first, as contradictions. For example, consider John 6:39.

Jesus says, So Jesus points essentially to the sovereignty of God in salvation.

Yes, we must believe, but those who believe were given to Christ by God the Father. And more to the point, they cannot fall away.

[11:27] Jesus says, I should lose nothing of all that He has given me, but raise it up on the last day. This is what we might aptly refer to as preservation of the saints.

God preserves His people by not allowing them to fall away. In another place, Jesus says, this is John 10, 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. 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.

This is eternal security. This is God preserving His people to the very end. Maybe a year ago, I was talking with a man at a funeral, and he was telling me about this sermon he heard.

He said, the sermon was fantastic. He said, it was theologically rich, it was biblically grounded, he said he never heard someone expound Scripture so well.

[12:39] but he had one big complaint. He simply could not believe what the preacher said at the end of this sermon. He said, the preacher had the audacity to claim that once a sinner is saved, he or she is always saved.

This really bothered him. So I asked, don't you feel secure in Christ? And he said, well I do, but, if I should turn away from Him and stop believing, then I won't be saved.

So I asked him, what makes you think Christ would ever let that happen? And I cited John 6 and John 10, I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.

This may have been one of the most contentious disagreements of the Reformation. In his book, *In Christ Alone*, Sinclair Ferguson, he mentions a Catholic priest of that time period who once said, the greatest of all Protestant heresies is, drum roll, assurance.

Now that might strike us as quite strange. Of all the doctrines to get upset about, how does eternal security, or more specifically, personal assurance of salvation, how does that even make the list?

[14 : 17] Well, according to the medieval church, according to their traditions, personal assurance was a sign of ungodly arrogance. Presuming you would be saved in the end was evidence of pride.

You can't possibly know, they'd say. And it's sinful. Sinful to assume you will be saved. No one has that kind of guarantee. Well, I've just read a couple of passages that say we do have eternal security.

And I'll read a few more before we're done, but why would anyone think we can't have assurance? Why would anyone object to the doctrine of eternal security? Well, that's where the apparent tension comes in.

One passage effectively says we have eternal security, but then we read the book of Hebrews, for example, and it appears to say something else.

For instance, Hebrews 6 says, 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, and have tasted the goodness of the Word of God and the powers of the age to come, 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.

[15 : 45] Then flip over a few chapters to Hebrews 10, and we read this, for if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful expectation of judgment and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries.

I think I've made the point, but let me read one more from 2 Peter 2. 2 Peter 2.

to contradict the doctrine of eternal security. They seem to give the impression that to some degree or another, we are responsible for ourselves.

Whatever role God's sovereign grace may play, He does not preserve us to the end. We are, in fact, ultimately responsible for persevering to the end.

So that's the tension. And we see this kind of tension throughout the Bible regarding salvation in general. One of my favorite examples is found in John chapter 1.

[17 : 20] That's where John says, Jesus came to His own, that is, Israel, the Jewish people. Jesus came to His own, and His own people did not receive Him.

But to all who did receive Him, 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.

So, if we were to read only the first half of that passage, we would probably assume that we are responsible for our own salvation because we are responsible for believing and receiving Christ.

But, if we were to read only the latter half of that passage, we might assume that God is altogether sovereign over our salvation, and perhaps there's nothing for us to do. It says, we are born again, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, that rules us out of the equation, but of God.

We are born again because of the sovereign work of God. So, we have this apparent tension in Scripture. It's a battle, if you will, between God's sovereignty and man's responsibility.

[18 : 44] Do we come to Christ of our own free will and volition, or does God sovereignly draw us to Himself? Do the saints persevere to the end?

Or, does God preserve the saints to the end? Which is it? Now, I probably don't have to tell you that many Bible-believing Christians are prone to jump to one side or the other.

The church of my upbringing, they took an eraser to perseverance of the saints and replaced it with preservation of the saints. As you might expect, they preached a lot of sermons from John 6 and John 10, but far fewer on Hebrews 6 or Hebrews 10.

