
The Glory of the Grace of God in Salvation

A Study of the Attributes and Applications of the Doctrines of Grace in the Life of the Believer

The Assurance of God's Salvation: Perseverance of the Saints

Romans 8:28-39

In 1948, a jewelry company came up with a slogan that has since become a part of American culture. It is statement describing not only the intrinsic value of their product, but has also become synonymous for the enduring nature of all such products. What is that slogan? De'Beer's came up with the motto, "**A Diamond is Forever.**" Far from being far-fetched, the beauty of this slogan is that diamonds are not only beautiful, but they are one of the hardest substances known and are virtually indestructible. The point is, the diamonds, while perhaps sometimes lost out of a ring, are themselves enduring, seemingly able to last forever.

Now then, maybe you will agree with that and maybe you will not. But let me ask you a question that employs a similar argument to get our minds thinking this morning. My question is this, can we say, "**A Christian is forever?**" Is it right and biblical to repeat that other age-old motto, "Once saved, always saved?" In other words, can those of us who call ourselves Christians, who have professed to know Jesus as Lord and Savior, can we rest assured that we will make it to heaven?

As we consider the answers to such questions, I well imagine that it would be easy to recall to your mind some terrible things that you have said or done to family, friends, or even to strangers that were anything but Christ-like. Even worse, every one of us has had thoughts, things we have entertained in our minds that would cause us great embarrassment and shame if such things were ever made known. And yet, let me remind you, God knows your every thought. He knows your every deed. God is keenly aware of every sin, every failure, every inkling of the mind that you have done, considered, or simply toyed with over the past week, month and year. Not only that, but God knows of all such sinful shortcomings you have yet to ponder or even perpetrate. When you stop to think about all such things, how can a Christian be certain; how can he have assurance that he will endure to the end that he will last forever and make it into the presence of Jesus?

Maybe you have some personal assurance; but what of those people, family, friends, those you looked up to, who at one time truly looked the part of being a Christian, but have since rejected the gospel; have forsaken Christ and have left the company and practice of the Church? What of those people with whom you have prayed, and even those who may have exposed and taught you the truths of the gospel, yes they themselves have since walked away from the faith.

If such is possible, what assurance do any of us have of looking forward to being in heaven with Jesus? How can you know that at some point you may not simply throw in the proverbial towel and forsake this walk with Christ? Could it be possible for a person to be safe in the Kingdom of God today, and yet, by some action or attitude, be unsafe and lost? Again, is the notion of "Once saved, always saved" of "Once a Christian, always and forever a Christian" really be true? How can any of us in this room have assurance that we will persevere as a Christian? Is there any biblical confidence that Christians are forever?

Turn in your bibles with me to the book of Romans; Romans 8; and in a moment we are going to read the closing verses of this great chapter that give us an absolute assurance of God's intention with regard to the outcome of every single genuine believer in Christ. In Romans 8:28-39 we are met with an confident "yes" to the question, are Christians for forever? Let us read the text: *28 And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. 29 For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to*

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become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; 30 and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified. 31 What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? 32 He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things? 33 Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; 34 who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us. 35 Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? 36 Just as it is written, "FOR YOUR SAKE WE ARE BEING PUT TO DEATH ALL DAY LONG; WE WERE CONSIDERED AS SHEEP TO BE SLAUGHTERED." 37 But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. 38 For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Based on this text alone, we can confidently say that a Christian is forever. We see here the great power and promise of God to keep His own safe and secure in His Son, Jesus Christ. In Christ we have the assurance of knowing and possessing eternal life; something that “no” one and “no” thing can take away from us. Beloved, this not only includes outside influences and forces, but also our own sinful tendencies; nothing is able to separate us from the love of God.

But just what is the basis of such an assurance? How can we be certain about this guarantee of salvation? If you are like me, you have purchased a number of things over the years that have had guarantees; right? Then something happens and you pull out that warranty, that guarantee only to find some fine print that nullifies it all, or worse yet, and so often my experience, the warranty has a time limit on it; and usually what I need covered has just gone past that guarantee date. By the way, the date they put on the milk container is no guarantee that your milk will last that long. It is a “best if used by date” which is not guarantee at all.

Yet our Romans text actually makes a guarantee saying that Christians, those who have truly trusted in the work of Christ on the Cross, who have their lives transformed by the power of the gospel; these will most assuredly make it to heaven. Here we find God’s absolute guarantee that Christians will persevere to the end; that they will make it to heaven to finally and forever be with Jesus and be like Jesus. How is it that the Christian can have such an assurance? Beloved, the promise of God’s Word is that He will preserve us every step of the way, that He will keep us at every point in our lives, that He will finally lead us home.

