

**Paul's First Epistle to the Thessalonians
(7) Paul's Ministry in Thessalonica (pt. 2)**

Introduction:

Our last time together was three weeks ago today, at which time we considered the contents of the second chapter of Paul's first epistle to the church at Thessalonica. The contents of chapter 2 is largely biographical in nature. Paul described his own ministry among these people when he had first brought the gospel to them. Through Paul's account, we have set before us a model for pastoral ministry, in which the manner of the pastor's dealings with the people and his focus on proclaiming the truth of the gospel is set forth. Let us read this chapter once again.

For you yourselves know, brothers, that our coming to you was not in vain. ²But though we had already suffered and been shamefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we had boldness in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in the midst of much conflict. ³For our appeal does not spring from error or impurity or any attempt to deceive, ⁴but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not to please man, but to please God who tests our hearts. ⁵For we never came with words of flattery, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed--God is witness. ⁶Nor did we seek glory from people, whether from you or from others, though we could have made demands as apostles of Christ. ⁷But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children. ⁸So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us.

⁹For you remember, brothers, our labor and toil: we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God. ¹⁰You are witnesses, and God also, how holy and righteous and blameless was our conduct toward you believers. ¹¹For you know how, like a father with his children, ¹²we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory. (1 Thess. 2:1-12)

We worked through this passage by taking note of the following:

- I. Paul was confident of their salvation (2:1)
- II. Paul was confident of the gospel that had brought them to salvation (2:2)
- III. Paul was committed to His God to proclaim the gospel faithfully. (2:3-12)

We now arrive to chapter 3 of this epistle. This chapter, like the previous one, is also biographical in content. Paul continued to describe his ministry to this church. But whereas in chapter 2 he rehearsed his ministry while among them, chapter 3 describes his ministry to them after he had left their city. In other words, whereas chapter 2 describes his past ministry to them, chapter 3 describes his present ministry to them. We have referred to the content of this chapter in prior weeks, but let us now consider it more closely. Let us read 1 Thessalonians 3.

Therefore when we could bear it no longer, we were willing to be left behind at Athens alone, ²and we sent Timothy, our brother and God's co-worker in the gospel of Christ, to establish and exhort you in your faith, ³that no one be moved by these afflictions. For you yourselves know that we are destined for this. ⁴For when we were with you, we kept telling you beforehand that we were to suffer affliction, just as it has come to pass, and just as you know. ⁵For this reason, when I could bear it no longer, I sent to learn about your faith, for fear that somehow the tempter had tempted you and our labor would be in vain.

⁶But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and has brought us the good news of your faith and love and reported that you always remember us kindly and long to see us, as we long to see you— ⁷for this reason, brothers, in all our distress and affliction we have been comforted about you through your faith. ⁸For

now we live, if you are standing fast in the Lord. ⁹For what thanksgiving can we return to God for you, for all the joy that we feel for your sake before our God, ¹⁰as we pray most earnestly night and day that we may see you face to face and supply what is lacking in your faith?

¹¹Now may our God and Father himself, and our Lord Jesus, direct our way to you, ¹²and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you, ¹³so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.

Matthew Henry summarized this chapter:

In this chapter the apostle gives further evidence of his love to the Thessalonians, reminding them of his sending Timothy to them, with the mention of his design therein and his inducements so to do (vs. 1-5). He acquaints them also with his great satisfaction at the return of Timothy, with good tidings concerning them (vs. 6-10). And concludes with fervent prayer for them (vs. 11-13).¹

We may consider the following outline for the contents of this chapter:

- I. Paul's concern for the church at Thessalonica (3:1-5)
- II. Paul's confidence renewed for the spiritual wellbeing of the church at Thessalonica (3:6-10)
- III. Paul's call upon the Lord to keep His people secure in Him (3:11-13)

Let us work through these verses:

I. Paul's concern for the church at Thessalonica (3:1-5)

Paul had been genuinely concerned for the spiritual well-being of the Christians of this church. Paul and his companions in the ministry had to flee the city earlier when persecution arose against the Christians by the unbelievers of the city. Paul was concerned that fear of their own persecution might cause these professing Christians to abandon their faith in Christ and turn back to a life of unbelief. So he sent Timothy to assess their spiritual condition as well as to exhort and strengthen them in the faith. He assured them through Timothy that persecution of those who have faith in Jesus Christ is not unusual, in fact, God has destined that His people would encounter resistance and opposition because of their faith.

Now Paul viewed Timothy as a great asset to him in the ministry. Timothy supported him, encouraged him, and stood with him. He was Paul's "brother." But although Paul personally benefitted from Timothy's companionship and service, Paul was more concerned for the Thessalonians than himself, so he sent Timothy to serve them. Again, here are the words of **Matthew Henry**:

In these words the apostle gives an account of his sending Timothy to the Thessalonians. Though he was hindered from going to them himself, yet his love was such that he could not forbear sending Timothy to them. Though Timothy was very useful to him, and he could not well spare him, yet Paul was content, for their good, *to be left alone at Athens*. Note, those ministers do not duly value the establishment and welfare of their people who cannot deny themselves in many things for that end.²

[Just as a side note, consider verse 4 in which the Greek word, **θλιβεσθαι** (*thlibesthai*), is translated in the English Standard Version (ESV) as "**affliction**." It is most commonly translated by the English word, "tribulation."³ The NKJV translates the verse, "For, in fact, we told you before when we were with you that we would suffer **tribulation**, just as it happened, and you know." The reason that I mention this is that soon in our epistle we will be addressing the subject of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. Most evangelicals believe that there will be an end-time tribulation period of 7 years that will transpire prior to the Second Coming of Jesus

¹ *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Fleming H. Revell Company, n.d.), vol. 6, p. 779.

