

Perseverance (Part 2)

The Perseverance of His Saints Depends on the Actions of God Triune

Jn 10:22-30; WCF 17.1 & 17.2

Reformed Church of Wainuiomata, 27 October 2019, 16:30

(Sermon put together by Pieter van Huyssteen with due acknowledgement)¹

Intro

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ,

We are now in the second part of a two-part sermon on the perseverance of the saints.

Yes, this morning we heard the first part of how those who have been born from above by God's Holy Spirit will persevere in their God-given faith!

And in that first part we heard the sad reality that those who have been born from above can still sin – sometimes even grievously so! But when they sin, God will discipline them to keep them on the straight and narrow lest they should fall away from God forever, if that were possible!

We also heard that the means by which you & I can persevere in Christian faith is...

- by staying immersed in the Scriptures through faithful personal Bible reading;
- through observing and participating in the sacraments of baptism and Lord's Supper;
- through prayer;
- through worship and Christian fellowship;
- through actively *servicing* God with the gifts He has given each one of us;
- and through winning souls for Christ!

So, these are the God-given means by which you & I will persevere in our faith!

But now we come to part 2, which teaches us the *grounds* on which the saints of God will always persevere and never fall away from the faith!

And here, up-front, is a vital truth, i.e. that the grounds of our perseverance do not lie in us. You see, even though you & I have been born again, and even though you & I have a new will in Christ, there still remains enough sin in us to leave us vulnerable to temptation!

So, left to our weak will, even the born-from-above person (you & I) would not persevere in our God-given faith!

So, wherein does our confidence lie that you & I will never ever fall away from the faith!? What gives you & me absolute certainty that we will, until our dying day, persevere in our God-given faith?

Well, the answer is: because of God's unchangeable covenant with each believer – a covenant that rests on the faithfulness of three Persons – on...,

- God the Father
- God the Son

¹ In writing this sermon, I am greatly indebted to my two main sources whose guidance I appreciate: 1) Van Dixhoorn, Chad. 2014. *Confessing the Faith: a reader's guide to the Westminster Confession of Faith*. Carlisle, PA : The Banner of Truth Trust. 484p.

2) Sproul, R.C. 2006. *The truth we confess*. (In: Sproul, R.C. ed. *Truths we confess: a layman's guide to the Westminster Confession of Faith – in three volumes*. Vol. 2: *Salvation and the Christian Life* (Chapters 9-22 of the Confession) Phillipsburg, NJ : P&R Publishing. 279p.).

Many words & phrases I have written, I have gladly borrowed with great thankfulness from this source.

- God the Holy Spirit

So, the first point of our sermon is....

On the Father

Beloved of our Lord Jesus Christ, the first reason why you & I can be absolutely certain that we will never fall away from our God-given faith is the fact that God is unchangeable, i.e. that He is consistent and trustworthy, and that He does not have a plan B.

In other words, those whom God, before the world began, chose to be His own – He will now never ever change His mind on them!

You see, we human beings have a plan B, because we can never know for sure if our plan A is going to work out. But God never needs a plan B, because the plans He has decided on will never fail, and because He never changes His mind!

From before time began – yes, from before the foundation of the world – God has known His people, and He has chosen them to be saved in Jesus Christ. And, because of God's unchangeableness (immutability), He is now not going to look at, let's say, Sally or Johnny and say, "Oh yes, Sally/Johnny, from all eternity, I did choose to save exactly you in My Son, but now I realise I made a mistake." "So, now I'm going to unchoose you!"

No, God's very nature is unchangeable.

Look, is this not why His Name is *Yahweh* – "I am who I am"?

So, because of God's unchanging nature, He will never say, "Sorry, I once chose you, but now I have changed My mind!"

You see, Paul says to Timothy (in 2 Tm 2:19), "***The Lord knows those who are his.***"² (God knows whom He once chose!)

