

Perseverance

Building a Christian Mind

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Bible Verse: Philippians 1:6
Preached on: Tuesday, December 5, 2023

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I invite you to turn in your Bibles to the book of Philippians 1 for our text this evening. Very grateful that the Lord has brought each one of you here with us as we are coming toward the conclusion of our year-long study, "Building a Christian Mind," and to have a truly Christian mind, you must know what the outcome of salvation is, that would seem rather obvious, and whether salvation is permanent or whether it's a temporary state that can come and go depending on your performance. And so those are very fundamental issues, and we're going to bring great comfort to your heart through the word of God here this evening.

In Philippians 1, I'm going to read verses 3 through 6, even though we'll be focusing almost exclusively on verse 6 here this evening. Philippians 1:3 through 6,

3 I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, 4 always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, 5 because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. 6 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.

Now this evening's message should be a particular encouragement and strength for those Christians that are beset by temptation, discouragement, conflict, unanswered prayer, weakness in the body, weakness in the spirit, suffering from rejection of various kinds at the hands of people you love and care about. In other words, in all manner of adversity, tonight's message should be a particular encouragement for you and I look forward to the privilege of being able to share these things with you.

As we read this text, Paul is writing to the church at Philippi and he opens up by thanking them for the gift that they had sent to him. You see it there in the first three verses that I read, he's thanking God in his every remembrance of them. Verse 4, "always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now." They had sent a gift to Paul to support him and to help him in his imprisonment. If you look at chapter 4, verse 10, this is just by way of the background of what Paul is saying, in chapter 4, verse 10 he says, "I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me. You were indeed

concerned for me, but you had no opportunity." He's telling them that, "Now that I have your gift, it's obvious that you've had an opportunity to renew your love and care for me, and that's been a great encouragement for me in my imprisonment," he says. Then he clarifies, he says, "I'm not writing because I wanted your gift. I didn't need the money." Verse 11, he said, "Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me." I didn't need the gift because of physical circumstances and yet I'm glad, verse 14, "Yet it was kind of you to share my trouble. And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except you only." I ministered to other churches, but they didn't support me. That's okay, but you guys did, he says, and so we have a long history together that makes you particularly dear to my heart. And so in verse 16, "Even in Thessalonica you sent me help for my needs once and again. Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit. I have received full payment, and more. I am well supplied," here it is, "having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God. And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus." All of that just to help you see the context. Paul's in prison, this church sent a gift, and he's writing to thank them for the gift that they sent by the hand of the man named Epaphroditus, and so he's grateful to God for the provision, support, the love that this church had shown to him, and he's writing to express that gratitude to them.

Now, that's all just a little bit of introduction. In these words of thanksgiving and the prayer of thanksgiving that Paul makes there in verse 3, "I thank my God in all my remembrance of you," he's doing more than just focusing on the horizontal, tangible dimension of the occasion. He is recognizing and he is explaining to the Philippians that their gift represents something of a much greater whole; it's a firstfruit of something far greater that's taking place. We kind of talked about this last week, as I recall, as we looked at Ephesians 1, we're sealed in the Spirit and one of the ways that we know that we're in the Spirit is by the fruit that God brings in our lives, and so a changed life filled with the fruit of the Spirit from Galatians 5:22 and 23, is doing far more than just showing somebody who has a nice pleasant disposition true spiritual fruit, it's the last link in a chain that goes all the way back to eternity past because the fruit of the Spirit shows that the Spirit of God is dwelling within someone, and the fact that the Spirit of God is dwelling within someone shows that they are owned by God. He has put his imprint upon them, so to speak, so that they are marked out, they are set apart as belonging to God by the presence of the Spirit of God within them, and if you have the Spirit of God within you, then that's a sure indication that Jesus Christ has saved you, and if Christ has saved you, it means that when he was dying on the cross, that he was dying for you by name when he did that, he loved me and gave himself up for me, and so if you're in Christ, then you were a part of the sacrifice. What I mean by that, you were on the receiving end of the substitutionary nature of that sacrifice that Christ made. He thought of you. God looked at Christ and said, "I'm going to treat you like that guilty Frank. I'm going to treat you like that guilty Susan. Oh, my Son, I'm going to treat you like you were them so that

their sins can be forgiven and they can receive eternal life." And if you were part of that, then it means that you were chosen by God before the foundation of the world. You can just trace this line all the way from eternity past all the way to the moment, shown by the changes in your affections, your love for Christ, your love for his word, your love for his people, all of those things that seem so ordinary because we're used to them and that's what we gather around, those things are actually eternally profoundly significant because of what they represent. It shows a little tiny bit above the surface of the water and below the surface of the water is this great iceberg of stability and solid nature that shows forth the truth of salvation in your life. And so the fact that your life changed has eternal ramifications going all the way back before the beginning of time and will go forward until after time has ceased to be. So to be a Christian is a really remarkable thing, and these new affections that bubble up out of our lives are proof that God has adopted us into his family, that the Spirit of God has placed a new nature in us, and that has just massive ramifications that go from Genesis 1:1 to Revelation 22:21, and all points in between. It's a wonderful thing to be a Christian, isn't it? What a profound blessing to know that those imperfect manifestations of the change of God in your life are representing such profound spiritual realities, certified to us by the word of God and certified to us by the Spirit of God, because Scripture says the Spirit testifies with our spirit that we are children of God. And so we've just entered into a magnificent mansion of truth with the things that we've been considering over these many weeks.

