

FOUNDERS JOURNAL

FROM FOUNDERS MINISTRIES | SUMMER 2018 | ISSUE 112

PERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS





Founders Ministries is committed to encouraging the recovery of the gospel and the biblical reformation of local churches. We believe that the biblical faith is inherently doctrinal, and are therefore confessional in our approach. We recognize the time-tested *Second London Baptist Confession of Faith* (1689) as a faithful summary of important biblical teachings.

The *Founders Journal* is published quarterly (winter, spring, summer and fall). The journal and other resources are made available by the generous investment of our supporters.

You can support the work of Founders Ministries by giving online at:

founders.org/give/

Or by sending a donation by check to:

Founders Ministries
PO Box 150931
Cape Coral, FL 33915

All donations to Founders Ministries are tax-deductible.

Please send all inquiries and correspondence for the *Founders Journal* to:

editor@founders.org

Or contact us by phone at 239-772-1400.

[Visit our web site](#) for an online archive of past issues of the *Founders Journal*.

Contents

Introduction: A New Journal on an Old (Eternally Old) Issue

The Perseverance of the Saints

Tom Nettles

Page 4

Perseverance of the Saints

From the upcoming book *Mere Calvinism*

Jim Scott Orrick

Page 8

The Certainty of Perseverance

Paragraph 2 of

Chapter XVII of the *Second London Confession*

Rob Richey

Page 20

Can a Genuine Christian Backslide?

Paragraph 3 of

Chapter XVII of the *Second London Confession*

Jeff Robinson

Page 28

Five Things I Needed to Learn as a Pastor

“Pastoring is a constant learning process...”

Baruch Maoz

Page 36



Tom Nettles

Introduction

A New Journal on an Old (Eternally Old) Issue:

The Perseverance of the Saints

Having carefully set forth biblical teaching concerning decrees, eternal covenant, creation, providence, election, sin, the person and work of Christ, effectual calling, repentance and faith, justification, adoption, good works, et al. the confession presses these ideas together and affirms that “Those whom God hath accepted in the beloved, effectually called and sanctified by his Spirit, and given the precious faith of his elect unto, can neither totally nor finally fall from the state of grace; but shall certainly persevere therein to the end and be eternally saved.” God’s gifts of saving grace are irrevocable, not because of us, but because of the immutability of His eternal decree, the absolute efficacy and justice of Christ’s atoning work, the effectual and invincible transforming power of the Holy Spirit, and the continued intercession of our advocate, Jesus Christ the righteous one. This article borrows from the First London Confession and is informed also by certain phrases of the True Confession of the Separatists as well as the Westminster Confession of Faith. A picturesque flow of words emphasizing the certainty of the salvation of the elect comes largely from the First London Confession:

And though many storms and floods arise and beat against them, yet they shall never be able to take them off the foundation and rock which by faith they are fastened upon:

notwithstanding through unbelief and the temptation of Satan the sensible sight of the light and love of God, may for a time be clouded, and obscured from them, yet he is still the same, and they shall be sure to be kept by the power of God unto salvation, there they shall enjoy their purchased possession, they being engraven upon the palms of his hands, and their names having been written in the book of life from all Eternity.”

To some this seems almost too good to be true. God takes people to heaven—the place free from pain, sickness, want, sin, destruction, natural disaster, death, and sadness—through no merit of their own but solely according to His unfettered eternal grace. Nothing can interrupt or make Him falter in His purpose to do so. Surely we must do something to be worthy of such a final state. Or perhaps we can do something to fall off the sure path to heaven or fail to do something that would maintain a steady course to arrive there finally. Can it really be true that “He who began a good work in you will perfect it [bring it to completion] until the day of Christ Jesus,” and that He Himself “will confirm you to the end, blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ” for “God is faithful, through whom you were called into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord” (Philippians 1:6; 1 Corinthians 1:8, 9 NASB 1995). The answers are, “No,” we can do nothing to alter God’s decreed course of eternal life for His elect, and “Yes” God Himself will see to it that it is done.

In fact, God will leave everyone to his or her free choice in this matter and give them the desires of their heart. For some that means they will continue freely to pursue their course of life in accord with the “course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air” and will indulge most freely in the “desire of the flesh and of the mind” manifesting that they are by nature and so freely choose to be “children of wrath.” Others, however, will choose the path to heaven for there is worked in them a taste of the heavenly to such a degree that their desires for knowing the sufferings of Christ along with the following glories in the presence of the triune God compel them to forsake all earthly things in order to attain the resurrection of the dead. They relish the promise of being like Christ. They really do want to see Christ in His glory and really do learn to despise the perishable glories and illicit pleasures of this life for the joy and pleasure that perishes not. Their desires have been changed by a powerful working of God’s Spirit in conjunction with the truth of Scripture and do not feel that they are being coerced to do something they do not want to do. They are aware of the contrary nature of the flesh and indwelling sin, but they hate its presence and by the Spirit they put to death the deeds of the flesh. They are willing to endure the many storms and floods that arise and beat against them for they have seen the heavenly city and they journey toward the company of myriads of angels, to the eternal church of all the firstborn enrolled in heaven, to the spirits of just men made perfect; they will see

without fear God the judge of all, and will be with Jesus the mediator and fulfiller of a new covenant established by the sprinkling of His own blood (Hebrews 12:22–24).

Yes, as the martyrial witness from the first through the twenty-first centuries demonstrates, persons do go to heaven of their own free will, testifying to their complete indebtedness to grace, hating their present lives for the sake of eternal life and the inexhaustibly glorious presence of the Savior, Jesus Christ.

We hope this exposition of Chapter XVII of the Second London Confession will encourage its readers with a deeper sense of gratitude for the grace of God and a more profound determination to take up the cross and follow Christ.

Jim Scott Orrick has written a book entitled *Mere Calvinism*. It will be released in January 2019 published by P&R. It is a charming display of the so-called TULIP acronym employing his inimitable combination of catechism precision, biblical argument, theological integration, illustrations from hunting, tanning, bee-keeping, hitch-hiking, bow-hunting (and making), as well as experiences from being a pastor and a father. He has allowed us to use his chapter on Perseverance from that book. This version is approximately 50% of its original form.

Rob Richey's exposition of paragraph two provides a rich theological engagement with the doctrine of perseverance in all of its supportive ligaments throughout the confession. Rob has served as a pastor (and continues to do so), a valuable and encouraging church-member, a football coach in Christian high schools, and has been in the classroom teaching a variety of courses in Bible, doctrine, and ethics for more than three decades. His insight into the goodness of the Lord as he has observed the Christian perseverance of his daughter as she and her husband formulate Christian witness in the midst of seeing two daughters struggle with incurable childhood conditions looms in the background of his perceptions of this doctrine. His ThD dissertation on John Bunyan provides a thoughtful academic background for his interaction with this subject in particular.

Jeff Robinson, a pastor, writer, professor, editor, dad, and husband has given us a transparent look at paragraph three using both doctrinal exposition of Scripture and a theologically interpreted narrative of life. The often stultifying effect of indwelling sin ("the prevalency of corruption remaining within them") provides the background for the preserving, all-conquering grace of God in securing the saints' perseverance. Jeff's skills as a writer, his care as an expositor, his sober doctrinal reflection, and his firm biblically-oriented grasp of his own pilgrimage combine to give rich personal and pastoral ambience to that exposition.

Baruch Maoz served for thirty-three years as pastor of a Christian congregation in Israel. He has shared with his characteristic candor “Five Things I Needed to Learn as a Pastor.” In a disarming and charming way Baruch tells of his pilgrimage in discovering that he needed to learn these things and that one never completes this specific course of learning. His narrative opens to readers something of the power of God’s preserving grace in producing perseverance in those whom he calls to pastoral ministry.

Founders Ministries submits this issue of *The Founders Journal* with the prayer that each reader will find reason to glorify God for his rich mercy in the call to endure to the end.

—Tom J. Nettles



Jim Scott Orrick

Perseverance of the Saints

The following article is taken from the chapter on Perseverance in Jim Scott Orrick's upcoming book, *Mere Calvinism*. Used by permission.

The Danger of Doctrinal Reduction

The doctrine of perseverance is like a golden crown that adorns the glorious body of God's sovereign grace. There are more than a few who would say that they believe only one of the Five Points of Calvinism, and the one they believe is this point, the perseverance or preservation of the saints. They want to hold to the crown while rejecting the body of sovereign grace that supports the crown. Such a position leaves the crown mysteriously floating in mid-air. I readily admit that these "one-point-Calvinists" have a substantial reason for holding so tenaciously to this one point: they see that it is taught in the Bible! They rightly take Jesus at His word when He says, "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. I and the Father are one" (John 10:27–30). The "one-pointers" at least know the meaning of *eternal*.