Dear Wainui member, surely each one of us will know whether he/she belongs to God through Jesus Christ. Indeed, each one of us will know whether the Holy Spirit has worked faith in your heart in Jesus the Son of God – whether you have been born from above!

Now, if you know *that*, then, in awe, you can be assured that you are one whom God, before time, has chosen for salvation in Jesus Christ!

And if you know *that*, then you can rest assured that God will now not change His mind on you, but that tomorrow, and the day after, and forever, you are going to remain in the state of grace in which you are now! Indeed, once God has set the process of your salvation in motion, the final outcome is assured.

You see, that's why Paul could with certainty say to the Philippians: "***And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.***"³

By God's unchangeable nature, He always *finishes* what He starts!

² 2 Tm 2:17-19, "...Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, ¹⁸ who have swerved from the truth, saying that the resurrection has already happened. They are upsetting the faith of some. ¹⁹ But God's firm foundation stands, bearing this seal: "The Lord knows those who are his," and, "Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity" (Emphasis mine).

³ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Php 1:6). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

My brother & sister, God's *nature* is unchangeable, but so, too, is His *love*. That's why, through Jeremiah, God was able to say to His loved ones from Israel, "***I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore, I have continued my faithfulness to you.***"⁴

And that's why, through Hosea, God said to His loved ones among Israel, "... ***I will betroth you to me forever. I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love⁵ and in mercy.*** ²⁰ ***I will betroth you to me in faithfulness.***⁶

Well, talking of this faithful, loyal, unchanging love of God by which He holds His persevering loved ones in His secure grip, RC Sproul gives the following illustration. He says...

"My mother-in-law lived with us for a time, and everywhere we went, I helped her to walk, because she was in a brace. She didn't like me to hold her arm; she wanted me to offer my arm, so that she could hold onto me. But that way her stability was only as good as her grip on me. If I was really to watch out for her and protect her, I had to have a firm hold of her arm in case she stumbled. Similarly, for our preservation, God has taken hold of us. If it were up to us, we would let go, but he will not let go. We do not fall because he keeps us from falling."⁷

Well, so far re point 1: "On God the Father," because the grounds of our confidence lie in God our Father and His unchangeable nature.

Here is point 2...

On the Son

My brother & sister, as we heard in this morning's sermon, even the born-again (and persevering) Christian could *fall into grievous sins and for a time continue in them*.

It is at this stage that the Roman Catholic Church will say, "But, let the sinner do some penance" – which means the sinner must now either spend more time in *prayer* or in *reading the Bible* or *reading other spiritual books*; or he must come do some *tougher acts of penance* like *fasting, continence, abstaining* from alcohol or tobacco, or the wearing of a *cilice* (/ˈsɪlɪs/), which is a garment or undergarment made of coarse cloth or animal hair worn close to the skin. If that's not enough, then the sinner could still do self-flagellation (self-whipping with whatever whip is decided upon). In other words, the sinner must *do something* to make *amends* for his sin: he must '*make satisfaction for*' or '*expiate*' his own sins.⁸

⁴ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Je 31:3). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

⁵ The Hebrew word *hesed* (חֶסֶד) contains the concept of not just *love*, but of *steadfast love* – i.e. of *loyal love*! (Cf. e.g. Stoebe, H.J. 1978. חֶסֶד *hesed* Güte. (In: Jenni, E. & Westermann, C., eds. Theologisches Handwörterbuch zum Alten Testament. München : Chr. Kaiser Verlag. p.603)).

⁶ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Ho 2:19–20). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

⁷ Cf. Sproul (ibid:205)

⁸ Cf.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sacraments_of_the_Catholic_Church#Penance_and_Reconciliation_\(Confession\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sacraments_of_the_Catholic_Church#Penance_and_Reconciliation_(Confession))

Wow! How far off the mark – and unbiblical – this doctrine of penance!

But the Reformed/Biblical view is that neither the *sinner* nor the sinning *saint* can ever make amends for his/her sins – and can never expiate his/her own sins, because the kind of “merit” that even the persevering saint can offer to God is only *demerit*!