Then we find others rejecting any notion of once saved, always saved. They're skeptical of any mention of God's sovereignty. They'll gladly preach John 1.12, but conveniently enough, never get around to addressing John 1.13.

These days, we also find a strange and dangerous, well, I'm tempted to call it a middle ground, but it's really not. It's like a mixed theological bag, if you will.

[20 : 05] You see, some will say that a mere profession of faith is good enough for salvation, never mind what happens after that, and perseverance is really a moot point because once saved, always saved.

After your profession, you have eternal security no matter what. Well, if you want to hear my thoughts on that, go back to the previous lesson on the subject of holiness. God saves us to what?

Change us. So where's the truth? Is God sovereign? Or is man responsible?

Does God preserve the saints? Or do the saints persevere? Well, here's where I get to quote my all-time favorite line from Charles Spurgeon yet again.

I love every opportunity to throw this in. Preaching on faith and regeneration, he said, Brethren, be willing to see both sides of the shield of truth.

[21 : 08] Rise above the babyhood that cannot believe two doctrines until it sees the connecting link. Have you not two eyes, man? Must you need to put one of them out in order to see clearly?

To give you a little context, Spurgeon was preaching about faith, which presents the same dilemma as preservation versus perseverance. On the one hand, faith is an active man, isn't it?

If we are to be saved, we are responsible for putting our trust in Christ, that is, trusting in Him for salvation. Romans 10, everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved.

On the other hand, the Bible teaches that faith is a gift of God. Ephesians 2, 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. And Spurgeon responds to the objection that he's preaching a contradiction.

[22 : 15] It can't be both, they say. It must be one or the other. Which is it? Is faith the responsibility of man, or the sovereign work of God? And that's when Spurgeon says, Brethren, be willing to see both sides of the shield of truth.

Have you not two eyes, man? Must you need to put one of them out in order to see clearly? Listen to what Spurgeon said in another sermon titled, Sovereign Grace and Man's Responsibility, where he addresses this very thing.

This is a longer quote. He said, The system of truth is not one straight line, but two. No man will ever get a right view of the gospel until he knows how to look at the two lines at once.

I am taught in one book to believe that what I sow I shall reap. I am taught in another place that it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy.

I see in one place God presiding over all in providence, and yet I see and cannot help seeing that man acts as he pleases, and that God has left his actions to his own will in a great measure.

[23 : 32] Now if I were to declare that man was so free to act, and there was no precedence of God over his actions, I should be driven very near to atheism. And if on the other hand I declare that God so overrules all things as that man is not free enough to be responsible, I am driven at once into antinomianism or fatalism.

That God predestines and that man is responsible are two things that few can see. They are believed to be inconsistent and contradictory, but they are not.

It is just the fault of our weak judgment. And listen to this. Two truths cannot be contradictory to one another. If then I find taught in one place that everything is foreordained, that is true.

And if I find in another place that man is responsible for all his actions, that is true. And it is my folly that leads me to imagine that two truths can ever contradict each other.

These two truths, I do not believe, can ever be welded into one upon any human anvil, but one they shall be in eternity. They are two lines that are so nearly parallel that the mind that shall pursue them farthest will never discover that they converge, but they do converge, and they will meet somewhere in eternity, close to the throne of God whence all truth doth spring.

[25 : 05] So I'll ask again, is God sovereign or is man responsible? Does God preserve the saints or do the saints persevere?

Well, the short answer is, yes, all of the above. Preservation and perseverance, just like God's sovereignty and man's responsibility, are really two sides of the same coin.

Look at the coin, and you will see the Christian person following Jesus to the best of his ability. He's reading, he's studying the Bible, he's diligently learning, he's equipping himself more and more as he goes, he's fighting temptations along the way, at times he doubts, at times he stumbles, but he appears to pick himself up, he appears to dust himself off and press on, he's slowly but surely growing in holiness, and short, he perseveres, he endures, and at the end we find every reason to congratulate him and say, well done, good and faithful servant.

