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**The Perseverance of the Saints
Encouraging to the Christian**

Dr. C. Matthew McMahon

One of the greatest hindrances to a comfortable walk with God as a Christian is their fickle nature. Christians have a problem with their fallen emotions. Their emotions often overtake their good sense, and as a result of their sin, especially their besetting sin, the greatest question that continues to arise all through their Christian walk is “Am I really saved?” Instead of resting on the hope of God, they wonder, based on their works, whether they have been truly saved. As the Westminster Confession of Faith states, these good works “are the fruits and evidences of a true and lively faith.”¹ It is true, and a good thing, that professing Christians look at their works. Works are one of those litmus tests that demonstrate if the heart has truly been changed and regenerated. As 1 John 3:9 states quite emphatically, “Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God.” At this point the Christian trembles because he knows he sins. So is he not born of God? The text itself is quite plain, but it is plain in the Greek syntax, tense and grammar, otherwise the translation is lost in English. He who is born of God does not *continue to sin as habit*. It is not that Christians do not sin, rather, they do not habitually sin, and plan out their sin and enjoy their sin as a *lifestyle*. That does not give them the right to say, “Well, I am going to sin, so I might as well sin big.” No. Shall we go on sinning that grace may abound? Certainly

¹ Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter 16:2.

not! Instead, they desire to be holy. But this dynamic of assurance, coupled with fallen emotions, makes Christians fickle. Oftentimes they are uneasy about their walk, and often doubt their salvation. What can a Christian do in order to gain a sense of assurance and stability in their salvation? The Calvinistic tradition has understood election as unconditional, regeneration as permanent, and the certitude of final perseverance as a genuine reality for the believer in Christ.

Within the sphere of Christian doctrine, there emerged a teaching called the “perseverance of the saints.” It has long been taught, even from the beginning of the early church, and was defined well by Aurelius Augustine, or St. Augustine as many know him, in his *Treatise on the Gift of Perseverance*. Thomas Aquinas, Luther, Calvin and others wrote extensively on it as well. Later, during the early 17th century, the Synod of Dort made a defining mark on the history of this doctrine while they battled the false teachings of James Arminius and the Remonstrants as the error of the Pelagians again rose its head in the subtle guise of Christian doctrine. Here, at this synod, the five points of Calvinism were defined, and the doctrines of grace in its form of TULIP were settled. The “P” of TULIP is “The Perseverance of the Saints.”

The Synod of Dort explains the doctrine of perseverance concisely. First they state that even though Christians are saved, they still sin. Though they have been delivered from the bondage of sin, and sin no longer reigns or has rule over them, they still fall into grievous sins.² However, though Christians sin, God still preserves them that they may not utterly fall away. Dort says, “By reason of these remains of indwelling sin, and also because of the temptations of the world and of Satan, those who are converted could not persevere in that grace if left to their own strength. But God is faithful, who, having conferred grace, mercifully confirms and powerfully preserves them therein, even to the end.”³ If men are left to themselves, without the powerful working of God’s Holy Spirit to motion them to good works, they will never be able to motion themselves without His help. Hypothetically speaking, if the

² *The Canons of Dort, Fifth Head of Doctrine*, Articles 1-2.

³ *Ibid*, Article 3.

Christian man has the power of God removed from him, he would simply be a fallen sinner. What can a fallen sinner do against sin but remain enslaved in it? The Spirit of God must motion the Christian to good works, and must be the agent that secures the application of the power of the cross to the Christian's soul. That is why Dort says, "But God is faithful..." It is not that man has power to sustain himself, but that God must preserve Him by grace. Oftentimes, then, theologians call "The Perseverance of the Saints" as "The Preservation of the Saints."

There is a common misconception about the doctrine of *The Perseverance of the Saints*. This doctrine differs from that of "once saved always saved" which has been a popular teaching in recent years often equated with the doctrine of the Perseverance of the Saints. However, this teaching in no wise gives a true representation of the doctrine of *The Perseverance of the Saints*. "Once saved always saved" is defined by one of its proponents as such: "Whoever once truly believes that Jesus was raised from the dead, and confesses that Jesus is Lord, will go to heaven when he dies. But I will not stop there. Such a person will go to heaven when he dies no matter what work (or lack of work) may accompany such faith."⁴ This teaching is pejoratively given the name "Perseverance of the Sinner" instead of "the saint" since it teaches that man can be saved by Christ and then sin habitually, but yet remain saved. It is often used as an excuse and caricature of the Reformed doctrines of grace because such a teaching does in fact bring reproach on those who would believe it. The Bible does not say that a man can be a Christian and may never change. To say that one is eternally secure and that such a man may still sin any way is a misrepresentation of the doctrine of *The Perseverance of the Saints* as a whole.