So, does the sinning saint doubt whether he/she is still in Christ (that he/she has perhaps fallen away from the faith forever)?

Then, come & confess your sins before God in the Name of Jesus Christ, because, you see, Christ’s merit works! It is perfectly effective, for that’s how God designed it to be!

Indeed, whenever someone gets born from above by the Holy Spirit, at that stage Christ’s merit is the grounds on which that person’s sins are forgiven! But Christ’s merit is not just effective when we first receive Him as our Saviour & Lord. No, His merit stays effective in the life of the sinning-but-persevering saint! Yes, our Lord’s merit does not, at some future point, lose its efficacy!

But there’s more, for, you see, your & my continuance in the Christian faith rests not only on our Lord’s single, once-for-all offering of Himself for our sins, but also on His *pleading* for us – yes, on His *intercession* for us with the Father!

In this regard, remember again how our Lord Jesus prayed already in advance for the persevering-but-weak Peter! Yes, remember how Christ forewarned this saint, saying: “*Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat...*”⁹ In other words, “Peter, I know what Satan will do with you, and that you will crumble like dust!”¹⁰

But, my brother & sister, hear how Jesus now continues! Says He to Peter: “...*but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.*”¹¹

See?

It’s unthinkable how someone who looks to Christ, and understands what our Lord has done for him/her, would ever worry about losing his/her salvation!

The only way the born-again Christian could ever lose his/her salvation, would be if our Saviour would forever die or would change His mind on loving us – both of which will never happen, for Christ can never die (and be dead forever), nor can He ever change His mind, for these things are totally foreign to the character of Christ who, like His Father, is unchangeable!

Look, is that not why God’s Word says, “*Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever*”?¹²

⁹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Lk 22:31). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

¹⁰ Well-said words of Sproul (ibid:201)

¹¹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Lk 22:32). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

¹² [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Heb 13:8). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

See why the Apostle Paul was able to burst out in praise & awe, saying that *nothing will separate us from the love of Christ*, and that *we are more than conquerors*, and that *neither death, demons, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Jesus Christ our Lord?*¹³

As God's Word says, "...*he (Christ) always lives to make intercession for them (also us).*"¹⁴

Well, so far re point 2: "On the Son."

Here is the last point...

On the Holy Spirit

Here is the third ground on which the saint (you & I) can be sure that he/she will persevere up to the end in our God-given faith – i.e. the Holy Spirit's work in us!

You see, the Holy Spirit does not just work *new birth* in us – no, He ministers *within* us, and so works the process of our spiritual growth and sanctification!

Indeed, our Lord Jesus says (in Jn 14:16-17), "... *I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever. ...he dwells with you and will be in you.*"¹⁵

In 1 Jn 2:27, John writes to his Christian readers, "*But the anointing that you received from him (Christ) abides in you...*"¹⁶ And in 1 Jn 3:9 we hear, "*No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him; and he cannot keep on sinning, because he has been born of God.*"¹⁷

So, what do we see?

Well, we see that you & I (insofar as we have been born from above) have God's seed, i.e. the Holy Spirit, dwelling in us – and not just for a time, but forever, which gives you & me solid grounds to be confident that we *will* persevere in our God-given faith!

And the Bible talks of the Holy Spirit being two things in us: a *seal* and a *guarantee* (or *earnest*) – so e.g. in Eph 1:13-14.¹⁸

¹³ Cf. Rm 8:33-39, *Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. ³⁴ 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. ³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? ³⁶ As it is written,*

"For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered."

³⁷ *No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ 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.*

¹⁴ Cf. Heb 7:25 *Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.*

¹⁵ Jn 14:16-17, "*And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, ¹⁷ even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you*" (Emphasis mine).

¹⁶ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (1 Jn 2:27). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

¹⁷ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (1 Jn 3:9). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles (Emphasis mine).