² Ibid.

³ Cf. John 16:33; Rom. 2:9; 5:3; 12:12; 2 Cor. 1:4; 7:4; 2 Thess. 1:6; Rev. 2:9, 10; 2:22; 7:14.

Christ. They also strongly believe that the Lord will remove His church in a pretribulation rapture, that is, the catching up of his people before the tribulation comes upon the world. One of their main arguments is that the Lord has not appointed His church to suffer tribulation, therefore, He must take His church out of the world before the tribulation occurs. But here, in the very epistle from which they argue their position, Paul declared that God has ordained that Christians suffer “tribulation.” 1 Thessalonians 3:4 negates their false argument. I suspect that we will say more of this within the next few weeks.]

We read that Paul was concerned about the influence the devil might have upon these people. He was afraid that the devil might have tempted them so that they would apostatize from Christ (i.e. abandon faith in Christ). We read this in **verse 5**, “For this reason, when I could bear it no longer, I sent to learn about your faith, for fear that somehow the tempter had tempted you and our labor would be *in vain*.” Here are Calvin’s words on this verse:

By this term he teaches us that temptations are always to be dreaded, because it is the proper office of satan to *tempt*. As, however, he never ceases to place ambushes for us on all sides, and to lay snares for us all around, so we must be on our watch, eagerly taking heed. And now he says openly what in the outset he had avoided saying, as being too harsh — that he had felt concerned lest his *labors* should be *vain*, if, peradventure, satan should prevail. And this he does that they may be carefully upon their watch, and may stir themselves up the more vigorously to resistance.⁴

Now again, Paul had expressed in 2:1 that he was confident his labor among them had not been *in vain*. But he was convinced of this concerning them only after he had received the positive report of them from Timothy, after he had visited the church. Before he had heard from Timothy, Paul had been fearful that he might have labored among them in vain. And of course what he meant by labouring among them in vain is that he feared that in spite his labor of the gospel among them and although they had believed the gospel, if they failed to continue in faith, if they abandoned faith in Christ, they would not inherit salvation. His labor would then have truly been “in vain.”

II. Paul’s confidence renewed for the spiritual wellbeing of the church at Thessalonica (3:6-10)

But Paul’s fears were alleviated upon hearing Timothy’s report of them. He learned that they continued in their faith in Jesus Christ and they continued to show forth their love for one another as Christians. He also learned that they had continued to have a high regard for him due to his ministry of the gospel among them. And so we read of his confidence in them, that he no longer had fear concerning their salvation. Paul wrote in **verses 6 and 7**:

⁶But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and has brought us the good news of your faith and love and reported that you always remember us kindly and long to see us, as we long to see you— ⁷for this reason, brothers, in all our distress and affliction we have been comforted about you through your faith.

This news greatly encouraged Paul. He seemed to speak with a bit of hyperbole in **verse 8**, “For now we live, if you are standing fast in the Lord.” Their salvation was the premier concern of his heart. One described it in this way:

The thing that really rejoiced him, the thing that really strengthened him, the thing that gave him life, was the fact so clearly demonstrated by Timothy’s mission, that the Thessalonians did indeed believe. Their lives were characterized by faith. This meant that they had a place in God’s kingdom, and this in turn that Paul’s work among them not in vain.

Elsewhere Paul writes, “to me to live is Christ” (Phil. 1:21). The present passage gives another facet of the same truth. The service of Christ was no half-hearted thing, but that which mattered most in life. This

⁴ John Calvin, *Commentary on the First Epistle to the Thessalonians*, in **Calvin’s Commentaries**, vol. 21 (Baker Book House, 1993), p. 267.

service did not mean an idle contemplation of the excellence of the Savior. It was an active, fruitful work of preaching Him and His atonement among the Gentiles. Thus Paul could equally say that Christ was his life, and that it meant life to him to know that his converts were standing. It was his service of Christ to win men for Him (“that I might by all means save some,” 1 Cor. 9:22). Thus it was his life indeed to know that this had happened.⁵

Paul wrote of their “standing fast in the Lord.” Their faith in Jesus Christ was a settled faith, faith with conviction. This faith had staying power. They were “standing fast in the Lord.”

⁹For what thanksgiving can we return to God for you, for all the joy that we feel for your sake before our God,
¹⁰as we pray most earnestly night and day that we may see you face to face and supply what is lacking in your faith?

Of course Paul knew that they were standing fast in the Lord because the Lord had been enabling them to do so. God had kept them by His grace. For this reason Paul expressed his gratefulness to God. **Verse 9** reads, “For what thanksgiving can we return to God for you, for all the joy that we feel for your sake before our God...”

But Paul did not presume upon the grace of God. He prayed fervently and continuously that God would be gracious toward them, sustaining their faith by His grace. We read in **verse 10**, “as we pray most earnestly night and day that we may see you face to face and supply what is lacking in your faith?” Paul not only understood that the Lord would need to sustain them, but that his own ministry of the word among them was also critical to their perseverance.