Perseverance of the saints teaches that once God has renewed the heart of a sinner through the application of the redemption wrought by Christ upon the cross, He will continue to be saved and show forth the fruits of that salvation. The sinner perseveres because of Christ, but he continually shows himself as one who has been changed by Christ. God has saved the individual and will sanctify him until the end when he is ultimately glorified, and in heaven. It does not mean man has a

⁴ R.T. Kendall, *Once Saved Always Saved*, Moody Press Chicago, (1985), Chapter 1, page 19.

license to sin. Dort explains this well in that if a Christian should fall, God “preserves in them the incorruptible seed of regeneration from perishing or being totally lost.”⁵ The sovereign work of the Spirit on the heart of the individual cannot be undone (John 3:1-16). It is the same sentiments that Peter states, “1 Peter 1:23, “Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever.” Regeneration, the changing of the heart from a heart of stone to a heart of flesh, cannot be revoked. It is a deposit of an incorruptible seed that cannot be taken away. Just after a long two-chapter discourse on election, Paul, in Romans 11:29, says, “For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.” Thus, if the Scripture is to stand firm, and the promises of God cannot be revoked, then perseverance is a biblical and logical necessity. If the opposite of this were true, Christians would be miserable people. Calvin says, “A fine confidence of salvation is left to us, if by moral conjecture we judge that at the present moment we are in grace, but we know not what will become of us tomorrow! The apostle speaks far otherwise: “I am surely convinced that neither angels, nor powers, nor principalities, nor death, nor life, nor things present, nor things to come ... will separate us from the love by which the Lord embraces us in Christ” [Romans 8:38-39 p.]”⁶

Why do theologians call the doctrine “The Perseverance of the Saints?” Why not, “The Preservation of the Saints by God?” The reason lies in the emphasis that since election is true, and God preserves the Christian, that they must demonstrate this true preservation by their outward conformity to the Word of God. In other words, the fruit of the life demonstrate that they are truly saved and will truly persevere. Dort says that such a salvation “renders them much more careful and solicitous to continue in the ways of the Lord,”⁷ not to continue in sin. It is important to note that such works do not save them, or improve on the promises of the salvation they have in Christ. But they do demonstrate that they have been saved. The fruit of a tree does not make the tree good or bad, but demonstrates whether the tree is a good tree or a bad tree. It is fitting

⁵ Ibid, Article 7.

⁶ John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, (3:2:40).

⁷ *The Canons of Dort, Fifth Head of Doctrine*, Article 13.

to say, then, that the saints of God must persevere, and in that perseverance is demonstrated the preservation of God.

There are numerous Scriptures that demonstrate the final perseverance of the believer. Christ says in John 6:37-39, “All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out. For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me. And this is the Father’s will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day.” Jesus Christ will lose none that the Father has given him. He will not lose one. He will raise them up in the last day. All that the Father has deposited unto the Son, and all for whom the Son intercedes shall be saved. Paul says in Phil. 1:6, “Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform *it* until the day of Jesus Christ.” Christians can be confident that God will continue and finish the work he had begun in them as a result of the work of Christ and its continued application by the power of the Sprit of God. Calvin says, “This declaration is clearly against the schoolmen, who idly talk and say, that no one is certain of final perseverance, except through the gift of special revelation, which they make to be very rare. By such a dogma the whole faith is destroyed, which is certainly nothing, except it extends to death and beyond death. But we, on the contrary, ought to feel confident, that he who has begun in us a good work, will carry it on until the day of the Lord Jesus.”⁸ God is always faithful to His promises as 1 Thess. 5:23-24 says, “And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and *I pray God* your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful *is* he that calleth you, who also will do *it*.” God will do it. There are reasons that we will explore as to “why” God will do this, but we have written for our hope the truth that He will. God will preserve His people blameless until the coming of Christ, and then at that time He will glorify them. Paul was confident of this for himself when he said, “And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve *me* unto his heavenly kingdom: to whom *be* glory for ever and ever. Amen (2 Tim. 4:18).” Such a life of preservation is echoed in Ephesians 2:10 where, just after Paul says