There is, however, a dangerous tendency that is inherent in holding to the crown of perseverance while rejecting the other four points. That dangerous tendency is hinted at

in the name the “one-pointers” often call this doctrine. Instead of referring to the doctrine as the *Perseverance of the Saints*, or the *Eternal Security of the Believer*, they call it, *Once Saved Always Saved*. Properly understood, there is nothing wrong with calling it that. It is catchy, memorable, and it is true. The real trouble is not what they call it, but the way they sometimes explain it. Regrettably, some of the one-pointers—not all, but some—who say that they believe in *Once Saved Always Saved* have woefully deficient ideas of what it means for a person to be saved. For them, a person may “get saved” when he or she merely repeats “The Sinner’s Prayer” (a prayer, by the way, that is not in the Bible). Or a person may “get saved” when he “walks down the aisle” (not in the Bible) or “asks Jesus into her heart” (also not in the Bible) or when she gets baptized. In brief, the person who “gets saved” has not necessarily repented. Perhaps the person has been told that all she need do is to admit that she is a sinner, but merely admitting one’s sin is not repentance.¹ Repentance that leads to eternal life is a saving grace, and when a person repents, he has a true sense of his sin, and he has begun to see the mercy of God offered in Christ. He is grieved over sin, he hates sin, and he turns away from sin. At the same time, he turns to God fully intending to and trying to obey God.² Repentance is much more than admitting that I am a sinner! A superficial understanding of repentance leads to a superficial understanding of salvation.

Similarly, many of those who hold to *Once Saved Always Saved* have a superficial understanding of saving faith. For them, faith in Jesus Christ may be no more than believing facts about Jesus, or believing that Jesus died for sinners, or even believing that “Jesus died for me.” Nowhere does the Bible say that if you just believe that Jesus died for your sins you will be saved. You must receive the Christ who died for sinners and rose again from the dead. The fact that our church rolls are sometimes swollen with the names of persons who give no evidence of spiritual life is a strong indication that we have often dealt with precious souls in a hurried, slipshod way. I am a Baptist, and we Baptists have historically stood for *believer’s* baptism, but based on the disparity between the large number of inactive members on our church rolls and the members who faithfully attend our worship services, the evidence is that we have settled for *consenter’s* baptism. We will baptize anyone who consents to it. Consent to be baptized is not saving faith.

What, then, is saving faith? Faith in Jesus Christ is a saving grace whereby we receive and rest upon him alone for salvation as he is offered to us in the gospel.³ We are saved when we receive Christ—a person—and we are not saved until we receive and rest upon Him alone for salvation.

An Important Clarification

Some time ago, I was talking with a man who did not have long to live. He admitted that he was not ready to meet the Lord, and I was earnestly pleading with him to receive Christ. I explained the gospel to him as well as I could, but he seemed confused. He had lived long on the earth, but he had not used his days wisely. He knew little about Christ. After I left that day, I reflected on what I had told him, and I wondered, *What does he understand me to be saying when I tell him that he must receive Christ? What does he know about Christ? What if I were dying, and someone came and told me that in order to be ready to meet God, I had to receive Millard Fillmore? I cannot tell you five facts about Millard Fillmore, and my eternal salvation depends on receiving Millard Fillmore? If I read books about Millard Fillmore, and I learned a lot about him, and I believed what I learned, would that be the same thing as receiving him?*

Allow me briefly to explain what it means to receive Christ. There was a time in my life when the truths expressed in the next few paragraphs saved me from despair.⁴ First, the word *Christ* means *anointed one*. It has become one of the names by which we refer to Jesus, but originally it was not a name, it was a title. Who is the Christ, or *The Anointed One*, and what does He do? Under the Old Covenant, when God wanted to set a person aside to perform a special task, He would have one of His representatives pour oil on the person's head—anoint him—as a sign that he was the person God had chosen to do the job. There were three very important jobs or *offices* that God anointed select men to perform. One was the office of prophet.⁵ A prophet speaks for God. A second office for which a chosen person was anointed was the office of high priest.⁶ The high priest offered sacrifices and interceded for the people. Third, kings were anointed.⁷ Kings were authorized to conquer, defend, and rule.

As *The Christ*, or *The Anointed One*, Jesus has been authorized to do all three jobs, or to put it another way, He performs or *executes* all three offices. So when we receive Christ, we are receiving someone who is a prophet, a priest, and a king. First, He is a prophet. Christ executes the office of a prophet in revealing to us, by His Word and Spirit, the will of God for our salvation. Are you willing to receive Jesus as your prophet? Will you take His Word to be absolute truth, and reject any ideas and philosophies that contradict His Word?

Second, He is a priest. Christ executes the office of a priest in His once offering up Himself a sacrifice to satisfy divine justice and reconcile us to God, and in making continual intercession for us. Are you willing to receive Jesus as your priest? It means that you must abandon any idea of saving yourself by your own good works. If you take Jesus to be your

priest, then you will rely on Him to represent you before God the Father and to do all that is necessary to make you right with God.

Third, He is a king. Christ executes the office of a king in subduing us to himself, in ruling and defending us, and in restraining and conquering all His and our enemies. Will you receive Jesus as your king? Will you lay down your arms of rebellion, submit to His absolute rule, and look to Him as your champion to deliver you from all your spiritual foes?

If you have received Jesus as your prophet, your priest, and your king, then you have received the Christ, and you are now a child of God.⁸ When Jesus came to earth, “He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him But to all who did receive him, who believed in is name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God” (John 1:11–13). What a difference there is between believing something about the work of Christ and receiving Christ! We know who the true Christ is because of the true things that are said about him in the Bible, but do not confuse believing true things with receiving the true Christ.

The problem with the doctrine of *Once Saved Always Saved* as it is held by many “one-point-Calvinists” is that it offers a false assurance of salvation to those who have never repented of sin or received Christ. A person who has “prayed the prayer” or “walked the aisle” or “asked Jesus into his heart,” or has been baptized is told that he has been eternally saved, and he must never allow Satan to cause him to doubt his salvation. This poor, deceived fellow may then live the rest of his life walking in darkness and in friendship with the world, never reading or hearing the warnings of the Bible that might alert him to his lost condition: “If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth” (1 John 1:6) and “You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore, whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God” (James 4:4). The Lord Jesus said, “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” (Matthew 7:21). Those who do not believe in the eternal security of the believer point the finger at those who hold to *Once Saved Always Saved* and say, “You people believe that a man can get saved, spend the rest of his life as a drunkard, and still go to heaven when he dies!” Sadly, these finger-pointing critics are sometimes right, but that is not the teaching of the perseverance of the saints. Those of us who believe in Perseverance agree that all God’s children must “Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord” (Hebrews 12:14).

The Perseverance of the Saints

The Biblical doctrine of the perseverance of the saints is a far richer and more robust doctrine than what is often meant by *Once Saved Always Saved*. The Bible teaches that God preserves believers by working faith in us and thereby permanently uniting us to Christ. In this way, believers are enabled to persevere to the end because of faith and because of union with Christ. In the words of the famous old hymn, Christ's atoning work cleanses us from the guilt of sin and it also frees us from the power of sin:

Rock of ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in thee;
Let the water and the blood
From thy riven side which flowed
Be of sin the double cure,
Cleanse me from its guilt and pow'r.⁹

Faith

The nature of true saving faith insures that believers will persevere to the end. Faith is not strong optimism. Faith is not the ability to imagine a desirable outcome and then convincing yourself that the outcome you have imagined will certainly happen. I suspect that when the average person uses the word *faith*, he uses it as a synonym for *strong optimism*. For example, when a person is going through a trial, he might say, "But I know it is going to be all right because I have faith." Faith in what? Faith may, and perhaps should, produce strong optimism, in the form of true biblically sustained hope; but faith is not strong optimism. A person may be strongly optimistic about something that is not true.

"Faith is that persuasion of truth which is founded on testimony."¹⁰ In other words, when you have faith, you believe something to be true merely because a person you judge to be trustworthy has said that it is true. In Christianity, God is the one who has testified to the essential ideas of our religion, and we have faith when we believe Him. At its most fundamental level, faith is believing what God has said. He is the God of truth, so we are safe in believing all that He reveals. The most important truths in life are not explained; they are revealed. We do not know these revealed truths because we have figured them out; we know them because we believe them. We believe them because God has spoken them. God has provided ample evidence that He has spoken in the Bible and that the Bible is therefore trustworthy. The experience of countless Christians confirms that the

Bible is true and trustworthy. After God's ample attestation to the truthfulness of the Bible, should we insist that God further prove to us everything that He reveals there, we insult Him, just as we would insult an honest man if we insisted that he provide proof for everything that he claimed to be true.¹¹

Hebrews chapter eleven begins with a description of faith: "Faith is the assurance of things hoped¹² for, the conviction of things not seen" (v.1). The remainder of Hebrews eleven is filled with illustrations of saints who were commended for their faith. If you read that chapter, you will find that every person mentioned in the chapter did something courageous because he or she believed God, and the only reason that they had for acting courageously was because God had revealed truth to them. In most cases, evidence and experience would have led them to disobey God, but they did what they did because they saw "him who is invisible" (v. 27). Faith is the way we see the invisible and the way we know the unknowable.