By the way, Paul’s motivation for future ministry among these people is expressed in verse 10. He desired to supply what was lacking in their faith. In other words, Paul knew that there was spiritual truth that they needed to learn and there were spiritual disciplines that they needed to develop. There you have before you what I regard as my chief responsibility in teaching and preaching. We are to seek “to supply what is lacking in your faith.” Perhaps this should lead you and me to ask ourselves, “What is lacking in my faith that needs yet to be ‘supplied’ through the ministry of the Word?” May we also pray earnestly night and day that He would fill this spiritual need for us.

III. Paul’s call upon the Lord to keep His people secure in Him (3:11-13)

¹¹Now may our God and Father himself, and our Lord Jesus, direct our way to you, ¹²and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you, ¹³so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.

Paul knew that the perseverance of these Christians in their faith would be due to the grace of God working in them. He knew also that God would keep His people unto their final salvation through His Word working among them. Verses 11 through 13 is Paul’s prayer to the Lord on behalf of these people. Paul prayed that the Lord would enable him to return to them in order to minister the Word of God among them.

Paul also prayed that the Lord would enable them to “increase and abound in love for one another and all.” The purpose for their increasing in love was for the purpose of establishing them in holiness with view to the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. We see that an important aspect of our sanctification, “being established in holiness”, is to increase “in love for one another and for all.”

The apostle introduces in verse 13 the subject of the second coming of Jesus Christ. This will shortly emerge as the major theme toward the close of this epistle, but it is introduced here.

Now the concern that the apostle expressed concerning the abiding faith of these Thessalonians, and what seems to be his doubts and fears regarding them, suggests a subject that is debated among many professing Christians. ***There are many who wrongly believe and teach that true Christians are capable of losing their salvation.*** They would argue that passages like this one show their understanding to be correct. They argue that

⁵ Leon Morris, *The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians* (William B. Eerdmans, 1959), pp. 107f.

Paul's concern for the salvation of these Christians in the church at Thessalonica, and that because Paul had some doubt regarding them, this is proof that true Christians can lose their salvation. Of course the belief that a true Christian can lose his salvation is false teaching. In the time remaining to us, I would like us to consider this teaching and the biblical corrective.

Historical Consideration of the Doctrine of Eternal Security of the true Believer unto his full Salvation

The belief that true Christians, ones to whom God has granted salvation, can afterward lose their salvation, is a teaching of classic **Arminianism**. Let me trace for us this teaching and movement.

The modern era of Christian history may be dated **the Protestant Reformation** of 16th century Europe. The Reformation was essentially a movement that called the church of Jesus Christ back to the Holy Scriptures as the sole authority to determine what Christians are to believe about God and how they are to live before Him. The Reformation was in reaction, of course, to medieval Roman Catholicism, with its many centuries of tradition and liturgy that had obscured the teaching of Holy Scripture and that prevented reform from taking place among the churches. But this all changed in the early 16th century.

Martin Luther first led the Reformation in Germany. Next year we will commemorate the 500th anniversary when Luther publicly posted 95 theses that challenged the authority of the pope and of the Church of Rome. It was for the most part a list of propositions that challenged the teaching and practice of distributing indulgences that purportedly secured the forgiveness of sins to their possessors. This was the beginning of the movement that transformed Europe and later the known (western) world. Protestant leaders emerged all over Europe. **Ulrich Zwingli** led reform in Zurich, Switzerland. **John Calvin** was the reformer of Geneva.

Calvin was born in 1509. He experienced a "sudden" conversion in 1533. Calvin was the greatest theologian of the Reformation. He was able to systematize and express in writing the great teachings of Scripture. His most famous work is his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, which he wrote at the age of 26, when he was only 2-3 years after his conversion. He revised his work in subsequent editions through his life. By the time he died he had become the dominant voice of the Reformation this side of Luther. His teachings were the expressions of faith that characterized of the Reformation in general. He died in 1564.

The Protestants of Europe were generally united in their understanding of the major tenants of the Christian faith. But that began to change due to the influence of **Jacob Arminius**, a professor at the University of Leyden, Netherlands, toward the end of the 1600s.

Arminius was born in 1560 and died in 1609. Early on he was a holder to the doctrines of the Reformation. He pastored a Reformed church in Amsterdam for 15 years where his theology began to change. He was called to be a professor at the University of Leyden where he began to stir up controversy with his teachings, when he began to teach publicly his views on predestination. The result was that his students became divided into two parties. There were debates and divisions. One formal disputation was being conducted but stopped short when Arminius died in 1609. His student followers continued to proclaim Arminius' views. These followers of Arminius were called the **Remonstrants**. The time came that they formally submitted a challenge to the Dutch government in protest to the official state-church creedal statement. A Synod was convened at Dort in which the doctrines were considered and rejected by the council in 1618/19.

I. The doctrines of Arminianism

What were the doctrines of Arminianism? There were five major doctrines that were articulated by the followers of Arminius.⁶

1. Free will. The first point of Arminianism was that fallen man possesses "free will." The Reformers acknowledged that man had a will, but agreed with Luther's thesis in his book, *The Bondage of the Will*, that it

⁶ The exact wording here is taken from Duane Spencer, *Tulip*, pp. 9, 10:

was *not* free from bondage to sin or Satan. Arminius believed that the fall of Adam was not total in defiling and damning in entirety the human race. Arminius taught that there was enough good left in man for him to will to accept Christ unto Salvation, though he needs the help of God's grace. Salvation is the result of the cooperation and joint work of God and man.

2. Conditional election. Arminius further taught that election was based upon the foreknowledge of God as to who would believe on Jesus Christ of their own free will. In other words man's *act of faith* is the "condition" for his being elected to eternal life, since God foresaw him exercising his "free will" in positive volition towards Christ.