You have fought the good fight, you have finished the race, you have kept the faith. But now, flip the coin over, and you will see the same Christian and the same life from a very different perspective.

Now you will see God watching over that Christian. You will see God walking alongside that Christian every step of the way.

[26 : 50] You see him teaching the Christian. You see him equipping the Christian with every gift and every grace he needs to continue. You see him protecting the Christian. You see him disciplining the Christian at times.

You may see the Christian start to veer off the path toward destruction and God just reaches out and pulls him back. So in short, God is preserving him.

And at the end, as you look back over the life that unfolded, you realize that God wasn't just walking alongside the Christian. God was essentially carrying him all the way to the finish line. In his book *Following Jesus*, Andrew Randall says the heart of the Bible's teaching here is this, whatever it might feel like in reality, I am not saved from sin, death, and hell because I have taken hold of God but because God has taken hold of me.

He goes on to write, which is why it is so important for Christians to be governed not by their feelings but by faith. Do the saints persevere enduring to the end or does God preserve the saints?

Which is it? Well, it is positively both. The saints persevere precisely because God preserves them.

[28 : 14] Again, Andrew Randall says, the reason I can never lose my salvation is not my holding on to God but His holding on to me. But I will also add to that to some degree or another though never perfectly because God holds on to us we hold on to Him.

because He will not let us go we endure to the end. Now, just briefly let me say something about those passages that seem to suggest that we can in fact fall away.

What do we do with those? I don't have time to go through each of them but I will read from two places in the Bible to answer that question. The first, 1 John 2.19.

John is talking about those who have fallen away. They've left the faith and worse yet have come to oppose the faith. And he says, 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 were not of us.

[29 : 26] You see, John says the very fact that they fell away that they apostatized indicates they were never saved.

Obviously, they had the appearance of Christians. They walked the walk. They talked the talk. But their faith in all reality was never genuine. The other passage I'll draw your attention to is found in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 7 he says, 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.

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? And then I will declare to them I never knew you.

Depart from me you workers of lawlessness. Godliness. Again, we see people who had the appearance of godliness. They preached the name of Christ. They did works in his name.

But what does Jesus say to them at the very end? I never, never knew you. Despite all appearances they never had union with Christ.

[30 : 46] They were not once saved only to become unsaved. tragically, sadly, they were never saved in the first place. God always preserves his people.

Jesus did not die in vain. Jesus died to save. Period. End of discussion. My sheep hear my voice and I know them and they follow me.

they persevere. I give them eternal life and they will never perish. Never. And no one will snatch them out of my hand. I will preserve them.

We desperately need to see this side of the coin. Now I'll talk more about our responsibility to persevere in a moment but if we don't embrace God's preservation of believers believers.

We can't really have a sense of security. We can't really have assurance and without assurance following Jesus frankly becomes a life of dread and uncertainty.

[31 : 56] Hope would cease to be what it is glad anticipation. That's how the Bible defines hope. Hope would become little more than wishful thinking.

I hope I make it to heaven. When we struggle in our Christian lives I strongly recommend we return to places like Romans 8 again and again and again and we know that for those who love God all things work together for good for those who are called according to his purpose.

That verse alone teaches us that God is sovereign. How could all things work together for good if God is not in control of all things? But Paul continues 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.

And those whom he predestined he also called and those whom he called he also justified and those whom he justified he also glorified.

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?

[33 : 24] Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies 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.

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?

As it is written for your sake we are being killed all the day long we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered. No. In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

For I am sure that neither death nor life nor angels nor rulers nor things present nor things to come nor powers nor height nor depth nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

That's as emphatic as it gets. Nothing will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

[34 : 38] Absolutely nothing. But it was precisely this that caused the medieval church to object. They reasoned that if believers have eternal security if God preserves his people all the way to the end what's to stop us from say doing nothing at all?

Why even attempt to persevere? At this point I realize I could use another hour but I don't have another hour so I'll do my best to be concise.