Although God has given to his image-bearers means of knowledge of this temporal and created world, those are not the same tools as achieving knowledge of the eternal world. Though we are happy to consider the right application of reason, carefully crafted experiments to gain empirical knowledge, and the use of mathematical formulas to gain useful knowledge for better living and flourishing in this world, knowledge of the eternal world in which God dwells is gained only by revelation. John Calvin noted, "those whom the Holy Spirit has inwardly taught truly rest upon Scripture, and that Scripture indeed is self-authenticated; hence, it is not right to subject it to proof and reasoning. And the certainty it deserves with us, it attains by the testimony of the Spirit."¹³ He went on to argue

When we call faith "knowledge" we do not mean comprehension of the sort that is commonly concerned with those things which fall under human sense perception. For faith is so far above sense that man's mind has to go beyond and rise above itself in order to attain it. Even where the mind has attained, it does not comprehend what it feels. But while it is persuaded of what it does not grasp, by the very certainty of its persuasion it understands more than if it perceived anything human by its own capacity. Paul, therefore, beautifully describes it as the power "to comprehend . . . what is the breadth and length and depth and height, and to know the love of Christ, which surpasses knowledge" [Ephesians 3:18–19]¹⁴

Since "in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom" (1 Corinthians 1:22) faith is the only possible means of knowing God, and "without faith it is impossible to please him" (Hebrews 11:6). The complement to this is that with faith it is possible to please God. While faith, *per se*, is a human response, and therefore not a supernatural act, no human ever exercises saving faith apart from the supernatural work of God in him.¹⁵

“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 can boast” (Ephesians 2:8–9, emphasis added).

Faith is a condition of salvation, but faith is not a work. On the contrary, faith entails the cessation of works that might otherwise be performed in the hope of earning salvation. Faith may be compared to a hole that is dug to receive a tree seedling. The hole is necessary, but the tree is the living, growing thing. The hole is empty; it is nothing. Again, faith is like a bandage that is used to apply a healing medicine to a wound. The bandage is not the medicine, but it is necessary to keep the medicine on the wound. The Bible says that we are saved by faith, but that does not mean that faith itself saves us. It is the one in whom we have faith who saves us.

Works That Accompany Faith

If faith is not a work of merit, how does that relate to the necessity that there is no such thing as faith without works? “What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? Faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead” (James 2:14,17). That is exactly the point, isn’t it? Faith arises because it loves the works of Christ and yearns for those works to be glorified both in the gratuitous character of salvation and in the transformation of life it produces. That stands as the foundation of so many of the warnings and admonitions in Scripture that help define the nature of true faith. “Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to make your calling and election sure” (2 Peter 1:10). “Every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus you will recognize them by their fruits” (Matthew 7:17–20).

The Holy Spirit has identified many fruits, or evidences that will help us honestly to discern whether we have saving faith. When we see these scriptural evidences in our hearts and lives, then “The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ” (Romans 8:16–17). The Holy Spirit bears witness most unmistakably in the written word, and not in some undefined sense of well-being that might embolden us to say, “I just know that I know.” What is in the heart will eventually come out. “Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. The good person out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil” (Matthew 12:34–35). When the Holy Spirit indwells

a person, he makes his presence known by producing good fruit in that person's life. "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (Galatians 5:22–23). A person who does not bear the fruits of the Spirit does not have the Spirit. "Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him" (Romans 8:9).

The Word of God is filled with evidences and examples of godly character, but the little book of 1 John was specifically written to identify and confirm true, saving faith. It shatters false perceptions of faith and bolsters true faith with the intent of giving a joyful assurance to real believers. "I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life" (1 John 5:13). Six outstanding marks of true faith are identified in 1:5–7, 2:4–6 and 29, 2:9–10, 2:15–16, 3:6–10, and 5:1.

Saving Faith Endures

Sometimes there are persons who demonstrate some of the evidences of true faith for a while, but like the seed sown among thorns or on rocky soil, they do not endure (Luke 8:13–14). When such persons fail to persevere, they simply show that whatever faith they might have had was not true saving faith. "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 all are not of us" (1 John 2:19). Salvation is not promised to temporary believers; it is promised to believers who continue in the faith. "We have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end" (Hebrews 3:14).

Union with Christ

In our effectual calling, the Holy Spirit works faith in us and thereby unites us to Christ. We are in Christ, and Christ is in us. The Bible teaches that when a person receives Christ, Christ and that person become one. The believer is now *in Christ*. "Because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that, as it is written, 'Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord'" (1 Corinthians 1:30–31).

God has seen fit to deal with human beings through representative heads. There have been two representative heads, the first man Adam, and the Lord Jesus, who is called "the last Adam" (1 Corinthians 15:45). Every human being is either in Adam or he is in Christ.

One need do nothing to be in Adam; simply being born a human in the ordinary way means that we are originally represented by Adam, the first man. To be in Christ, one must be born again and believe in Christ. Being united to Christ, there are definite benefits that are credited to us because of Christ's obedience. Christ is the one who obeyed, but God treats us as if we had obeyed. That is, Christ works *for* us. We are justified and adopted.

At the same time, being united to Christ, there are benefits that are produced in us. He influences the way we think and act so that we are changed to look like Him. That is, Christ works *in* us. We are sanctified. What Christ does *for* us insures that no one united to Christ can ever be damned. What Christ does *in* us insures that everyone united to Christ will persevere to the end. In justification He has erased our demerit by forgiving us our sins through the substitutionary death of Christ; He has given us the merit of eternal life by Christ's perfectly loving obedience. In addition, He has made us children through adoption and has guaranteed that we will conduct ourselves according to the character of this divine family by sanctification.

I often hear the following Scripture read as a benediction: "Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ" (Hebrews 13:20–21). Does God ever answer that prayer? Does He ever equip us with everything good that we may do His will? Does He work in us that which is pleasing in His sight? Is He pleased with us?

I get the impression from a lot of Calvinistic preaching that God really does not like anyone but Jesus. Oh, He loves us, it is granted, but it is no more than a benevolent love. He loves us only because of the good person that He plans to make us one day, but today! He can barely stand to have us around Him. That is not true. God does love us benevolently, yes. That is the only way He could love us when He loved us in eternity past and up until our conversion. But when He reconciled us to Himself, He was reconciled to us, and we were reconciled to Him, and He loves us not only for what He is going to make of us one day, He loves us because of what He has made us today: His children. If you are a believer, you are part of a noble family headed by a Father who loves you.

When God moves in with you, he changes you. He transforms you into a person he likes. He sanctifies you. Sanctification is the work of God's free grace, whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God, and are enabled more and more to die unto sin, and live unto righteousness.¹⁶ In sanctification, the perverse effects of our depravity are

not healed all at once, but, indeed, we are enabled more and more to die unto sin and live unto righteousness. Though at one time we wanted what this world could afford, we come to say, “Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you” (Psalm 73:25).

Why It Is Impossible for a True Child of God Not to Persevere

In some ways, I think that 2 Peter 1:3–4 is the most shocking passage of Scripture in the whole Bible. If you are thinking about it for the first time, you might think that it sounds like a scripture from a cult, but it is in the Bible. “His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.” *You may become partakers of the divine nature.* God’s power has provided everything you need for it to happen. When you come to know Jesus Christ, you have embraced a Savior who expects great things of you, and He calls you to them. He lived a life of glory and excellence when He was on the earth, and now that He has crossed the finish line, He turns and calls you to a life of glory and excellence. He equips and motivates you with His very great and precious promises. You have become a partaker in the divine nature. You were created in the image of God, but you were bruised and mangled by the Fall. You fell into a diseased way of thinking and living, and you were enslaved by the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire, but your King freed you, and you have escaped. He has adopted you into His family.

Your greatest delight is to know Him, “and this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent” (John 17:3) As you behold the glory of the Lord, you “are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another” (2 Corinthians 3:18). You are precious in His sight. You are part of His bride, and He will not let another have you. “Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish” (Ephesians 5:25–27).

You are His child, and he will not give you up. “Can a woman forget her nursing child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you. Behold, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands” (Isaiah 49:15–16).

You are His sheep, he knows you, and He will protect you from the wolf. “I am the good shepherd I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep” (John 10:14–15). You are one of His precious jewels, and “They shall be mine, saith the LORD of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels, and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him” (Malachi 3:17, KJV).

Jesus holds you tight in His strong hand, and He is in the Father’s hand, and He says, “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” (John 10:28–29). How could you be in a safer place? “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? Who will 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” (Romans 8:31–39).