⁸ John Calvin, *Calvin’s Commentary on Romans*, Ages Software, Auburn: OR (1996), Page 256.

that Christians have been saved by grace through faith, the real emphasis on election and preservation comes forth when he says, “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.” God ordains the steps of the Christian and orders the very works that they shall do to glorify Him in the truth.

Though the Scriptures are plain that God preserves His children to the end, there are Scriptures that demonstrate the possibility of falling from grace and winding up in hell. Is this a contradiction to the doctrine of the saint’s perseverance? Not at all. It may seem at the outset that it is, especially using the wording above, but if time is taken to look at passages that seem contradictory, the true nature of those statements becomes evident. One such passage is Hebrews 6:3-6. This is probably the most famous passage that is most often quoted again the doctrine of perseverance all through church history, and it will do well as an example. It reads, “For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame.” This is a serious list. These people have been 1) enlightened, 2) have tasted the heavenly gift, 3) have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, 4) have tasted the good Word of God, 5) have tasted of the powers of the age to come, and, most critically, they 6) have the possibility of falling away. The text is saying that though all these things have occurred, these “professing Christians” will utterly miscarry their souls into all eternity. Does this sound like perseverance? This sounds more like a warning to instill fear rather than assurance! However, one key unlocks the meaning of the passage that is often overlooked. If the Christian would continue reading he would find that the writer of Hebrews makes a valid distinction between these people in verse 3-6, and the true Christian who will be saved. In verse 9 it says, “But, beloved, we are confident of better things concerning you, yes, things that accompany salvation, though we speak in this manner.” Better things? Things that accompany salvation? It is clear that in the mind of the writer of this inspired epistle, he does not equate what he formally says in verses 3-6 to *salvation*. Whatever the writer is

talking about in being enlightened, tasting the heavenly gift and the like, he is *not* speaking about salvation. In verse 9 he is quite sure that the brethren spoken about here are in contrast to these other people who seem to fall away. In actuality, these people were never saved though they, in some way, partook of the covenant community and the blessings there. There is a dividing line between those who are saved (verse 9) and those who are under some kind of strong delusion that allows them to believe they are saved (verses 3-6). Those acts mentioned in verse 3-6 are things that do not accompany salvation and should not be confused with the idea that Christians who are truly regenerated may ultimately fall away and become lost. Christians have the Holy Spirit residing in them as a regenerated elect sinner. However, this list in verses 3-6 does not comprise of regenerating ordinances at all. The problem lies in the human inability to distinguish who are the elect and who are not. “While regeneration is irreversible and leads to final perseverance, in the visible Church it is not humanly possible to infallibly distinguish the truly regenerate from those who are not.”⁹ That is why Christians who are not theologically sound make rash judgments about the nature of election because they see that a person they thought was a Christian finally falls away and goes back to the pig pen of the world. In this they believe that Christians fall away and that places them in a state of terror believing they might do the same.

Though having a healthy fear of falling away is not in itself bad, the continued state of un-assurance will render the Christian pressed into a state of spiritual depression, or simply one who thinks that salvation and assurance are totally on their shoulders. Rather, in the infallible work of Jesus Christ there is the union of the believer and the Lord which remains inseparable. The Westminster Larger Catechism asks this in question 79, “May not true believers, by reason of their imperfections, and the many temptations and sins they are overtaken with, fall away from the state of grace?”