This awesome assurance that we look at this morning is the fifth and final of the doctrines of grace. Let us quickly recap what we have considered over the past several weeks. If man is truly dead in his trespasses and sin, unwilling and unable to come to Christ, and is therefore, by nature, a child of wrath (Ephesians 2:1-3 – total depravity/inability); then it stands to reason that unless God chooses to save some, none would be saved (Ephesians 1:4). It also stands to reason that because the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23), that unless someone pays the price of the penalty of their sin, these “chosen by God” could not be saved (Ephesians 1:7, Colossians 1:19-22 – Actual atonement/particular redemption). Additionally, since these “chosen” are found in a condition of hostility toward God, unwilling and unable to come to Christ, until the Holy Spirit effectually calls and changes the heart and will of a person, no one would be saved (Ezekiel 36:25-27 – irresistible grace). These are the first four of the doctrines of grace. The final doctrine of grace is also logical in that those who are chosen by God, redeemed by the Son and born

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again of the Holy Spirit are so thoroughly changed and kept by the power of God that they all will persevere to the end (Romans 8:28-39 – perseverance of the saints).

This final point, the perseverance of the saints, is equally dependent upon understanding the sinfulness of sin in our lives. For if we could do nothing to earn our salvation, but rather salvation is from the Lord, then it stands to reason that there is nothing we could do to keep our salvation but rather we must be kept. This doctrine of the perseverance, the continuance, the assurance of the saints to be kept in Jesus until they are brought to heaven has two aspects. First, it implies the work of God to preserve His children to the end and by so doing it next implies that His children will persevere (that is continue) in faith and trust in Jesus until they are secure in heaven. The entire eighth chapter of Romans actually speaks of this perseverance of Christians.

Allow me to break this chapter up into two parts; the work, what we will call God's preservation, as seen in verses 1-32; and the result, what we will call the Saint's perseverance, seen in verses 33-39.

I. The Work - God's Preservation (8:1-32)

Beloved, the work of God's preservation of His people is founded in this statement; God always finishes what He starts. Let us see how this is revealed to true by walking through Romans 8. Beginning in verse 1 we read, *Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.* For those who are "in Christ" whose lives have been transformed by the gospel; there is not judgment; no guilt; nothing held against them. The reason why God can preserve or keep a believer until the end is that all the sin that first kept the sinner from Jesus has been removed by the cross of Jesus.

In Romans 8:2-8 we read, *2 For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. 3 For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, 4 so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. 5 For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. 6 For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, 7 because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so, 8 and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.* Here we find the evidence what it means to be in Christ. Notice something important; that there has been a whole change in heart, in attitudes and desires. Before Christ we were unable to please God, following the sinful desires of our flesh and caring less about God, in fact, hostile toward God. But now, in Christ, we have the Spirit of God who causes us to want and to do the things that please God, we enjoy life rather than death; and peace rather than hostility. God preserves His people by the giving of His Holy Spirit to dwell in us.

Then, reading in verses 9-17, *9 However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him. 10 If Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness. 11 But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you. 12 So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh — 13 for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live. 14*

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For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. 15 For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!" 16 The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, 17 and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him.

Again, these verses reveal to us that God has put His very Spirit within us; notice this; to testify, that is to confirm to us that we are His children and heirs together with Christ. Beloved, we are to have a sense of safety and security in Christ.

As we have studied the doctrines of grace we are reminded that we actually become Christians, not by the will of the flesh; nor even by an act of our fallen will; but rather by God's grace alone. God, by His mercy and grace has caused us to be born again, according to 1 Peter 1:3. So we become Christians by grace alone, but how are we kept Christians? By our own doing? No. By some combination of God's grace and our doing? No. How is that we will persevere and make it to glory? By God's grace. This is what Paul says in verses 18-27 where we read: *18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us. 19 For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. 20 For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope 21 that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. 22 For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now. 23 And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body. 24 For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for who hopes for what he already sees? 25 But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it. 26 In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words; 27 and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.*

Beloved, even in the midst of a hostile and difficult world where we are groaning as a consequence of sin, where is our hope? Where is our certainty of salvation? Not in ourselves, but with "perseverance" - that is in enduring in the hope that God has promised to reveal us in glory as the sons of God. God is preserving us until that time. We are promised to make it to the end.

How can we have such confidence that God will preserve us to this end. Look with me at verses 28-30, verses we first looked at seeing the work of God in our salvation. There we read, *28 And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. 29 For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; 30 and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.*

What is the basis for this confidence that God will preserve us to the end and thus we can persevere unto the end? We have God's purpose and promise. The golden chain of salvation; that God works all things to work for our good, that is He preserves us. It begins with His choosing us by His own foreknowledge, then predestining us to become like Christ; then calling us to Christ, justifying, declaring us righteous in Christ, and then glorifying us because of Christ.