NOTES:

¹ See C. H. Spurgeon’s “Confession of Sin—A Sermon with Seven Texts” in which he examines the lives of seven men in the Bible who admitted, “I have sinned” but were not converted.

² Westminster Shorter Catechism (WSC) Q.87.

³ WSC Q. 86.

⁴ I first encountered this summary in *The Christian’s Great Interest*, by William Guthrie, a magnificent little book.

⁵ For example, you can read about Elijah anointing Elisha to be prophet in 1 Kings 19:16–21.

⁶ For example, you can read about Moses anointing Aaron to be high priest in Exodus 40:12–14.

⁷ For example, you can read about Samuel anointing David to be king in 1 Samuel 16:13.

⁸ The ideas in this paragraph are summarized in the WSC, questions 23–26.

⁹ *Works of Augustus Toplady* (originally published 1794, reprint, Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle Publications, 1987), 912. The last line of this stanza has been altered to say “Save from wrath and make me pure,” but the meaning is very similar.

¹⁰ A. A. Hodge and J. A. Hodge, *The System of Theology Contained in the Westminster Shorter Catechism* (1888, reprint, Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2004), 121.

¹¹ This sentence is an idea I encountered in William Jay’s *Evening Exercises*.

¹² Like faith, *hope* is often misunderstood. There are three essential components of Christian hope: 1. We believe a promise that God has made for the future. 2. We are happy about the promise, and we want God to fulfill it. 3. We cooperate with the means that God has ordained for the accomplishment of the promise.

¹³ John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, translated by Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1960), 1.8.5.

¹⁴ John Calvin, *Institutes*. 3.2.14. Battles Translation.

¹⁵ This is explained at length in the chapter on Irresistible Grace [in the upcoming book *Mere Calvinism*].

¹⁶ WSC, Q. 35.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Jim Scott Orrick serves as Professor of Literature and Culture at Boyce College, the undergraduate school of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, KY.

Rob Richey

The Certainty of Perseverance

Paragraph 2 of Chapter XVII of the *Second London Confession*

17.2 This perseverance of the saints depends not upon their own free will; but upon the immutability of the decree of election¹ flowing from the free and unchangeable love of God the Father; upon the efficacy of the merit and intercession of Jesus Christ and union with him,² the oath of God,³ the abiding of his Spirit and the seed of God within them,⁴ and the nature of the covenant of grace⁵ from all which ariseth also the certainty and infallibility thereof.

¹Romans 8:30; 9:11, 16; ²Romans 5:9, 10; John 14:19; ³Hebrews 6:17, 18; ⁴1 John 3:95; ⁵Jeremiah 32:40)

Introduction

The doctrine of the perseverance of the saints affirms the assured and certain endurance of all Christ-followers. Such is the orthodox belief. Calvinists of all persuasions hold hard and fast to this teaching as do many who would *not* ascribe to the other four historic doctrines of grace.

The Puritan, John Flavel, stated that there will be a “steady and constant continuance of Christians in the ways of duty and obedience, amidst all the temptations and discouragements to the contrary.”¹ He then gave four reasons for man’s perseverance: one, God’s electing love; two, the immortal nature of sanctifying grace; three, the covenant of grace; and, four, Christ’s effectual intercession.² Orthodoxy demands both precision

and fidelity to the biblical doctrine of the final and complete perseverance of the saints of God—only by His precious grace, would they remain steadfast until the final day.

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 (Philippians 1:6, ESV).

Chapter Seventeen, Paragraph Two Delineated: First Statement

Paragraph two of the seventeenth chapter in the Second London Confession is the clarion call to God's sovereign work in endurance, and the first few words quickly move the reader that direction: "The perseverance of the saints depends not upon their own free will..." To be sure, the apostolic writers in the New Testament were prone to concentrate herein—i.e., away from man's ability to keep himself safe and saved—and for good reason. First, due to the immutability of the Godhead, there is a steadfastness in the relationship between God and His people—i.e., the saved sinner has become a partaker of true and everlasting life which is grounded upon the perpetual immanence that exists between the Godhead and the believer. And, second, the Godhead has bestowed power upon the believer to wage successful warfare against the enemies of righteousness. From beginning to end, God is the very heart of man's perseverance. Salvation is of the Lord!

From there, the confession moves to five grounds for man's successful completion at the day of Jesus Christ. The initial statement, "...the immutability of the decree of election flowing from the free and unchangeable love of God the Father..." states the foundation for perseverance. It is God's unchangeable foreordination of a definite number in salvation. Rather than depending upon man's will to coerce the sinful nature to "stay in line," the teaching is that God's decree was the glue that kept man in check.

God's eternal grace was the singular beginning which settled other issues down the road by intimating a direct opposition to man's efforts to save himself throughout and unto the very end. The essence is that God, from eternity past, freely under no compulsion, did order whatever has come to pass. In this decree, God also declared that some men and some angels would be predestined to everlasting life whereas others would be passed by. These counsels were God's alone, and it is according to His own good pleasure that He has ordered and done all things. Those chosen in Christ were elected without regard to foreseen faith, good works, or perseverance—it was by free grace and love alone.³

Of course, the reason behind this understanding is found in the nature of man—man is completely depraved, totally incapable of any good. Thus, man cannot possibly hope to

hold on to something even as grand as salvation. Man's will is totally destitute due to the ravages of sin. There is no hope for a successful end save in the grace of God. He offers the Divine remedy, a foolproof gift that causes not only survival but also eternally glorious flourishing.

But, what is the source of God's decree? Why, it is His "free and unchangeable love"—a fountainhead that gushes forth everlasting benevolence for all the elect. God's decree and Divine love - inseparable! The Father had set as His purpose in love to save to the end a people for Himself, and nothing would alter that: "But God's firm foundation stands, bearing this seal: "The Lord knows those who are his..." (2 Timothy 2:19, ESV).

Second Statement

The second head of the paragraph states that perseverance of the saints rests "upon the efficacy of the merit and intercession of Jesus Christ and union with Him..." While the previous constituent is the heart of perseverance, the merit and intercession of the Son is the most vital for this gives vibrancy to the entire doctrine. Such an idea arises from the teaching that the work of Christ secured the full satisfaction of divine justice.

Too, the mediatorial work of Christ connects the Father's decree of election with the Holy Spirit's experimental wooing, drawing, calling, birthing, *and sustaining* labors. More on the Spirit's work later.

Upon Christ Jesus' meritorious sacrifice, therefore, fell the task of intercession for God's own in order that the comfort due to the heirs of the Father was never lacking. It is reasonable to assume that His intercessions are prevailing for, if the Father regarded the calls of the birds of the air as well as the cries of the humblest of men, He would also answer the prayers of His only Son whose bloody sacrifice groaned for the saints.

At this juncture, it might be necessary to recall Christ's qualifications as Mediator—that is, why was God the Son alone sufficient to stand between God and man: one, He was like those for whom He would negotiate—i.e., His nature was like theirs; and, two, Christ was sinless—a "high priest, holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners."⁴

One final consideration with reference to Christ's mediatorship as it pertains to the final perseverance of the saints is that He purchased redemption, an eternal inheritance, for all that had been given to Him by the Father—none would be lost:

All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day” (John 6:37-40, ESV).

The assuredness of perseverance rested, to a great extent, in the Person and Work of Christ. The confession holds firmly to the belief that the Lord Jesus was well-pleased with the work that He had undertaken on behalf of sinners—He had seen the anguish of His soul and was satisfied. What consistency between the Father’s electing love and the Son’s redeeming love! All that are in Christ possess the promise of God that they will complete their journey.

Third Statement

Thus, the third proposition is “...the oath of God.” Yes, there it is, God’s promise!

Perseverance is also based upon...the oath of God. Scripture states: “So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it with an oath (Hebrews 6:17 ESV). And so, our perseverance does not depend upon our own free-will, but upon the very oath of God. This brings to mind a stanza of the hymn, “The God of Abraham Praise:”

He by himself hath sworn, I on his oath depend;
I shall on eagle’s wing up borne to heaven ascend;
I shall behold his face, I shall his power adore;
And sing the wonders of his grace forever more.⁵

Herein, God swears by virtue of: one, His non-lying character; and, two, His binding oath.⁶

When a witness gives his testimony in a court of law, he binds himself to an oath, swearing to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth “so help me God.” That kind of testimony is used to determine innocence or guilt in legal matters. Verse 18 [of Hebrews 6] says that God did two things to demonstrate that His promise to Abraham would not be broken.

(1) *His non-lying character:* Of course, the problem is that a man is only as good as his word. If he is a liar, then all the promises in the world will not change him into an honest speaker. But when we see God making a promise, it is a promise made by the One who always speaks truth.