The answer is given, “True believers, by reason of the unchangeable love of God, and his decree and covenant to give them perseverance, their inseparable union with Christ, his continual

⁹John Jefferson Davis, *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society Volume 34, Perseverance of the Saints throughout Church History*, 1991; 2002. Page 217.

intercession for them, and the Spirit and seed of God abiding in them, can neither totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace, but are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation. (Jer. 31:3; 2 Tim. 2:19-21; 2 Sam. 23:5; 1 Cor. 1:8-9; Heb. 7:25; Luke 22:32; 1 John 2:27; 3:9; Jer. 32:40; John 10:28; 1 Peter 1:5).” There are too many biblical factors that overthrow man’s ability to thwart the salvation attained by God. Perseverance of the Saints can be seen in a number of various scriptural lights. The Scriptures are exceedingly plain as to the reasons that it presses into the conscience of the Christian the truth of the matter that God is truly the Savior and He will save His people from their sins. They are, 1) There is no failure in the decreed counsel of God. 2) There is no change in the Divine being (which is essential to this doctrine of perseverance), 3) There is no failure in the work of Christ, 4) There is no failure in the Love of God to the elect, and 5) the elect cannot cease to be what they are by God’s decree.

First, there is no failure in the decreed counsel of God. Everything which resides within the mind of God is not potential but is an eternal actual. A fancy name given to this actuality, so finite human beings can grasp the idea in some sense, is an Eternal Decree. The eternal decree of God is that perfect, complete, infinite plan from which all things transpire in our time and space as history unfolds. It is the next step in understanding the Eternal Counsel, more appropriately, what God did in that counsel. God has planned this decree carefully and to its most minute detail. Jesus says, “Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father. And even the very hairs on your head are all numbered (Matthew 10:29,30).” How infinite is this great Continuum where God himself numbers the hairs on your head! He is there when every sparrow falls for His plan is vast. He leaves nothing to chance nor anything to a whimsical fling. All things are under His power and authority and all things have been planned accordingly (Genesis 50:20; Psalm 75:9-25; John 10:29). “Divine salvation is a supernatural work which produces supernatural effects.”¹⁰

¹⁰ AW Pink, *Eternal Security*, Ages Software, Auburn, OR, (1996). Page 7.

The decrees of God are purposed filled. The decreed counsel of God is the will of God willed in purpose. God’s knowledge is eternal, as is His essence. Therefore, it is necessary that the decree upon which this is set forth is also eternal. Every decree of God is eternal. We lower God’s standards when we see that God’s redemptive, eternal plan rests on the will of man apart from God. Nothing functions apart from the will of the Divine Creator and sustainer of life. For if God is so impotent that He must wait on man for His will to be effectual, then He is hardly a God at all. *The Westminster Confession of Faith* says, “God, from all eternity, did, by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will, freely, and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass.”¹¹ All things are decreed by God in an eternal and unchangeable act. This decree takes place at an appointed time and nothing can change it, for if it could change then this would contradict the Scriptures which state that God’s decrees *do not change* (Isaiah 46:10; Ephesians 1:9; Matthew 18:7; 26:54; Luke 22:22; Acts 2:23; 1 Corinthians 11:19). Even the most casual of instances are seen as part of the divine decree: accidental death (Exodus 21:12); lots (Proverbs 16:33); the preservation of the bones of Christ (John 19:36). Turretin states, “For the certainty does not arise from second causes, which are free and contingent, but extrinsically from the immutable decree.”¹² God’s purposes stand (Proverbs 19:21). God’s decrees in the purpose of salvation are not a matter of foreknowing who will do what or how well they did it, but of decreed completeness as God exercises His good pleasure in shaping a people for His very own (Deuteronomy 4:37; 7:6-8; 8:17; 9:4-6; Psalm 135:4; Ezekiel 16:1; Amos 3:8; Malachi 3:17). Based on that decree, the perseverance of the saint is secure – their salvation to the end is secure. If God decrees anything, such a decree renders the action certain to come to pass. But why is God’s will “iron” and “immovable” in this way? This is the next point.

Secondly, there is no change in the Divine being. What this means is that the character of God remains the same, and thus his promises remain the same. Why is this important to the saint and his

¹¹ The Westminster Confession of Faith, (3:1).