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Our salvation is a building project planned and managed by God; and God always finishes what He starts; it will be completed. It began in eternity past when God set His love on you, to setting you apart for salvation, to calling you Christ in real time, to dealing with your sin on the cross of Christ. If God has done this, we have assurance that He will see the job through to the completion of that final stage, being glorified with Christ in heaven.

The problem we have is that we are unable to see the whole plan of salvation as God sees it. Day by day we experience things that discourage and frustrate us; sometimes causing us to question in our minds God's good intentions. But in verse 28 we have this great promise of God, that in all our circumstances, we can be assured that they are part of His master plan and for our good. At times we will feel like life is chaotic and out of control. At that point we must look to, that we must persevere to stand on God's promise here; that God uses every event and every experience to bring us one step closer to completion, one step closer to glory. Is your life messy at times; overwhelming at times? Remember that God is with us in the messes of life and that He, even if it seems slow, is surely renovating us into the beautiful structure He has designed and is being built by God.

But life is hard and can be overwhelming, right? Indeed, but let us read verses 31-32, *31 What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? 32 He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?* Beloved, here is the power of God. *"If God is for us..."* This is written in such a way in the Greek as to imply a positive answer, *"If God be for us, and He is..."* Or we could translate it to say, *"Since God is for us..."* This is God's guarantee of salvation; that His according to His purpose and promise to save us; who could possibly arise that might possibly outflank, outwit or outmaneuver God. Is there anyone at all that could be so against us, so antagonistic toward us that he, she or it could actually mess our salvation up? The testimony of Scripture is that God is faithful to His promises; that God is trustworthy to do just as He has said, to finish what He has started. Just like in the marriage vow, and to even greater extent, God has promised to love and to cherish us in sickness and health for better for worse, for all eternity.

How can we know this? In verse 32 we have the proof. Having already done the hard thing in loving us who are by sin and by nature totally unlovable, having sacrificed His own Son in order to redeem us from sin and save us, having called us to Himself and renewing us by putting His own Spirit within us, God is not going to hold back on anything else, which in comparison to all that He has done is minor, but will bring us to Himself in glory. Our Heavenly Father has not given us His very best, the sacrifice of His Son for our sins, only to withhold everything necessary to bring us safely into heaven. This is the preservation of God. This is the work of God. And as is true to form, when God works in the lives of His people, something always happens to God's people; there is always a result. So God's work of preserving us leads to a result.

II. The Result - the Saint's Perseverance (8:33-39)

The result of God's work of the perseveration of the saints is the saints' perseverance in this work of God. If God always finishes what He starts, then it stands to reason that God's people will persevere, be brought to the end unspoiled.

The reason why so many marriages come to an end is that over time, the initial love and commitment made at the start begins to erode. Little hurts and disappointments turn into resentments and forms of neglect until one or both of the parties simply abandon the relationship. Is it possible that something like this could happen to God's love for us? Honestly, how many hurts and

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disappointments have we hurled onto God? How many second, third, fourth, one-thousandth chances has God given to us only to have us continue to make a mess of our lives with sin? Yet our text tells something about the love of God. In verses 33-34 we learn that God's love is unconditional. We read, *33 Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; 34 who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us.* Beloved, even our own sin cannot spoil our salvation. Here Paul uses courtroom language. Here God challenges anybody to bring a charge against those for whom Christ has died that will stick. We are reminded that every one of our sins, past present and future, has been paid for by the death of Jesus. The Lord did engage in any cover up that when it comes to us that would come back to embarrass him. Our assurance of salvation is based on the fact that not one is ever able to bring a charge against God's people that will stick. It is also based on the fact that our Savior, Jesus Christ is in heaven, constantly declaring to the Father that He paid the price to redeem and secure His people, making them acceptable by His death on the cross for them.

Then we come to verses 35-39, the great promise of God that His people will persevere. We read, *35 Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? 36 Just as it is written, "FOR YOUR SAKE WE ARE BEING PUT TO DEATH ALL DAY LONG; WE WERE CONSIDERED AS SHEEP TO BE SLAUGHTERED." 37 But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. 38 For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.* Let us be clear as to what is being said. There is not one person, there is not one thing in all the created universe that has the ability to separate us from God's love. In verses 33-34, the concern is that maybe someone might show up and bring a charge against the believer that God was not aware of. That won't happen, so the Christian is assured heaven. These verses concern themselves with life's troubles and trials, those times of suffering simply because we are Christians, through no fault of our own. Paul's point is that even in such times we need not fear missing out on heaven because we failed to persevere. Think of the worst torture that a Christian has ever suffered; think of the most powerful spiritual forces of evil in the universe come against you; and yet not one of these things will overpower or erode the love of God for us or His promises to us. Rather, these are the kind of things through which God's love for us is manifested and will thrive and through which we are promised to be more than conquerors.