3. Universal atonement. Inasmuch as it was their further conviction that God loves everybody, that Christ died for everyone, and that the Father is not willing that any should perish, Arminius and his followers held that redemption (used casually as a synonym for atonement) was general. In other words the death of Christ provided grounds for God to save all men. However, each must exercise his *free will* to accept Christ in order to make Christ's atonement effectual for the forgiveness of one's sins.

4. Obstructible grace. The Arminians further believed that since God wanted all men to be saved, He sent the Holy Spirit to woo all men to Christ. However, since man has absolute "free will" he is able to resist God's will for his life. (The Arminian order being that man exercises his own will first, *then* he is born again.) Although the Arminian says he believes that God is omnipotent, he insists that God's will to save all men can be frustrated by the finite will of man on an individual basis.

5. Falling from grace. The fifth point of Arminianism is the logical outcome of the preceding portions of the system. If man cannot be saved by God unless it is man's will to be saved, then man cannot *continue* in salvation unless he continues to will to be saved. ***Arminius taught that a person with salvation could lose his salvation.*** Those who believe and teach that Christians can lose their salvation are espousing the teachings of Arminianism.

The "Calvinists" wanted to settle this matter and so they petitioned the States General of the Netherlands to convene a synod for this purpose. Representatives from the Reformed churches of Europe convened to address the nature and substance of the teaching of Arminianism. This was done at the city of Dort over the course of about 7 months. This extended conference came to be known as the **Synod of Dort** (1618/19). Reformed Churches and governments from all over Western Europe were invited to send delegates. The Dutch churches sent 35 clergymen and "a certain number of elders." 6 deputies represented the States-General. In addition some universities sent delegates. The state-churches of many nations sent representatives, having 27 from Switzerland, England, Scotland, and a number of smaller principalities. The Remonstrants had 16 representatives to represent and defend the Arminian teachings.

In the 22nd session the main business came to the forefront. The Remonstrants wished to be allowed to debate publicly and challenge openly the positions held by the Reformers. This was denied them. They were told to submit their grievances and positions in writing. There was refusal, challenge, and proposals made. The Synod offered to respond to questions and challenges posed in writing, but the Remonstrants refused. Finally, in the 57th session the Remonstrants were asked if they were going to submit to the procedure. They refused. The Synod expelled them. But at this time the Synod felt compelled to answer every issue. So they continued to convene and considered the doctrines until the 136th session, when they formally made their decision. They determined the teachings of the Remonstrants were heretical, being contrary to Scripture. At the same time they issued 5 points that countered the 5 points of Arminius. These are what have come to be known as the **5 points of Calvinism, or the Doctrines of Grace**. These doctrines are at the heart of Reformed theology. From that synod onward, evangelicals can be classified as either Calvinistic or Arminian. Some have tried to argue they are neither, but that is not possible. One is either for or against these doctrines. There is no third way.

II. The Doctrines of Calvinism, or, The Doctrines of Grace

Now *what are these doctrines of grace, these five points of Calvinism?* Usually they are described by the acrostic TULIP, each letter begins the name of each doctrine.

1. The Total depravity of Man--which speaks of man's sinful condition and need of a Saviour. J. C. Ryle stated:

There are very few errors and false doctrines of which the beginning may not be traced up to unsound views about the corruption of human nature. Wrong views of the disease will always bring with them wrong views of the remedy. Wrong views of the corruption of human nature will always carry with them wrong views of the grand antidote and cure of that corruption.

This doctrine says that man is beyond self-help. He is more than simply ignorant, he is lost, enslaved to satan and sin and will remain so unless Christ sets him free. It says that man does not have a free will, in the sense that he has the ability to come to God. He is totally unable to do so. Satan and sin has bound him and he cannot nor will not be free. Unless the Lord intervenes by His sovereign grace, salvation will not be experienced by anyone. Just as Lazarus was dead in the grave and unable to come out until Christ in His power bid him, so it is with every sinner. We can in no way escape our slavery, our bondage to sin and Satan. Moreover, because of our sin we do not want to do so if it means leaving our sin behind. We are like Lot's wife in that sense.⁷

2. Unconditional Election--which speaks of God's purpose in saving a people for Himself out of fallen humanity, having chosen them before creation apart from any condition foreseen in them. "God is not a respecter of persons."⁸

3. Limited Atonement --which speaks of the accomplished redemption of His people which He secured through Christ's death. This is also referred to as **Definite Atonement**.⁹

4. Irresistible Grace --which describes God's work of bringing salvation to each of His own. This is also referred to **Effectual Calling**.¹⁰

5. Perseverance of the Saints--which speaks of the fact that through God's purpose and power He will keep His own unto salvation.¹¹ It is the teaching that once a person truly becomes saved, he can never lose his salvation.

III. The objections of Arminians

Now through history Arminians have continually opposed and challenged these doctrines. Many of their arguments are spurious. Let us consider a few of them.

1. Arminians argue, "The teachings of a man, John Calvin, should not be given such weight; rather, teach the Bible only."

Answer: First, because the doctrines of grace are also called the 5 Points of Calvinism, John Calvin is often attacked in order to discredit the teaching. The problem with this argument is that the 5 points were articulated 50 years *after* Calvin died by the Synod of Dort in 1619. Any rejection of the 5 points cannot be made by discrediting Calvin. Further, we would respond, are *all* proponents of Calvinism ignorant, brainwashed, duped

⁷ Cf. John 5:40; 8:43f; Rom. 3:10ff; Eph. 2:2, 3.