¹² Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, Volume 1, Philipsburg: P&R Publishing, 1992. Page 321.

perseverance? The divine being is immutable (has no fluctuation or change). An immutable, infinite, eternal, necessary act of God's will cannot be violated or halted by the devil, by man, by beast or by anything at all. The essential characteristics of His nature dictate that this is so. God is immutably holy, immutably loving, immutably perfect, etc. (James 1:17; Mal. 3:6). *Immutability* is defined as something "not capable of or susceptible to change." If God wills something, and God cannot change, then such a decree cannot change. John Gill states this rightly speaking of the perseverance of the Christian, "The immutability of God is concerned in this affair; I am the Lord, I change not, therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed (Malachi 3:6)."¹³ Jacob, though treacherous, and his sons, though equally treacherous, are not consumed by the holiness of God because God does not change. He is immutable in his promises and His decrees. When God states that "I will lose none," He is bound by divine oath to carry out that statement for He cannot lie. "I do not change" says God.

Imagine how horrible it would be if God were to change His promises. Imagine that the Christian reads that God holds out the promise of life, and God alone saves the sinner, "by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises." (2 Peter 1:4) Imagine then, that the Christian dies, stands before God, and God says that He changed His mind and has decided to throw him into hell. To even think that such could be the case would remove all hope even from this life and make salvation (life even!) a sick joke. Hodge states, "The apostle's confidence in the steadfastness and final perseverance of believers was founded neither on the strength of their purpose to persevere, nor on any assumption that the principle of religion in their hearts was indestructible, but simply on the fidelity of God."¹⁴ It is upon the immutability of God and His promises that such realities are able to take place, which otherwise would never take place. Gill says that may be further concluded "from the special and particular promises made in this covenant [i.e. promises], and which stand on divine record [i.e. promises], relating to the perseverance of

¹³ John Gill, *The Doctrine Of The Saints Final Perseverance, Asserted And Vindicated*, London: George Keith, (1752) Page 15.

¹⁴ Charles Hodge, *Commentary on 1 Corinthians*, Libronix Digital Software, Page 30.

the saints.”¹⁵ Without the unchangeable nature of such promises, the Christian has no hope but what he can muster of himself. Such a possibility is sheer horror, and of no comfort to the soul at all. No. The unbreakable tenor of the promises of God rest in the nature of God and His will. His will is as unchanging as the promises that issue forth. The Christian can rest heartily on the reality that God is the sovereign Savior, and He will be true to His word.

Thirdly, there is no failure in the work of Christ. Christ shall accomplish all that He sets out to do. Within the Covenant of Redemption, where the Son enters into a covenant with the Father to “do His will” for the Redemption of his elect, John Owen describes this “covenant” as a “compact.” He says, “The...act of this sending is his entering into covenant and *compact* with his Son concerning the work to be undertaken, and the issue or event thereof.” Owen describes the Covenant of Redemption as a covenant where the Son must work, based on the Father’s decree to send Him to save and redeem sinners, “so as that God might be everlastingly glorified in the work which he was designed unto, and which by him he had to accomplish.” (Hebrews, 3:78) ¹⁶ Owen links this to the creative power of the Son in framing the worlds, that there would be a context in which His work would take place. However, though the Son takes up the “work” decreed for Him to accomplish, if men attempt to take up this work themselves, they will consistently fail. Owen says, “Those who seek him according to the law of works, and by the best of their obedience thereunto, shall never find him as a rewarder, nor attain that which they seek after; as the apostle expressly declares, Romans 9:31, 32.” (Hebrews, 6:56).”¹⁷ The reason for this failure is their mutable inability to uphold the demands of the Law in any covenant. God must send a Mediator, then, to uphold His Law perfectly, and satisfy divine justice. Jesus Christ accomplishes this. Christ achieves this by coming into the world incarnate, and taking up the offices of the prophet, priest and king which He executes perfectly. He offers Himself as a sacrifice to God on behalf of His elect, chosen people. In doing so, He secures their salvation and by

¹⁵ John Gill, *The Doctrine Of The Saints Final Perseverance, Asserted And Vindicated*, London: George Keith, (1752) Page 22.

¹⁶ John Owen, *Commentary on Hebrews*, Published by Banner of Truth Trust, Volume 3, Page 78.