This is the same promises made in 1 Peter 1:3-6. We read, *3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, 5 who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. 6 In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials,* Here we have the new birth, a living or enduring hope, and the guaranteed inheritance. But notice the conditions made there in verses 4-5. God guarantees our salvation because He keeps it for us and He also keeps us for eternity in Christ. Nothing is left to us. God's grace is evident from start to finish. Then in verse 6 we have an important perspective on the tough circumstances of life; that we can and must rejoice through them because we know they are part of God's renovation project and that they are for are for our ultimate good.

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Paul makes the same point in Philippians 1:3-6. We read, *3 I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, 4 always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all, 5 in view of your participation in the gospel from the first day until now. 6 For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.* Paul is thankful and confident in his prayers for these Christians because, according to verse 6, God has guaranteed that He finishes what He starts. God's preserving them has resulted in their persevering, their changed attitudes and desires. Then looking into the next chapter, in Philippians 2:12-13 we read, *12 So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; 13 for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.* Here believers are urged them to press ahead confidently in Christ. For what reason? On the reason God knows that our desire is to obey Him. And what is God's desire? That we obey Him. Our desire and God's desire complement one another. And so, as we strive to be like Christ and to be faithful, we can be confident that is exactly what God, through His Spirit is also accomplishing in our lives. Our perseverance, our continuing in the faith is exactly what God is enabling, preserving us to do.

So what? How does this twin truth of God's preservation and our perseverance play itself out in our lives? Let me give a word of caution; perseverance does not mean that every single person who professes to be a Christian, who goes to church and is baptized goes to heaven, no matter what. We are all aware that there is difference between what people "say" or "think" as compared to what is true in their heart. What is true is that all genuine believers Christians will persevere because God will preserve or keeps them. This is what we see in Romans 8, especially verses 28-30. Beloved, if you are truly in Christ, the evidence of this is a trusting in Jesus that actually changes your desires and attitudes along with the whole focus of your living. When your focus becomes, "What does God want; how does God want me to speak to this person; how does God want me to live; then you can have assurance that that you will persevere. Another word of caution; perseverance does not mean that you will never sin; that you will be kept from temptations and trials in life; or that you might not, for a time, even grow cold towards Jesus and the things of God. But if you are a believer, you will always repent, always return, always longing to be right with God.

The Bible is filled with examples of this. Whether it be David's wandering eye; Solomon's wandering heart; John Mark's fear on the mission field; God's people may stumble, but they will never fall away. To be sure, this life is filled with difficulties that try us, but the Word of God promises us that God Himself ensures we never fall absolutely and completely away from Him. We will sin and fail daily, some days worse than others, but the person who is truly in Christ be brought back to a renewed commitment to Christ. The promise of God is that the believer will persevere in the faith because God will preserve that faith and bring him to salvation.

Let me give you a word of challenge. Beloved, we are expected to live confidently, assured by the promise of God that we are eternal saved. Why do we need this? Because, living in spiritual doubt is crippling. It is impossible to be the most useful to God if we are consumed with worry about our own standing before God. Remember Romans 8:1 - *Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.* We are not condemned, but converted; not judged, but justified; not guilty, but godly; not blamed, but blessed; not accused, but atoned for. This kind of understanding of our condition before God give us assurance and confidence as servants of the Lord.

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Here is the thing; if we can be so confident about this most important issue of our standing before God and our eternal destiny; then we can get on and endure the everyday task of living for the Lord; of sharing the Gospel of Christ with others; of knowing that even though we will mess up and struggle with sin; that God has forgiven us in Christ. If you are mindful that the issue of eternity is settled with God, then, by comparison our struggles on earth will be manageable.

The doctrine of the perseverance of the saints is to bring us joy and hope. Beloved, Christians are forever. If you are in Christ then you can be assured that words of Jesus spoken in John 5:24 are words for you. There Jesus said, *Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life.* Christians are forever. If you have trusted Him as Savior, as dying your death on the cross; if you have thus realized Him as Lord; seeing your heart and desires increasingly conformed to the purposes of God; then you can be assured that glory awaits you; the fullness of salvation is yours because the God is keeping your salvation for you; is preserving you in it; enabling you to persevere to the end. A Christian is forever!

Soli Deo Gloria

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