In short we persevere because God preserves. you'll notice even in Romans 8 that Paul writes about eternal security with full expectation that those who are secure will persevere.

After all they're enduring the famine and the persecution and everything else to prove themselves more than conquerors over these things. At the start of the chapter he says there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus for the law of the spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.

Then he proceeds to talk about those same people who are not condemned and cannot be condemned walking not according to the flesh but according to the spirit.

[36 : 11] In fact he goes on to say you that is you the believer in Christ are not in the flesh but in the spirit if in fact the spirit of God dwells in you. I'll say again God saves us to change us.

Preservation and perseverance are two sides of the same coin. You can't have one without the other. God preserves the Christian equipping him teaching him providentially leading him.

According to Hebrews 12 Jesus is the founder and perfecter of our faith. I'm kind of partial to the King James version which says Jesus is the author and finisher of our faith.

He is the beginning of our faith and he will sustain our faith all the way to the end. Now having said that let me draw your attention to 2 Peter chapter 1.

I don't have time to read it in full but if I did you'd see that Peter has the same expectations as Paul. the believer will press on. The believer will endure to the end.

[37 : 21] At the same time Peter like Paul is more than willing to instruct Christians about our responsibilities. So when we talk about God preserving his people we're not talking about some sort of hyper grace soteriology some sort of fatalism as paradoxical as it may seem to at least our finite minds man has responsibilities even though God is sovereign.

Be willing to see both sides of the shield of truth. Well Peter tells believers to add to their faith continually.

He says supplement your faith with virtue and virtue with knowledge and knowledge with self-control and self-control with steadfastness and steadfastness with godliness and godliness with brotherly affection and brotherly affection with love.

For if these qualities are yours and are increasing they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. In verse 10 he says therefore brothers be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election.

For if you practice these qualities you will never fall. For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

[38 : 57] You are called and elected he says. Now confirm it. Prove its certainty. And what will the result be?

Will you finally be saved as a result of your efforts? No. As Paul tells the Galatians are you so foolish? Having begun in the spirit are now being perfected by the flesh?

No. But you will have assurance. And without assurance as I said before hope is little more than wishful thinking. You know someone once asked me why we would ever teach people about eternal security.

Wouldn't it be better, he asked, just to let people assume their salvation depends on their own works? Wouldn't they strive harder to become better Christians? Arguably, they might.

But first of all, that isn't the truth. Clearly, God wants us to know that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

[40 : 08] That's what his word tells us many times in many ways. And second, while the Bible clearly lays the responsibility on us to endure to the end, it does not leave us to think for a moment that we can achieve this on our own, even in part.

God, and that's good news, because I don't know about you, but I struggle an awful lot to persevere.

But rather than look to ourselves in the midst of any struggles we might have, undoubtedly leading to discouragement, if not complete hopelessness, because we're never going to find much hope in ourselves, instead of that we can look to Christ, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who has promised to bring our faith, our Christian walk, to completion.

We are secure in him. As Andrew Randall says, and I'll close with this, this is the key thing.

The true source of Christian assurance is a gaze that is fixed upon Jesus himself. The one who gave us faith in the first place, and the one who has promised to bring it to completion.

[41 : 42] Let's pray. Heavenly Father, as we strive to persevere, to endure to the end, when we will ultimately see our salvation, we thank you for the promises you have given us through your word.

We're thankful to know of your sovereignty. We're thankful to know of your great love through Jesus Christ our Lord, and that that love guarantees that we can never fall away if we are truly yours.

you will hold on to us. No one can snatch you, snatch us out of your hand. We're thankful for this promise of security.

We're thankful for the assurance we can have as we look not to ourselves, but to Christ. In Christ, the author and the finisher of our faith, we know that we can rest easy as we struggle to endure.

Lord, help us to persevere. May we come to the end of our lives and hear those words, well done, good and faithful servant. You have fought a good fight.

[43 : 05] In Christ's name, amen.