(2) *His binding oath:* When God wanted to show Abraham the truthfulness of His promise, He went beyond the truthfulness of His character. He bound Himself with an oath. He said, “I swear to God.” And in doing so, He was saying that if His word does not come to pass, then may He cease to exist.⁷

Fourth Statement

The next statement, “the abiding of his Spirit and the seed of God within them,” in the confession addresses the Holy Spirit’s grand work in the saints’ perseverance. The harmony of the Godhead in accomplishing the salvation of man was completed in the consideration of the Holy Spirit. Although it was unlike the work of either the Father or the Son, it was nevertheless of equal significance.

The abiding of the Spirit culminated both the Father’s love decree and the Son’s mediation by effectually applying the reconciliation purchased by Christ. As Paul had declared to Titus, “...not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us...” (Titus 3:5-6a, ESV). The Spirit’s work was the climax whereby the sinner was made into a child of God—by His power He brought the Gospel with full conviction.

This union between God the Spirit and the new believer manifested itself by actually making the sinner one with Christ so that no amount of distress could separate him from Christ which, in turn, resulted in all the eternal riches of Christ now being possessed by him. The new believer was now enabled to participate in all the duties of his gracious new calling. He was intimately, insolubly, inherently, and obediently united with the Father through the Son and by the Spirit.

Blessing of blessings that God the Holy Spirit Himself dwells in believers! So, what can be imagined as possessing the ability to expel Him from Christ-followers? Can sin, self, or Satan? Is there anything in the whole wide world capable of such separation?

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 (Romans 8:37-39).

Indeed, not! The goodwill of both the Father and the Son followed by the special sealing of the Holy Spirit will bring about a happy ending for the believer—he will persevere to the end.

Fifth Statement

The confession gives one final ground for the saints' perseverance, and it is "the nature of the covenant of grace." God's pledge toward sinners was a most "solemn compact and agreement between God and fallen man"⁸ and as such was part of the answer to man's sin and misery. To understate the importance of this covenant in sustaining the saints' perseverance would be a sore mistake. For what began in the eternal counsels of the Godhead with reference to the Father's unchangeable love, the Son's merit and intercession, and the Spirit's abiding was activated by the covenant of grace. Thus, what God had purposed would surely come to pass without frustration or failure.

Concerning the appellation "grace," the covenant was so-called because everything within it respecting the elect was completely of grace—it was a covenant opposed to anything of worth within the sinner. Both the items pledged in the covenant (pardon of sin) and the condition of the covenant (faith) were gracious.

A brief primer on the covenant might prove helpful. The covenant of grace was made initially with God the Son. Christ, the second Adam received the commission as Mediator—He was made under the law, and He would perfectly fulfill it. Of course, the Son did this by enduring the most egregious torments in His soul and to His body as well as perfect obedience to its stipulations. Such was incumbent upon Christ because of the utter failure of the first Adam.

Although made in eternity, the covenant had to be applied to the elect. A right consideration of it, thus, notes the differences between the Son and the elect: Christ was the Representative, the elect were the recipients; Christ was not in need of grace, the elect were in need of abundant grace; Christ was obedient to the Father's will, the elect were given faith to believe in the Son's Person and work. The covenant resulted, and God's promises—full and free—covered all the contingencies of the elect's experience.⁹

It is evident that the covenant of grace was vital to the doctrine of the saints' perseverance. The elect's confidence is bolstered by it for if the covenant is true once, it is true always. Yes, God's love for His own is unchangeable – He will not forsake them. And, then, of course, the Son must enter the picture as the One who took upon Himself the requirements of the law and union with Himself. Lastly, the Holy Spirit took His place as the One who put the new law in the mind and wrote such upon the heart of the elect.

Conclusion

The die was cast. If these five statements were true, it must follow that the elect would enjoy the benefits of the Author and Finisher of salvation - the work of the Godhead was too sure to bring about any contrary conclusion. As the confession itself states: "from all which ariseth also the certainty and infallibility thereof." What God had purposed would come to pass without complication or collapse. Free grace from decree to covenant to the final manifestation of all redeemed souls basking in the light of everlasting peace.

... [for] 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 (Philippians 1:5).

To God be the glory.

NOTES:

¹ John Flavel, *The Works of John Flavel*, vol. 6 (The Banner of Truth Trust, 1968), 206. Flavel did go on to note that not all who profess Christ will continue in the Lord, however: "...many that zealously profess him, afterwards fall away...[They] have not a good root and foundation." (Ibid.)

² Ibid., 206–207. It is interesting to note that he also stated two *instructions* concerning the Christian's response to these truths: one, man himself must lay a good foundation; and, two, all men should examine themselves with reference to the task before them. Still, the emphasis in perseverance—as with all the doctrines of man's salvation—is Godward. Only after sovereign grace can human responsibility be posited.

³ Insistence on this truth is not to say, however, that God dashes man's will to pieces upon the rock of His sovereignty. God does not violate the will of His creature, nor does He takeaway liberty or the contingency of second causes. There is a deeply mysterious harmony in the doctrines of God's sovereignty and human responsibility. Neither must be compromised.

⁴ Though Christ was True God of True God, He took on flesh so that He might be able to sympathize with men's weaknesses and infirmities. Christ was without sin (cf. Hebrews 7:26). He was true God and true

Man. The union of these two natures (the most profound of mysteries, no doubt), qualified Him to be the reconciliation so desperately needed by sinful mankind.

⁵ Gary Marble, "A Commentary on the 1689 London Confession of Faith."

⁶ John Stevenson, "The Oath of God."

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Thomas Watson, *A Body of Divinity* (The Banner of Truth Trust, 1968), 154.

⁹ These promises were both general and specific. The general contained the twin promises of Hebrews 8:10: "...and I will be their God, and they shall be my people." The peculiar promises were manifold: illumination of the truth of God by the Spirit, remission of sin by the work of the Son, and sanctification by the Spirit.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Rob Richey has served as a pastor, a football coach in Christian highschools, and Bible teacher. He is the founder of Blackhorse Ministry. This article is ©2018 BlackHorse Ministry and used by permission.



Jeff Robinson

Can a Genuine Christian Backslide?

Paragraph 3 of Chapter XVII of the *Second London Confession*

It was a profound, shame-inducing moment, one I had coming, but one God used as embers that would eventually grow into a flame of spiritual awakening.

I was a 21-year-old sports journalist/college student working for a daily newspaper in the Atlanta area, not far from my hometown in the north Georgia mountains. I arrived to cover the baseball game just moments before the first pitch. It was Sunday afternoon. As I hustled to prepare my scorecard and situate my pre-internet era laptop and other necessary accoutrements, a colleague arrived at his seat next to mine in the press box. I was wearing a coat and tie—atypical attire for one about watch a baseball game in the Peach State in July.

“Man, why are you so dressed up?” he asked. “You look like you’ve been to church or something.”

“I have been to church,” I said. “I went to worship service this morning at First Baptist.”

He looked confused. “Huh? That’s a shocker. I’ve never taken you for the religious kind.”

You mean you're a Christian? I've never seen that in you."

His words, spoken matter-of-factly, left me feeling as if I'd grabbed onto a high-voltage wire. I spent all nine innings of that game thinking more about hypocrisy than homers. My Christian witness had taken a called third strike. Actually, it had never left the dugout. I was humiliated, not because he had failed to see my obvious piety, but because my life did not match what he rightly expected to see from a follower of Jesus Christ. It was the first time I had been to church in three years. He was right; there was no evidence that I was a Christian. Sadly, this was not a new development.

I had grown up in church, made a profession of faith at 10, and walked with the Lord until age 17. My family was in church Sunday morning for Sunday school and corporate worship, Sunday night for training union, Monday night for choir practice, Tuesday night for outreach, and Wednesday night for prayer meeting and Royal Ambassadors. I was an officer in FCA, a leader in my youth group, a mediocre but eager singer in youth choir. But the summer before my senior year of high school, my affections began to change. My heart grew cold toward Jesus and His church. When I graduated from youth group, I left church too. A private detective couldn't have located my Bible.

I began to go places no Christian should. I hung with people whose rebellion didn't trouble their consciences—I had friends in low places. I joined a rock n' roll band; this was the mid-80s, the so-called "decade of decadence," so you know what that meant ... For a number of years, I lived the rock 'n roll lifestyle. Jesus was out. Judas Priest was in. Though my time in the band was somewhat short-lived (Thankfully, God didn't give me enough musical talent to play hair metal!), my time as a prodigal was not, and if being a Christian would've been a crime, no honest judge would've found me guilty. I was a Christian, but I was deeply backslidden, out of church, intentionally cut off from the vital means of grace that nourishes a baby Christian into mature adulthood.