⁸ Cf. Rom. 9:11; 1 Cor. 1:26-29.

⁹ Cf. Rom. 8:31-33; Eph. 5:25; John 10:15; Heb. 10:11, 12.

¹⁰ Cf. John 6:37; John 6:44.

¹¹ Cf. Phil. 1:6; Jude 24, 25; 1 Peter 1:4, 5.

followers of a man and are unteachable with respect to the Scriptures? Dozens of scholars convened for dozens of sessions, debating, considering the Biblical teaching about these things.

2. Arminians argue that “It teaches that God has decreed that most people will go to hell. This makes God unjust and it also limits the love of God.”

Answer: But neither the Bible nor most Calvinists teach this. Rather, we believe that the Bible teaches that a man will go to hell because of his sin, not because he was not chosen. The way of salvation has been made available. If a man chooses to reject it, he is responsible for his rejection. But further, this does not say that God wants people to go to hell. He does not take pleasure in the death of the wicked, nor does He enjoy consigning souls to eternal damnation, but He does not shrink back from doing so. He will utterly conquer and destroy His enemies. (Cf. Romans 9:14-23)

3. Arminians argue that “It takes away human responsibility. It teaches that we are all robots. Why repent? Why believe?”

Answer: No, the Bible teaches that God has chosen to save His people through the means of hearing the gospel, responding in repentance from sin toward God and faith in Jesus Christ (Cf. 2 Thess. 2:13).

4. Arminians argue that “a man cannot be saved if God doesn’t want him to be saved.”

Answer: If by this statement one means that a person who wants to be saved cannot if God has not chosen him, the statement is false. The Scriptures teach that nobody “seeks after God” (Rom. 3:11). The yearning heart for Christ is the product of God’s work of grace. God saves everyone who calls upon Him in accordance to what the Bible teaches.

5. Arminians argue that “the teaching of Calvinism kills the motivation for missions and evangelism. If God is going to save whom He is going to save, what is the point of going?”

Answer: Although there have been hyper-Calvinist churches, they are relatively few in number. But because there might be the existence of some with error, it does not discredit the whole system. Besides, history has shown that this charge is not true. It can be argued from history that some of the greatest missionaries and pastors who have sought to reach souls for Christ were devout Calvinists.

6. Arminians argue that “the teaching of Calvinism is offensive to new believers.”

Answer: No, in actuality, new believers who have just come through an experience of conviction and know fully the depravity of their own hearts. They readily accept the teaching that God was sovereign in their salvation.

IV. What is true if the Arminian position is true?

1. God is not sovereign, but is subject to man and is often defeated by Satan, for although He tries to save sinners, He is unsuccessful in doing so in all cases.

2. God is a respecter of persons with regard to whom He saves. He chooses people to be saved because of something they are able to do or not do (i.e. exercise faith) But the Bible declares this is never the case, that God is not a respecter of persons (Cf Acts 10:34)

3. Christ’s death did *not accomplish* the redemption of anyone, but only made *possible* the redemption of everyone. This is error. When Christ died He sat down, having accomplished eternal redemption on behalf of His people (Heb. 10:12).

4. It greatly understates the condition of man in sin as set forth in the Scriptures, giving him ability which he does not have because he bent on sin and bound by the devil.

5. Ultimately, salvation is earned by man, merited by his wise, deliberated acceptance of the plan of salvation. He may boast over others in this. Ultimately, it gives man a basis of boasting, which is not possible if one's "gospel" is consistent with biblical teaching (Cf. 1 Cor. 1:27-29)

6. It presents God as all-loving, but not all-powerful; He is subject to defeat. This is blasphemous.

7. The Arminian position tends toward a message that is palatable to listeners so that they might respond, thereby failing to proclaim the whole counsel of God. It appeals to fallen man as though he were the determiner of his own destiny.

Now it is Arminianism that teaches true Christians who have salvation are capable of losing their salvation. This is false teaching. It is the Reformed doctrine of the perseverance of the saints that refutes this teaching.

V. The doctrine of the perseverance of the saints

This doctrine is the "P" in the acrostic, TULIP. We have shown that these doctrines of grace emerged from the Reformed leaders in Europe responding to the aberrant teachings of the Arminians, the followers of Jacobus (James) Arminius. The Arminians taught that God's grace was resistible or obstructible by the free will of man. Even after having experienced saving grace, the Arminian said that man of his own will, may reject that grace and as a result lose his salvation. The assembled men at the Synod of Dort said this was heresy, that the Scriptures taught that God's purpose to save His people was never frustrated or defeated, but that God keeps all of His people secured in His grace. He does not lose one of His elect, but rather saves them to the uttermost.

1. The perseverance of the saints is taught in 1 Peter 1:1-5.

Let us turn to 1 Peter 1. We will read the first 5 verses.

¹Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the pilgrims of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, ²elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace be multiplied.

³Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, ⁵who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

In these first verses of this epistle we have several of the doctrines of grace mentioned to which we have been directing our study: the unconditional election of His people by God the Father, the particular redemption of Jesus Christ, the effectual calling (here, included in "sanctification") of the Holy Spirit. Here also, specifically in verse 5, we have the fifth and final doctrine of grace set before us, the perseverance of the saints unto their full and final salvation.