¹⁷ John Owen, *Commentary on Hebrews*, Published by Banner of Truth Trust, Volume 6, Page 56.

necessity, their perseverance. The Scriptures state that Christ saved his people, “, "And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins (Matthew 1:21); His sheep, “As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep (John 10:15);” His friends, “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends (John 15:13);” His church, “Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood (Acts 20:28), and, "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it (Ephesians 5:25)." The Christian, then, sees the gift of eternal life as completed and finished, as Christ said, “It is finished.” They are able to hope in it as permanent, “For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate *to be* conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren (Romans 8:29).” As Edwards so nicely states, “God, when he had laid out himself to glorify his mercy and grace in the redemption of poor fallen men, did not see meet [did not see fit], that those who are redeemed by Christ, should be redeemed so imperfectly, as still to have the work of perseverance left in their own hands.”¹⁸ And again he says, “Again, Christ came into the world to do that in which mere men failed.”¹⁹

In knowing that the sacrifice of Christ is effectual, and actually saves, demonstrates that perseverance must follow, otherwise, Christ did nothing, and the Christian can hope in nothing. Many people feel as though they are saved, but that they always have the possibility of falling away hanging over their heads. This does injustice to the finished work of Christ on the cross. Christ is the Savior. Man cannot do anything to add to the blessed sacrifice of the Lord. Calvin demonstrates the absurdity of this when he says, “Then, how absurd it is that the certainty of faith be limited to some point of time, when by its very nature it looks to a future immortality after this life is over!”²⁰ In other words, if a Christian says they are saved right now, how certain can this be if they believe at any point they can fall away?

¹⁸ Jonathan Edwards, *Works*, Vol. 6, *Misc. Observations on Important Theological Subjects*, Ages Software, Auburn, OR, (1996) Page 461.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 463.

²⁰ John Calvin, *Institutes*, 3:2:40.

Such a thought is absurd. Christ is the second Adam who fulfills God's requirements and procures for His people their salvation, of which He shall lose nothing. Garlington states, "Therefore, the Adam/Christ analogy is intended to ground the final perseverance of the saints in the perseverance (obedience) of Christ himself, because the one who now lives by the power of an indissoluble life (Heb 7:16) was obedient unto death (Phil 2:8)."²¹ Out of the reality of Christ's obedience and sacrifice, Christians have the ability to be lead back to the law and to be obedient. They do not do this to gain eternal life, but to please Him who has already purchased it infallibly for His people.²² John Owen rightly exhorts Christians to listen to the Word of Jesus Christ, "But will this be granted, that wherever the saints are said to hear the voice of Christ, perseverance is included? — we shall quickly have a fresh supply of Scripture proofs for the demonstration of the truth in hand. But what attempt is made for the proof hereof? "It is so because the words immediately following are, 'I give unto them eternal life,' which presuppose their final perseverance;" and this must be so, because it is so said. "I give unto them eternal life," is either an intimation of what he doth for the present, by giving them a spiritual life in himself, or a promise he will do so with respect to eternal life consummated in heaven, which promise is everywhere made upon believing; and it is a promise *of perseverance*, not given *upon perseverance*."²³

Fourthly, there is no failure in the love of God to the elect. Though one may believe this should remain under the rubric of God's character as immutable since He *is* love, it is still important to treat this in some manner separately since Christians often have a hard time believing they are accepted before God as sons and daughters. John Gill succinctly states, "The final perseverance of the saints, may be concluded from the everlasting love of God unto them. Those who are

²¹ D. B. Garlington, *Westminster Theological Journal Volume 55, The Obedience of Faith in the Letter to the Romans*, Westminster Theological Seminary, 1993;2002, Page 96.

²² To take upon one's self the Arminian schema of divine redemption is to make Christ hypothetically create a possible way of salvation. Such a hypothetical injunction creates the possibly (in theory) that no one would ever come to Christ, and thus the plan of God would be seen a thwarted. However, the opposite of this is true in that the secured salvation gained on the cross, not only saves, but preserves the Christian until the time of Christ's return where He will gather His elect to glory.