After Darkness, Light

Mercifully, the sovereign hound of heaven trailed me in the middle of my rebellion. I sinned boldly, but I didn't enjoy a nanosecond of my hedonism. The indwelling Spirit of God convicted me time and again. One night I returned home from a bar in Athens, Georgia, and lay awake all night sweating, thinking about the reality of hell, hearing Jesus's words in Matthew 13:50, "and throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth." Other Scripture verses learned in VBS, youth group,

and in my home, warred with my mind regularly for months upon end—and one night I awoke in a sweat from a nightmare that I was being dragged to hell by a Satanic minion dressed like a black-hooded executioner. Once during a rock concert in Atlanta, I told a friend, “We really shouldn’t be here. The things we’re doing aren’t right.” He thought I needed another beer. I needed to come home to Jesus—and I knew it. Thirty years later, I’m convinced God was at work in my heart. Eventually, through a series of personal and biblical conversations with my older brother, my parents, and our pastor, the Lord drew me back to Himself and granted me repentance that left me weeping for hours over my sin, then rejoicing for weeks over the burden of guilt being lifted. At 22, the prodigal had returned to his Father.

But what happened? Did I lose my salvation during my late teenage years, only to regain it as a young adult? Some might think so, but I don’t. Scripture is clear that nothing can pluck a genuine believer from the hand of God (John 10:27-29)—not sin, not death, not Twisted Sister. Chapter 17, section 3 of the Second London Confession captures five years of my young life with stunning, glorious accuracy:

And though they may, through the temptation of Satan and of the world, the prevalency of corruption remaining in them, and the neglect of means of their preservation, fall into grievous sins, and for a time continue therein, whereby they incur God’s displeasure and grieve his Holy Spirit, come to have their graces and comforts impaired, have their hearts hardened, and their consciences wounded, hurt and scandalize others, and bring temporal judgments upon themselves, yet shall they renew their repentance and be preserved through faith in Christ Jesus to the end.

Simultaneously Saints and Sinners

As I believe my prolonged foray into hedonism demonstrates, it’s possible for a genuine Christian to sin grievously, to spend a season away from the Lord, and later return—drawn by sovereign grace back to the Father whose Son saved him before he ran away to a remote country. Scripture demonstrates this clearly.

Think first of David, Israel’s greatest king. The youngest and most unimpressive of Jesse’s sons, God chose David to lead his covenant people. David was a poet, a warrior, a musician, a shepherd, a lover of sound doctrine, an adulterer, a schemer, a murderer.

David seemed to be a good man—until he slept with another man’s wife, the affair leaving the adulteress, Bathsheba, great with child. Then David connived to make her husband,

one of the most courageous and committed soldiers in the king's army, think he had impregnated his wife while on a weekend furlough. It didn't work, so David's machinations turned deadly—he had the soldier, Uriah, intentionally killed in battle. Yet, in Psalm 51 we read of David's incredible, gut-wrenching confession, and his dramatic repentance before God. As he does toward all penitent sinners, God had mercy on David, even calling Jesus the final David, the sinless king and Savior of sinners.

Think of Peter. Don't you praise the Lord for Peter's presence in the New Testament? Peter was one of God's choicest servants, but he was a bit of a character. So zealous (and misguided) was he for the Savior, Peter cut off a soldier's ear when he perceived they had arrived to arrest the Lord of glory. But Peter's devotion was bipolar. He could be rash, petulant, even unwise and chicken-hearted. On the night of the Lord's crucifixion, he denied Jesus, not once, but three times, even cowering at the feet of a pre-teen girl who accused him of following Jesus. In the shadow of violent Calvary, Peter wanted nothing to do with the Christ. But God inspired the rest of the story. Our Lord interceded for Peter (Luke 22:32). He repented, was restored (John 21:15-19), wrote two epistles, and was preaching when the Spirit came in fullness at Pentecost. Tradition says he ultimately laid down his life for the cause of Christ—being crucified upside down because he was unworthy to be put to death in the manner of Jesus. Peter went away, but because he was one of Christ's sheep, he returned.

By contrast, think of Judas. He betrayed the Lord into the hands of the authorities—just as God planned before time began (Acts 2:23). Jesus called him the “son of perdition” who fell away as prophesied by Scripture (John 17:12). Some theologians and theologies argue that Judas proves the possibility of final apostasy by a genuine believer, but that's simply not the case. Scripture makes clear that Christ's betrayer was a reprobate from the beginning, not a sincere follower of Christ who threw off effectual grace and walked his own path to destruction.

In his 1801 work, *The Backslider: His Nature, Symptoms, and Recovery*, Andrew Fuller distinguished between two different types of backsliders, a Judas and a Peter. The Parable of the Sower helps distinguish them:

Like the blossoms of spring, they for a time excited our hopes; but a blight has succeeded; the blossom has gone up as the dust, and the root in many cases appears to be rottenness.

Fuller encouraged pastors to strengthen the diseased and to bind up the broken and preach and teach in such a way to deepen the roots of the seed that has taken root in

shallow soil. He said there are different types of backsliders, some, like Judas, were never saved, others, like Peter, will return. Gratefully, I was like Peter. As Fuller writes, God used my own wickedness to strike terror into my heart and used it as a means of drawing me back to himself.

All backsliding from God originates in a departure of heart from him ... Thine own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy backslidings shall reprove thee. Know, therefore, and see, that it is an evil thing and bitter, that thou has forsaken the Lord thy God, and that my fear is not in thee, saith the Lord of hosts. But the degrees of this sin, and the modes in which it operates, are various.

But how can it be that a disciple of Christ can fall prey to any of the members of the unholy trinity Scripture sets forth as the world, the flesh, and the devil? Luther's famous theological formulation *simul justus et peccator*—simultaneously a saint and a sinner—is pertinent here. The Christian is just that—a redeemed sinner, who remains in a struggle with indwelling sin until death or the return of Christ. But a genuine follower of Christ will persevere to the end, even if his or her walk with Christ takes a side road for a season.

Final Apostasy—Big Deal or Not?

What about the doctrine of the final apostasy of genuine believers? Is it a secondary doctrine on which Christians may “agree to disagree” without much being lost in the details? It is far more dangerous to reject this doctrine than perhaps first meets the eye. Like the house that sits on an old, crumbling foundation, rejection of perseverance renders unstable many other critical doctrines that rely on it as a solid foundation.

If genuine believers can lose their salvation and be cast away forever, consider the collateral damage to other biblical doctrines:

Election and Predestination

If God chose His people in Christ before the foundation of the world, is it possible for those same people to then “unchoose” themselves? No matter one's view of election, final apostasy seems to render meaningless Scripture's teaching on God's eternal predestining of a people. Even if one holds to election based solely on foreknowledge, final apostasy seems to make God unreliable at best.

Atonement

According to Mark 10:45, Christ gave His life as a ransom for many. Jesus bore God's wrath we deserved so He could buy us back from the curse of the law. If a ransomed one can be finally lost, doesn't that then mean that the ransom price paid was not enough to actually purchase its intended product—the eternal salvation of God's people? Final apostasy also seems to undermine the substitutionary nature of the atonement, since Christ was condemned in the place of His people. This view would seem to indicate that due to an exercise of their free will some of God's people have once again fallen under condemnation with their sins no longer covered by the sacrifice of the substitute—even though they were once covered through the blood of Christ.

Justification by Faith

Justification is a legal declaration that says because of faith in Christ's work on the cross, one is no longer guilty, positionally or legally, before God. Final apostasy seems to undermine God's verdict and re-establish guilty charges against those who were exonerated by faith in Christ. This view mangles the foundational Reformation truth of sola fide.

Indwelling (or Sealing) of the Holy Spirit

In Ephesians 1:13-14, Paul describes believers as those who have been “sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.” It seems that a doctrine of final apostasy undermines Paul's teaching of the Spirit given as a down payment guaranteeing salvation. If salvation can be lost, then the guarantee is meaningless, as is the down payment. And yes, we can grieve the Spirit (Ephesians 4:30), but can we evict him? Scripture never says that.

Promises of God

In John 10, Jesus said, “My sheep hear my voice, 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 ... and no one is able to snatch them out of my Father's hand.” Also, Philippians 1:6 promises that God will complete the work He begins in His people, and the glorious passage in Romans 8:31-39 promises that nothing can separate the believer from the love of God.

But how comforting are these promises if we can, as some argue, remove ourselves from Christ's hand or circumvent the work God has begun in us? In what way do they remain as promises? If these promises are not true, doesn't that undermine the very Word of God? Can we trust a God who is unable to keep His promises from being undone by the power of human choice? Is the will of man stronger than the will of God?

Intercessory Work of Christ

If Christ lives to intercede for us as Hebrews and Romans 8 contend and as John 17 and Luke 22 demonstrate, then in what meaningful way can we trust His prayers if He does not get what he prays for? If Christ prays that we will be kept as in John 17 and those prayers are frustrated, then it would seem to undermine both His intercessory work and His infallibility—Christ prays and then hopes His prayers will be answered and that we will remain in the faith, but our future salvation remains uncertain.