Peter opens his epistle identifying himself and the ones to whom he addressed his epistle. They were Christians who are described as wandering pilgrims in this world, alluding to the Christians' life journey to their heavenly Jerusalem. They lived in the northern areas of what is now modern Turkey, in the region just south of the Black Sea. He describes them as elect of the Father, sanctified (set apart) by the Holy Spirit, and redeemed by Jesus Christ, having been brought into a state of faith and obedience to their God.

With verse 3, the main body of the letter begins. Peter magnifies the grace of God in their salvation. Verse 3 is an expression of praise to God for having caused them to be born again. People are born again because God has purposed that for them. We should praise and thank God for having caused us to be born again. In His great

mercy He performed this work in us. When we were dead in sin, unfeeling and unaware of our true condition, when we were strangers to Him, and quite content to be so, in mercy He caused us to be born again, whereby He imparted spiritual life to us, enabling us to understand, desire, and enter into a life of faith in Him and obedience to Him. And so, we were born again.

With that new birth, we were brought into a new life with new hopes and dreams. We were born into two things according to our text. First, we were born again “into a living hope” (v. 3). What is meant by “living hope?” What does it imply? Well, we might suggest several things. When we are born again, ***we are infused with new desires and aspirations***. We desire to please God, and be blessed of Him. We are brought to love His Word and righteousness as taught in His Word and we long to be conformed to it. We look forward to the day we will be without sin, standing before Him in spotless purity and holiness. In addition, we see a glorious future before us, with the certain prospect of this future blessing. ***We become a people living in the prospect of the future***. We are a forward looking people. Not for what we might purchase with next week’s pay check, or the prospect of enjoying next year’s vacation, although these are pleasant. These are not the things that drive our lives; rather, it is the prospect of eternity which moves and shapes our thinking and actions. ***We also anticipate with joy our future resurrection***. We long for God’s kingdom to be realized. We look forward to our reunion with loved ones, our coming into God’s presence, as the things which give strength to us in living now.

How is this “living hope” secured? Verse 3: *“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In His great mercy He has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.”* If it were not for the resurrection of Jesus Christ, we would not have a ***certain living hope***. Remember, “hope” in the Bible is not used as we frequently use it today: *“I hope such and such will occur.”* Rather, ***hope is a certain anticipation of what most assuredly will occur***.

The only way we could have a certain anticipation of eternal participation in the blessing of God is *“through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.”* The certain prospect of our future before we were born again, was death (and taxes). But because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, we, His people, have the certain prospect (hope) of our own resurrection. And as a result of His resurrection we are infused with certainty giving us meaning and motivation for living in anticipation of that day. We have been born again unto a “living hope through the resurrection of the dead.”

How is this “living hope” secured to us? By faith in what God has said in His Word respecting ourselves and Christ’s resurrection. It assures that God **is able** to raise us from the dead. This Hope is secured in us because we are confident that since God raised Jesus from the dead, He can raise us from the dead also. It assures us that God **has purposed** to raise us from the dead (cf. 1 Cor. 15:19-26). And then we have the promise of our Lord Jesus Himself: Jesus said, *“I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die”* (cf. John 11:25). We Christians have a certain hope, and it effects how we live. It is a living hope into which we were born.

But notice again our sentence, particularly verse 4, we are not only born into a “living hope” but **we were born “into an inheritance” (v. 4)**. God has promised great things for His children. We are invigorated with the hope of our future inheritance, looking eagerly and waiting patiently for the full realization of the privileges and blessings of our sonship. God is a good God and He gives good gifts to all in this world, whether they are Christian or not. He gives gifts of health, strength, wisdom, wealth, power, and prestige, bestowing these gifts on ones even though they may not be His sons on whom He has designed to bestow His inheritance. **Abraham** gave gifts to sons born to Keturah, and then sent them on their way; but for Isaac, his chosen son, he reserved his name and fortune, bestowing them on him when he came to age. 1 Peter 1:3ff says that we were born again “into this inheritance.” It is an inheritance of the children of God, promised to us by God our Father. We are invigorated with this hope, secured to us by the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

Verse 4 tells us **the nature of this inheritance**. Notice how Peter described this inheritance:

- a. It can never ***“perish.”*** This speaks of its everlasting duration. It is eternal.
- b. It can never ***“spoil.”*** This speaks of its purity. There is no mixture of curse with this blessing, unlike so many earthly inheritances.
- c. It can never ***“fade.”*** This speaks of its enduring quality. It cannot be spent/exhausted.
- d. It is ***“reserved in heaven for you.”*** This speaks of the certainty of our receiving it. God Himself has set aside for safe keeping the inheritance that belongs to His children. It will be there for us when we arrive there one day.

Our inheritance is secure. God Himself has set aside for safe keeping the inheritance that belongs to His children. It will be there when we arrive. In contrast, earthly inheritances can disappear through any number of ways--financial setback, poor management. The Lord Jesus once described our treasures in heaven as being such that "thieves" cannot break in to steal, nor can "moths" ruin. Our inheritance is secure for us in heaven.

In verse 5 we read of **Peter's description of the heirs of salvation**. We first read of the **nature of the heirs (1:5a)**: "who through faith are shielded by God's power." The heirs are "**shielded**." This is a passive verb, meaning that they are not shielding themselves, but God Himself is protecting them. Not only is our inheritance **guarded** by God for us, but we ourselves, **are being guarded** by God until the day we receive our inheritance.

We read that the heirs are shielded "**through faith**." As an ancient soldier would use a shield to protect himself from an enemy's assault, so God guards us through the means of faith. It is through faith that He shields us.