¹⁸ Eph 1:13-14, *In him (Christ) 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, ¹⁴ who is the guarantee of our inheritance until*

Firstly, seal:

My brother & sister, the Roman Catholic Church believe that the outward sign of baptism makes an indelible mark on the person baptised.

Now that's already strange & unbiblical. But what's even more strange is that the Roman Catholics believe that a baptised person can commit a mortal sin – a sin which, unless the person does penance, can take him/her to hell, which would then mean that that person has gone to hell with the indelible sign of the Holy Spirit on him!¹⁹

Well, what comfort does such unbiblical teaching give to believers?

Instead, the true Biblical teaching is that it's not with *outward* baptism that a person receives the indelible seal of the Holy Spirit, but with *spiritual* baptism, yes, at the time when a person gets born from above! Now such person is one of God's elect! So, such a seal is indeed indelible, for God's elect will persevere to the end, and will never enter hell!

So, what comfort to all God's loved ones (you & me?), that we have the Holy Spirit inside us as a seal or a mark given to us by the King of the universe! And this seal is indelible, i.e. it cannot be erased! With it we have been sealed for the day of redemption!²⁰

What about the Holy Spirit as *guarantee/earnest*?

My brother & sister, in our day & age the word *earnest* is still used in the concept of *earnest money*. For example, if you have made an offer on a house which you want to purchase, then, if you're very sure that you want that house (and absolutely keen to have it), you could make a cash payment to the owners up-front at the time when you make the offer on their house. The keener you are to buy that house the more earnest money you will put down. And the more earnest money you put down with your offer, the happier the sellers will be – but also, the greater your chances of getting that house! If your offer is then accepted so that you buy that house, then the earnest money which you have given will be taken as part of your total payment for that house. However, if you withdraw your offer on that house, then you may even forfeit that earnest money!

Well, the Holy Spirit whom God has given to each born-from-above person (you & me), is God's earnest "payment" showing how serious He is to finish what He has begun in us – it's God's guarantee!

we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory. For guarantee, the Greek has *arrabōn* (ἄρραβών): "the first or initial payment of money or assets, as a guarantee for the completion of a transaction or pledge (in the NT ἄρραβών is used only figuratively in referring to the Holy Spirit as the pledge or guarantee of the blessings promised by God)—'first installment, downpayment, pledge, guarantee.' ἔσφραγίσθητε τῷ πνεύματι τῆς ἐπαγγελίας τῷ ἁγίῳ, ὃ ἐστὶν ἄρραβών τῆς κληρονομίας ἡμῶν 'you have been sealed by the Holy Spirit which he promised and which is the first installment of what we shall receive' Eph 1:13–14" (Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). [Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains](#) (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., Vol. 1, p. 576). New York: United Bible Societies).

¹⁹ Cf. e.g. in Sproul (ibid:208-209)

²⁰ Cf. Eph 4:30, ***And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption*** (Emphasis mine).

So, as for the saint who has sinned and is now worried that he might forever have fallen away from God: let such person be assured and comforted that, although he/she might have grieved the Holy Spirit who dwells within him/her, he/she will never fall away from God – not because of anything good in *them*, but because of *God's earnest/guarantee* signed and *sealed* in their hearts!

Should this now make the Christian to say, “O wow, now I can keep on sinning, because I can never fall away from God’s grace!”?

No, the true believer/saint will never even think of saying that!²¹

Rather, the true believer will be grieved with sin in his/her life.

The true believer – persevering saint – will rather stand/live in awe of God’s unbreakable covenant with him/her!

So, the saint is one who will want to praise God Triune by putting his money where his mouth is – by walking his talk!

Our Lord Jesus says (in our NT passage, Jn 10:28), “***I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.***”²²

Praise be to God the Father, Son & Holy Spirit!

AMEN (2,644 words excluding footnotes)

²¹ Cf. Rm 6:1-2, ***What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? ²By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?***

²² [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Jn 10:28). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.