Preservation of the Saints

Inextricably linked to perseverance (and Christ's intercession) is preservation. First Peter 1:3-5 contains a beautiful promise of God's preserving grace for His redeemed people: "He has caused us to be born again ... to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation to be revealed in the last time." If God is guarding our inheritance in heaven, then to assert that free will can lead one to lose his or her salvation seems to exalt the power of man and denigrate the power of God, not to mention what it means for Peter's language describing the inheritance as "imperishable, undefiled, and unfading." Those words seem to ring with an empty note if it is possible for human beings to give away their inheritance.

No doubt, there are many additional implications for the denial of this doctrine, but these are a few of the most devastating consequences that show how crucial the doctrine of final perseverance is for Christian theology. If my reasoning is fully biblical, then it would seem that perseverance of the saints is anything but a tertiary matter. If the foundation crumbles, how can the building stand? Let us preach, teach, and defend this doctrine as a critical part of the entire soteriological structure. Surely children of grace can do this winsomely, even when they do so without apology.

Persevering Grace, How Sweet the Sound!

It is simply not possible to express, in mere words, the depth of my thankfulness to God that He gives persevering grace to His saints, even His prodigal sons. If it's possible to forfeit salvation, I surely would have done it during those young years of wandering far from the fold of God. But, as James 4 puts it so simply, God gives more grace.

By no means should my testimony or these doctrinal insights encourage a backslider to remain "as is" and presume on the grace of God that one day he or she will repent and return to a state in which they will enjoy his love and mercy. That's not my story and it's the story of neither David nor Peter. But prodigal sons (and daughters) should be encouraged that God will love His elect children all the way into eternity because He is guarding their inheritance that is laid up in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroy, where thieves can never break in and steal (1 Peter 4:5-6; Matthew 6:19-21).

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Jeff Robinson is pastor of New City Church in Louisville, KY and a senior editor for The Gospel Coalition.



Baruch Maoz

Five Things I Needed to Learn as a Pastor

I have had the high privilege and awesome responsibility of shepherding a flock of God for just under 33 years. In the course of that time I began to get a glimpse of the wisdom found in the Socratic statement, “all I know is that I do not know.” It’s not that I could not know; I could and should have—at least I could and should have known more than I did. But I didn’t. Over the course of time God’s gracious providences brought me to recognize that I was in desperate need to learn important principles pertinent to the pastoral ministry in which I engaged, and of which I was painfully unaware.

The first thing I need to learn is that I needed to learn. The fact that I completed seminary training or people addressed me as “Pastor” did not mean that knew it all.

The second thing I needed to learn is that I had to learn far more than five things, that the pastoral ministry is a life of constant learning—on every level. But I have been asked to share with you five things, no more, so I am going to limit myself to what I think are the five most pressing matters in my own life and ministry. I’ve chosen to discuss what I consider to be five core issues, each of which points to further necessary practical lessons relative to which I fell short and needed to improve. I make no claim to special insight. For some of you, these will be obvious truths because you will have already learned them. Accept what I have to say as a confession of my own frailty.

Trusting God

I needed to learn to trust in God. The pastoral ministry is extremely demanding—on many levels. Above all, it requires a sincere walk with God, high moral standards, and a good deal of self-sacrifice repeatedly expressed in self-denial. At the same time, the pastoral ministry requires the ability to lead with a Christ-like combination of firmness and gentleness, clarity and a lack of pedantry. It is often a thankless calling. Many will use you and, should you not meet their expectations, turn against you. Paul experienced this in Galatia, which brought him to say to the Galatian Christians, “I testify to you that, if possible, you would have gouged out your eyes and given them to me. Have I then become your enemy by telling you the truth” (Galatians 4:15-16)? Other will use you and, once they believe you cannot profit them further, turn their backs to you. It is well to remember that one is called to serve, not be served.

I needed to learn to trust in God because I am no superman. I am merely a human being called by grace. It was my duty to trust in God to use me in spite of my failings, in spite of my shortcomings and in spite of my sins. I needed not—I was forbidden by the Scriptures—to present myself to the congregation as a know-it-all. Yes, I was called by God and, as one called, obliged to be faithful. But I was not called because I was worthy, certainly no more worthy than any in the congregation. No flesh many glory in God’s sight, nor glory before men. Not being numbered with the many noble or many wise, I was called by grace and, having called me, it was my duty to believe that God would also condescend by grace to use me. One important way He would do so is by me shepherding the flock, not lording it over them, but equipping them for the work of the ministry rather than forcing them into the role of yes-men.

In that context I also needed to learn that it was not all up to me. I could not and did not need to try to do it all. Paul reminds the Corinthians: “I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth ... He who plants and he who waters are one, and each will receive his wages according to his labor

According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it” (1 Corinthians 3:6-8, 10) and that there was much that I could not do and should not presume to do. It is all in God’s hands: He saves. He sanctifies. He blinds or causes people to see. He alone gives the increase. What is born of the flesh is nothing but flesh. Unless those who hear are born from above, by the Spirit, they cannot see the kingdom of God. It was up to me studiously to avoid inappropriate pressure and all forms of manipulation, emotional, intellectual or social. It was up to me

to trust God, preach the word of God faithfully and await the will and work of God and his timing—and His wise timing seldom matched mine.

Further, I needed to learn to trust God in adversity. The church has enemies from within and enemies from without. Sometimes I am my own enemy, at times, in spite my best conscious intentions, I might even be one of those. In spite of my weakness, failings and the ups and downs of the ministry, I was to trust, never succumb to the temptation to despair, never employ worldly means, never to water down the message. The fruitfulness of my calling was not to be measured in numbers. In fact, it was not to be measured at all. God in His faithfulness would not thrust me into a situation by which He does not intend to glorify Himself. I needed to learn to trust Him and recognize that it is not by my strength but by His, made strong through my weakness. I would often be afflicted in every way, but never crushed; perplexed, but never driven to despair; persecuted, but never, ever forsaken; struck down, but never destroyed; “always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. We who live are always being given over to death for Jesus’ sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh” (2 Corinthians 4:7-11). My ultimate calling was to live out the faith I preach, to preach it by my conduct, not merely from the pulpit. To that end I was not entitled to create a screen between my private life and the congregation. I was to conduct myself with maximal transparency so long as doing so would not adversely affect my family.

Trusting in God also meant that I should spend much time in prayer—more than I actually did. It meant that the prayer time during congregational and pastoral meetings was for more than a formality; it was an important—essential—part of our shared walk with God.

A Proper Sense of Priorities

I needed to learn priorities in church life. My primary task as a Pastor was to lead the church in fulfilling its own primary task, which is to place God in Christ above all, “that in everything he might be preeminent” (Colossians 1:18). Community life, family orientation, child and youth programs, theological correctness, evangelism, the physical and social needs of those around us—these and others are to varying degrees important matters, but none equals the glory of God. I had to learn to direct the focus of our church life on God, on loving and obeying Him, of placing Him in the center of our interests and at the forefront of our congregational and personal priorities.

This meant that I had to learn to labor for the cultivation of informed, affectionate, obedient, enthusiastic and consistent worship of God in all that we did as a congregation and in all that each family and each member of the congregation did in their various walks of life.

My duty was to please God, not the people. I needed to be guided by what was best for the congregation, not what the members enjoyed most or demanded most vociferously. I needed to focus on consistent teaching and preaching God's Word, primarily by way of an expository ministry, without shying away from theology or theological consistency, and therefore engaging from time to time in topical sermons, at times in series of such. I needed to cultivate in my heart and in that of the congregation a fascination with God's word and a conscious desire to understand and obey it. Nothing more was to be expected of me or of the congregants, nor anything less.

To that end, heartfelt worship in prayer, song, and attentive listening to God's Word had to become a central part of the church's life. I was to labor to that end. I was to preach at a level that would inform and challenge the hearts of the people, never to entertain them, never to allow them comfort in their sins, never to rob them of hope and of a lively aspiration for more of God. I was to work hard at improving my preaching, and to make the pulpit the major part of church life. To that end I also needed to be open to criticism from all and any who cared to offer it, whatever might be their motive (In this regard, thank God for enemies! They are often willing to tell us what our friends are not willing; and often they are not willing because we are not as approachable as we ought to be).

In terms of priority, I needed to learn to put my family before the church. My primary calling was to be a husband and a father (in that order) and only then Pastor of a church. To that end I secured one day a week in which I was free of all church obligations. No one called me unless their house was on fire (in which case they would do better to call the fire department) and if no other elder was available. My wife and children had to know that, should they ever need me, I would be there for them and that there was a window each week when I was exclusively theirs. I would peel and chop vegetables while my wife cooked, and when the children came home I would have time with them.