But notice this third point, for it is important: the heirs are "**shielded through faith by God's power**." Notice what is being said here and what is not being said. He is not saying that we are shielded "**by faith**." He declared that Christians are shielded "**by God's power**" "**through faith**." God keeps us by creating and sustaining faith in us, whereby He protects and preserves us until the day when we will receive our inheritance. It is God's power that created faith in us-- we "believed through grace" (Acts 18:27). And it is by God's power that true faith is sustained.

God defends us with His power through faith. He first created faith in us. When trials come which would overwhelm us, by His power He increases our faith so that we do not falter. We are shielded by God's power through faith, until the coming of our inheritance.

Saving faith is not something that is created *by us* and sustained *by us*. It is a product of the grace of God. If our "shield" was only strong as a faith that we can muster together in and of ourselves, then it would not be much of a shield to protect us. And it would certainly provide little sense of security. But if the faith that saves is a divinely-wrought thing, created and sustained by His power, then indeed, the presence of that faith is both the means of keeping us and a cause of assurance that we will be kept. It is "God's power" which shields us, that is, protects us so as to assure that we will one day receive our inheritance. And He uses faith as the instrument to keep His people.

Now also in verse 5 we read of the **identification of the inheritance**: "*who are shielded "until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time."*" Peter has been speaking of an "inheritance" which God has for His chosen people. But specifically, what is this inheritance? How would you define it? Perhaps when we have been referring to an inheritance you have been thinking in terms of heavenly rewards that He will bestow on His faithful servants. Thankfully, God will one day give rewards to His servants who have faithfully lived before Him. But Peter is not speaking of rewards for Christians. The inheritance is **salvation itself**. Salvation is viewed as **future prospect** (but its future reception is assured presently). It will be revealed at "**the last time**." In Peter's writings, salvation is presented as being received when the resurrection occurs at the Second Coming of Christ. It is received *after* having completed a life of faith and it is viewed as *an outcome* of that life of faith. What is the nature of saving faith according to Peter? One described it this way:

Faith here, as in Hebrews 11, is the power by which we grasp the unseen realities, the conviction that God is, that He is a Rewarder, and that His reward far exceeds the troubles of this life. It is the firm trust in God in spite of suffering: the salvation of his soul the Christian will only receive as the end of faith. It produces "endurance to the end," unshaken by offences, false prophets, or lawlessness (Matt. 24:10-13); by it we resist the devil, and the sufferings he brings against us (1 Peter 5:9). (Charles Bigg, International Critical Commentary, p. 101).

What we have just read and considered in these few verses is the Bible's teaching regarding the perseverance of the saints. It is the fifth of the five doctrines of grace. Here is a summary statement of this doctrine:

Those who are the elect of God, who are recipients of God's effectual call, having been regenerated by the Holy Spirit, led to repent of sin and believe on Christ for salvation, shall never fall away so as to perish, but will be kept by the power of God unto the salvation which is reserved for them in heaven.

The doctrine of perseverance does not mean that everyone who professes to believe or believes for a while is saved eternally. This has reference to the elect of God, true believers who are truly born again, whose lives bear evidence of the presence of saving faith. Consequently, the common expression, "the eternal security of the believer" is somewhat a misnomer. Perhaps better, "the eternal security of the true believer" would be better. But the expression "eternal security" should probably be distinguished from the expression, "the perseverance of the saints." The former expression is often stressed with only respect to what Christ has done on behalf of the Christian-- due to His perfect sacrifice the Christian who is once forgiven, is forever forgiven. But "the perseverance of the saints also involves what Christ does 'in' a person, thereby enabling him/her to persevere unto the end.

2. The perseverance of the saints is taught in our confession of faith

Perseverance in faith and obedience is the grand distinguishing mark of a true child of God. Here is the statement in our confession, **The Baptist Confession of 1689**.

Art. 18. The Perseverance of the Saints

1. Those whom God has accepted in the Beloved, and has effectually called and sanctified by His Spirit, and given the precious faith of His elect, can neither totally nor finally fall from the state of grace, but they will certainly persevere in that state to the end and be eternally saved. This is because the gifts and calling of God are without repentance, and therefore He continues to beget and nourish in them faith, repentance, love, joy, hope, and all the graces of the Spirit which lead to immortality (John 10:28-29; Phil 1:6; 2 Tim 2:19; 1 John 2:19).

And though many storms and floods arise and beat against the saints, yet these things shall never be able to sweep them off the foundation and rock which they are fastened upon by faith. Even though, through unbelief and the temptations of Satan, the sight and feeling of the light and love of God may for a time be clouded and obscured from them (Psa. 89:31-32; 1 Cor. 11:32), yet God is still the same, and they are sure to be kept by His power until their salvation is complete, when they shall enjoy the purchased possession which is theirs, for they are engraved upon the palm of His hands, and their names have been written in His Book of Life from all eternity (Mal 3:6).

2. This perseverance of the saints does not depend on them - that is, on their own free will. It rests upon the immutability of the decree of election (Rom 8:30; 9:11-16), which flows from the free and unchangeable love of God the Father. It also rests upon the efficacy of the merit and intercession of Jesus Christ, and upon the union which true saints have with Him (Rom 5:9-10; John 14:19). It rests upon the oath of God (Heb 6.17-18), and upon the abiding of His Spirit. It depends upon the seed of God being within them (1 John 3:9) and upon the very nature of the covenant of grace (Jer. 32:40). All these factors give rise to the certainty and infallibility of the security and perseverance of the saints.