²³ John Owen, *Works*, Published by Banner of Truth Trust, Volume 11, Page 380.

once the objects of God's love, are always so; his love to them in every state and condition into which they come is invariable and unalterable: it is constant, permanent, perpetual, and for ever God loves his people with the same love he loves his Son, and therefore it will always continue; and if it always continues, it is impossible they should ever perish; can a man perish everlastingly, and yet be the object of everlasting love? the love of God to him must cease, or he can never perish; God always *rests* in his love to his people; it is more immovable than *hills* and *mountains*; they may *depart*, but his loving-kindness never shall, that is from everlasting to everlasting; *I have loved thee*, saith the Lord (Jeremiah 31:3), *with an everlasting love, therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee.*" [these] things were written aforetime, were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope (Romans 15:4)."²⁴ God's everlasting love cannot desire something it cannot have and will not have. If God loves the Christian, then for all time, the Christian shall be loved by an immutable love that never changes. The reason such a love rests on the Christian is that Christ dwells in them and His righteousness covers them. God then sees the Christian as if looking at Jesus Christ. It is His righteousness, the imputation of the active obedience of Christ to the law of God kept perfectly, that justifies us in His sight. It is His cross, his propitiation of God's wrath and expiation of our sin that secures our place in the redemption plan of the elect. God loves His people and the Scriptures demonstrate this love over and over: Romans 5:8, "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." 2 Corinthians 5:14, "For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died." Ephesians 5:2, "And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma." 2 Timothy 1:7, "For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind." 1 John 3:16, "By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us." 1 John 4:10, "In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins." It is

²⁴ John Gill, *The Doctrine Of The Saints Final Perseverance, Asserted And Vindicated*, London: George Keith, (1752) Page 15.

difficult to ponder the reality that God loves sinful men. However, it is a reality nonetheless. If He begins to love them, and has decreed to save them by this love, they shall never be lost. They shall persevere to the end and be saved. The Christian must believe this as 1 John 4:16 exhorts, “And we have known and believed the love that God has for us.” Pink says, “God does not love His people because they love Him. No, we read of “His great love wherewith He loved us even when we were dead in sins” (Ephesians 2:4, 5): when we had no desire to be loved by Him, yea when we were provoking Him to His face and displaying the fierce enmity of our unrenewed hearts.”²⁵ What might the Christian do to please God? What righteous deed might they do in order to win over His favor? Nothing. God loves His people because He loves them through Jesus Christ. His love is immutable and unchangeable. The sons of Jacob are not consumed by God’s anger against their sin because He does not change, and He cannot change. His love is everlasting. Jeremiahs 31:3, “Yes, I have loved you with an *everlasting love*.”

The doctrine of the *Perseverance of the Saints* has withstood the test of time and critic. It is rooted and grounded in the bible and gives the saint an infallible assurance of salvation, though presses him on to good work in grateful humility before his sovereign Benefactor. It is by way of awe and reverence, incomprehensible to the Christian heart. It is not that it is incomprehensible to the brain – Christians can certainly see this from Scripture quite clearly if they take the time to read through the Bible. But it forces the Christian into a state of awe due to God’s immeasurable love for him that is undeserved. It is a real truth, but a high truth. Dort, in summing up the positive aspects of this doctrine in their section on perseverance says, that God has impressed this truth to the hearts of believers, but there are outside influences that desire to destroy it, “The carnal mind is unable to comprehend this doctrine of the perseverance of the saints and the certainty thereof, which God has most abundantly revealed in His Word, for the glory of His Name and the consolation of pious souls, and which He impresses upon the hearts of the believers. Satan abhors it, the world ridicules it, the ignorant and hypocritical abuse it, and the heretics oppose it.” Though opposition stands in the way of the

²⁵ A.W. Pink, *Eternal Security*, Ages Software, Auburn, OR, (1996). Page 52.

assurance of the Christian, the Sovereign God of the Universe, and His Son Jesus Christ, are upholding him even when he may feel deceived as to the truth of it. Dort continues to say, “But the bride of Christ has always most tenderly loved and constantly defended it as an inestimable treasure; and God, against whom neither counsel nor strength can prevail, will dispose her so to continue to the end. Now to this one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, be honor and glory forever. Amen.”²⁶ Christians should never doubt God at His word. God says He will save and Christ does the saving. The Christian must remember the promises of God and say along with Hodge, “If God of his own good pleasure elects some [me] to eternal life, they [I] cannot fail of salvation.”²⁷

²⁶ The Canons of Dort, Fifth Head of Doctrine, Article 15.

²⁷ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*. Originally published 1872., Vol. 2, Page 161. Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997.