I further needed to learn that the church comes before anything else except family. Conferences, opportunities outside the church, these were all well and good, but the Lord's Day was to be devoted to the worship of God in the company of His people—one never takes vacation from being Christian. I, my wife and my children all needed to put the church before all kinds of other activities, including Christian activities, and I needed to teach that set of priorities to the church. Missions are to be done through the church.

Giving is to be done through the church. Instruction is to be had primarily through the church. Counselling is to be conducted within a church context. God established no other organization but the church. His Word calls for no other framework of Christian activity. Therefore, all other such frameworks should be subject to the church.

The Importance of Faithfulness

I needed to learn the lesson of faithfulness. I was to be a guardian and promoter of God's truth. I was to stand for the truth, the whole truth including those parts that are unpopular. To that end I needed to preach the whole counsel of God, and therefore through the whole of scripture, rather than dwell on my pet subjects. I needed to constantly study the truth so as to better understand it, and that meant reading broadly. I needed to stretch, to feed, train and exercise my mind no less than I needed to feed, train and exercise my heart. It was important that I be challenged as I read, so I also needed to read those with whom I disagreed. I needed to read a notch or two above my level of understanding so as to broaden it. I needed to be growing.

I needed to teach the truth, employing every legitimate means at my disposal, from the pulpit, in the course of home visitation, in personal counselling and in the conduct of both my family and the church. I needed to work constantly to keep ahead of the congregation in my understanding of God's Word and in my ability to teach it because, if I was fulfilling my calling as Pastor, they constantly grew in their understanding, and I needed to be able to lead them on, ever on, to greater, warmer, clearer comprehensions of the glory of God in the gospel.

The truth needs to be lived out in practice. Among other things that meant that I needed to be willing to admit my mistakes and to correct myself, seeking grace to understand and to do better. It meant that I needed to cultivate my walk with God and to place the welfare of the church and its' interests above my own. Sometimes that meant that I had to forgo a privilege, yield a legitimate pleasure or suffer real loss. But that was my calling. Faithful shepherds do not flee when wolves attack; they stand their ground. When war broke out in our country and an elder chose to leave with his family to safety, we asked for and received his resignation. He was never reinstated, although lovingly welcomed back.

I needed to beware of self-seeking, which can often masquerade in the form of heightened spirituality or sincere sacrifice. I dare not use the ministry to buttress my insecurities. God has harsh words to say to self-serving shepherds (Jeremiah 23, Ezekiel 34). In that

connection, I needed to learn not to view every disagreement as a form of personal opposition, nor every opposition as personal affront. After all, it's not about me; it's about God's honor, His truth and the welfare of His people. So, I needed to be willing to take a stand without promoting or defending myself, without being offended and without seeking to offend. I also needed to learn to deflect personal attacks, when they came, and to focus on the truth at stake; to be open to criticism by way of examining myself, not just hearing people out, smiling kindly and going my own way.

Finally, I needed to learn that my duty to God's truth does not exceed that to God's people. Somehow, we tend to focus on one or the other. Either we're so strict about truth that we fail in terms of our duty to love, or we're so determined to love that we fail in terms of our duty to the truth. I needed to learn to maintain the painful tension that often exists between the two, not to sacrifice either.

Honest, Daring Love

I needed to learn that, as pastor of God's flock, it was my glad duty to embrace all of those whom God in His sovereign mercy chose to embrace. Some were nice; others were ornery. Some were wise; others were not. Some were strong; others weak. Some needed very little attention; others would sap up as much as I was able to give. Some agreed with me; many disagreed and were right. Some differed from me culturally, linguistically or even theologically. Some were Reformed; others were opposed to Reformed convictions. But they were all my brothers and sisters and many of them were my charge before the Lord. Many, thank God, differed from me in personality. But Christ died for them all and it was my duty to love them as firmly, as warmly and as sincerely as I knew how.

Loving others meant that I was to respect them, take into account their sensitivities and bear with their weaknesses. There were times when it also meant that I should challenge their errors and rebuke their sins, but it always meant that I should do so in a spirit of meekness, considering myself lest I too be overtaken by the same. I was obliged to hear them out and seriously weight their arguments. I was never to use subterfuge in the course of a disagreement and must never impose upon their consciences.

That meant that they had as much right to their opinions as I did to mine and, so long as they made a sincere case from Scripture in matters of principle, or from wisdom in matters of application, there was room for us to differ without compromise. We were still obliged to work things out, together. In consequence, I had to learn to proceed no farther than the

congregation, or the elders, were willing to follow, and that there are instances when my wonderful ideas were rightly shot down. That is when I learned time and again that I lacked the patience that is the product of sincere humility. On the other hand, being the pastor I still needed to lead, and that was something I needed to learn too.

Part of embracing people had to do with caring about them, and that meant visiting them in their homes, welcoming them into ours and fraternizing with them and, as my wife repeatedly reminds me, I'm not very good in fraternizing. I do not enjoy chit-chat, but I needed—and still need—to engage in it sincerely. The Elders and I worked out a visitation program which ensured that each congregant received at least three pastoral visits a year. At every elders' meeting we would report on those we visited, prayer over, discuss and consult with regard to each family and, should there be need, determine the course of any action that needed to be taken or support that needed to be offered. Where justified, we would refer the matter to the Deacons. Such action helped us sustain a sense of community and, at the same time, enabled us to become aware of needs and opportunities of which we would not have known otherwise.

Finally, each of the capable, mature families in the church were encouraged to adopt a widow, widower or single parent family so as to reach out and meet people in their areas of need.

Empowering Others

I needed to learn that my task as pastor was to cultivate, encourage and empower others. I was not to micro-manage everything or presume to be able to do it all myself. The church grows toward to the full measure of the stature of Christ by way of the contribution each and every member makes to the growth and welfare of the body, and the Spirit distributes such abilities to all for the benefit of the whole. My task was to search out those giftings, train them, equip them with responsibility, authority and the necessary tools, encourage their exercise and then leave ample space for such exercise.

I was called to supervise, set the general direction, pattern in practice the truths and the path we were to follow. I was not to give in to personal ambitions or try to keep individuals happy by according them responsibilities. I was not to purchase their support by preferring them over others. I was to teach gifted individuals that spiritual and moral qualities were by far more important than technical or managerial skills or what is known today as "leadership abilities." It meant that I needed to dare tread over people's prideful toes as

frequently as I needed to push timid individuals forward. It meant that I needed to learn how to listen and to grant my fellow Christians the right to make mistakes because I was not the only one who had the right to do so.

Empowering others meant that their roles, responsibilities and authority are all clearly defined. Few situations emasculate endeavor and reduce initiative than the lack of clarity or the imposition of responsibility without authority, and many pastors are notoriously weak just at this point. Clear procedures needed to be presented, clear goals, ample means and a well-defined framework were all necessary for proper function, and proper function is necessary for proper growth. Just as muscles grow through exercise, so do human capabilities. My duty as a pastor was to labor for the maximal development of every congregant in every area of spiritual and moral endeavor. My task was to bring them as, as individuals, families and as a body, into the process whereby we are to grow toward the full measure of the stature of Christ. To that end I needed to warn every man and teach every individual in all wisdom to the end that I might present every individual mature in Christ Jesus. For that I needed to toil, struggling with all God's energy, with which he powerfully worked in me (Colossians 1:28-29).

I can't say I have learned these lessons, not even after almost 33 years of pastoral ministry. Remember—the subject of this talk is not “Five Things I Learned” but “Five Things I Needed to Learn.” I still do. Pastoring is a constant learning process because it is, ultimately, nothing more than becoming what all Christians ought to be in Christ, and that is something for which I continue to strive.

I am encouraged by the assurances of God's Word and the sweet comforts of the Spirit. If you share my struggles, take heart. Our Savior will doubtless present us faultless before His eternal glory, because, ultimately, the pastoral ministry is all about grace—His faithful grace and kindness.

Eternally glorious God,
three in one and one in three,
holy, true, wise and happy through all ages
world without end,
we bow before your majesty and the majesty of our calling
and ask for grace to be what we are called to be.
We ask for grace to exemplify the gospel;
to reflect the beauty of Christ

and the power of the gospel;
to grow in all things toward the full measure of His stature
and to exalt You in the conduct of our ministries.
We ask this because we all know that we fail
and because we are aware of some of our failings.
O God of grace, glorify Yourself in us in spite of what we are.
Build Your church, and use us to that end,
and we will sing Your praises forever,
through Jesus Christ, Your Son and our Savior, Amen.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Baruch Maoz, born in the United States, immigrated to Israel as a child with his mother. He became a Christian while serving in the Israeli army. He is a retired pastor, editor, and translator of the Old Testament into modern Hebrew, and author with books published in Hebrew, English and Dutch. He is the author of two Founders Study Guide Commentaries: Malachi and Colossians.