3. The saints may, through the temptation of Satan and the world, and because their remaining sinful tendencies prevail over them, and through their neglect of the means which God has provided to keep them, fall into grievous sins. They may continue in this state for some time (Matt 26:70-74), so that they incur God's displeasure, grieve His Holy Spirit (Isa 64:5-9; Eph 4:30), suffer the impairment of their graces and comforts (Psa. 51:10-12), have their hearts hardened and their consciences wounded (Psa. 32:3-4), and hurt and scandalize others. By this they will bring temporal judgements upon themselves (2 Sam 12:14). Yet they shall renew their repentance and be preserved, through faith in Christ Jesus, to the end (Luke 22:32; 61-62).

3. The perseverance of the saints is taught elsewhere in Scripture

a. Those verses which speak of God's *ability* to keep His own

Phil. 3:20, 21. "For our citizenship is in heaven; whence also we wait for a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: who shall fashion anew the body of our humiliation, (that it may be) conformed to the body of his glory, according to the working whereby *he is able* even to subject all things unto himself."

2 Tim. 1:12. "For which cause I suffer also these things: yet I am not ashamed; for I know him whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that *he is able to guard* that which I have committed unto him against that day."

Jude 24, 25. "Now unto him that *is able to guard you from stumbling*, and to set you before the presence of his glory without blemish in exceeding joy, to the only God our Saviour, through Jesus Christ our Lord, (be) glory, majesty, dominion and power, before all time, and now, and for evermore. Amen."

b. Those verses which speaks of the *certainty* of God keeping His own.

Job 17:9. "The righteous also shall hold on his way, and he that hath clean hands shall be stronger and stronger."

Jeremiah 32:37-42. "Behold, I will gather them out of all countries where I have driven them in My anger, in My fury, and in great wrath; I will bring them back to this place, and I will cause them to dwell safely. ³⁸They shall be My people, and I will be their God; ³⁹then I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear Me forever, for the good of them and their children after them. ⁴⁰And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from doing them good; but I will put My fear in their hearts so that they will not depart from Me. ⁴¹Yes, I will rejoice over them to do them good, and I will assuredly plant them in this land, with all My heart and with all My soul.' ⁴²"For thus says the LORD: 'Just as I have brought all this great calamity on this people, so I will bring on them all the good that I have promised them.'"

Ezekiel 36:22-27. "Therefore say to the house of Israel, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: "I do not do this for your sake, O house of Israel, but for My holy name's sake, which you have profaned among the nations wherever you went. ²³And I will sanctify My great name, which has been profaned among the nations, which you have profaned in their midst; and the nations shall know that I am the LORD," says the Lord GOD, "when I am hallowed in you before their eyes. ²⁴For I will take you from among the nations, gather you out of all countries, and bring you into your own land. ²⁵Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. ²⁶I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them.'"

John 6:35-40. "Jesus said unto them: 'I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall not hunger, and he that believeth on me shall never thirst. But I said unto you, that ye have seen me, and yet believe not. All that which the Father gives me shall come unto me; and him that cometh to me *I will in no wise cast out*. For I am come down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me. And *this is the will of him that sent me, that of all that which he hath given me I should lose nothing*, but should raise it up at the last day. For this is the will of my Father, that *every one* that beholds the Son, and *believeth* on him, *should have eternal life*; and I will raise him up at the last day.'"

John 10:27, 28. "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: and I give unto them eternal life; and *they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand*."

John 17:1, 2. "Jesus spoke these words, lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said: 'Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You, ²as You have given Him authority over all flesh, that *He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him*.'"

Romans 8:28-30. “For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.”

1 Corinthians 1:8, 9. “I thank my God always on your behalf, for the *grace of God which is given you* by Jesus Christ; that in every thing you are enriched by him, in all utterance, and in all knowledge; even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you: So that ye come behind in no gift; waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ: *Who shall also confirm you unto the end*, that ye may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. *God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord.*”

Phil. 1:6. “*Being confident* of this very thing, that he who began a good work in you *will perfect it* until the day of Jesus Christ.”

2 Thess. 2:13, 14. “But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, for that God chose you from the beginning unto salvation through the sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth: whereunto *he called you* through our gospel, *to the obtaining of the glory* of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

1 Thess. 5:23, 24. “And the God of peace himself sanctify you wholly; and may your spirit and soul and body *be preserved entire*, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. *Faithful is he that called you, who will also do it.*”

2 Tim. 4:18. “The Lord *will* deliver me from every evil work, and will save me unto his heavenly kingdom: to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.”

Heb. 9:11-15. “But Christ having come a high priest of the good things to come, through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation, nor yet through the blood of goats and calves, but through his own blood, entered in once for all into the holy place, *having obtained* eternal redemption. For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling them that have been defiled, sanctify unto the cleanness of the flesh: *how much more shall the blood of Christ*, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish unto God, *cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?* And *for this cause he is the mediator* of a new covenant, that a death having taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first covenant, *they that have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.*”

1 Peter 1:4, 5. “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to his great mercy begat us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, unto an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fades not away, *reserved in heaven for you*, who *by the power of God* are guarded through faith *unto a salvation* ready to be revealed in the last time.”

1 John 2:1. “They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, *they would no doubt have continued with us*: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us.”

Jude 1. “Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James, to them that are *called*, beloved in God the Father, and *kept for Jesus Christ.*”

But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus,
after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you.
To Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen. (1 Pet. 5:10f)