Tonight's message from Philippians 1 is titled, "Perseverance," and it is an extension of these things and once you understand the full context that I just laid out before you, perseverance is a natural result of it and you respond and say, "Well, it could be no other way." If all of these eternal realities are true that we've already covered in the Scriptures, then the perseverance of the saints is something that has to be true. It could not be any other way. There is no reversal of election. There is no reversal of redemption. There is no reversal of adoption. There is no reversal of the sealing of the Spirit. And those who teach that you can lose your salvation have to try to present that in such a narrow focus that ignores so much of Scripture, ignores the alternative explanations for the handful of verses they use to frighten people into an external obedience. The fullness of the teaching of Scripture is just so abundant on this that it's really a wonderful, encouraging, stabilizing force for us as we see these things.

So as we come to verse 6 now, let me read it again because I don't want it to slip out of your mind along the way. Philippians 1:6, Paul says, "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." And so we see in this verse the doctrine known as the perseverance of the saints. The perseverance of the saints. It's the P in TULIP, the five points of Calvinism, the perseverance of the saints. And let me just give you a definition from a standard theological work that gives us a definition of what we mean by the perseverance of the saints, all right? This is a definition of the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints. All those who are truly born of the Spirit and united to Christ by faith are kept secure in him by God's power and thus will persevere in faith until they go to be with Christ in death. I'll say that again. All those who are truly born of the Spirit and united to Christ by faith are kept secure in him by God's power and thus will persevere in faith until they go to be

with Christ in death. I might add, or until Christ returns, whichever comes first. But all those who are true Christians will be found in heaven in the end. There will be none lost along the way, and that's why if you are a Christian here this evening, tonight's message is such an encouragement to you. In the midst of all of the sorrow and heartache that this world can bring as its waves beat upon you as you sit on the beach of life, so to speak, when the waves are pounding upon you, there is this lighthouse of refuge into which you can go and be secure from all of those waves, and it's this, is that God will keep you by his power all the way to the end and that nothing about your present trials could ever take away the most important thing that you have, which is your salvation, being united to Jesus Christ by faith. And so I want to take you through this verse and just kind of unpack that doctrine for you in some greater detail. We're going to look at three aspects of the nature of the perseverance of the saints here this evening. We're going to look at the author of the work of salvation, the nature of the work of salvation, and then the purpose of the work of salvation. The author, the nature, and the purpose of the work.

Let's look, first of all, at the author of the work as Paul expresses his confidence in the spiritual stability of the Philippians in what he says here in verse 6 and look at it there with me, he says, "And I am sure of this." I am sure of this. Paul is expressing a convinced confidence that his expectation of the outcome of their salvation, all being positive, he is expressing his confidence that his trust is well placed. And how can he say that? How can he look at these people that have a very imperfect manifestation of their salvation, there is grumbling in the church of Philippi, you see that in Philippians 2, there's division between a couple of women in the church, you see that in Philippians 4:2 and 3. He's not writing to people that have reached some kind of state of sinless perfection, and based on their sinlessness he's saying this. Quite to the contrary, he has to write to correct them on certain aspects of their practical living. And so how can he be in a convinced state about their spiritual well-being and the ultimate outcome of it? What is it that he's convinced of? Let's ask this question: who began the work in the first place that made them Christians, was it them or was it God? And as you consider the history of the church of Philippi, you can read about it in the book of Acts, we won't take time tonight to go back there, at every point in the founding of that church, God had been doing the initiating work. Think about Paul himself. How was it that he was converted? He was a convinced Pharisee who was persecuting the church and sharing in the stoning of Stephen in Acts 7 by watching the cloaks of those who were throwing the rocks, how was it that Paul even got to be in a position where he was an apostle, where he himself was a Christian? Well, Christ stopped him, didn't he, on the road to Damascus, "Paul, Paul, why are you persecuting me? But get up on your feet and oh, you're going to be a servant of mine." Christ stopped Paul on the way to Damascus. Christ started a work in Paul that Paul was not looking for. Later on, God, as Paul is on his missionary journeys, God gave a vision to Paul that directed him to Macedonia. God directed Paul to the region where he would begin this church at Philippi. And as he's preaching in Philippi and teaching alongside the river, God opened Lydia's heart, it says in Acts 16:14, to believe. God opened her heart to believe. And then when Paul was in prison, God sent an earthquake to save the jailer, the Philippian jailer and he said, "What must I do to be saved?" And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved, you and your household." And so God started a work in Paul. God started a work in the region. God

started a work in individuals with Lydia and the Philippian jailer and growing out of that work was the church that Paul was now writing to. But the historical reality of it was, was that God was doing something. God had started something. Now, ten years after that initial beginning stage of things, the work was continuing on. They were still supporting the gospel, as shown by the gift that they sent to Paul.

Now, beloved, It's just so very important for us not to think about these things in tangible outward terms, said, "Oh, they sent a gift. Well, you know, people give gifts at Christmas time and at birthdays. There's no spiritual significance to that necessarily." What is it about this gift in this context that shows that there is a spiritual component to it of far-reaching ramifications? Well, their gift indicated that they were supporting the work of the gospel. Ten years after the gospel had come to them, which is roughly the length of time that our church has been in existence, we've been in existence a little bit longer than that, maybe not as a church, as a fellowship, but their gift indicated that they still loved the gospel. They still loved the Apostle Paul. They were still motivated by the things of God. There was an enduring nature to the work that their gift represented. Once again, the gift was the tip of an iceberg that was far more greater established underneath the surface. And so God had chosen them in eternity past to save a people for himself.

Listen, God's choice, it stands. You know, men are fickle, women are fickle. People that name the name of Christ can be very, very fickle, but God is not fickle. God does not change. He's not a man that he should repent. He's not a man that his mind should change. God had chosen them in eternity past and he's not going to change his mind. In like fashion, Jesus Christ died to save them. What did he say? What did he say on the cross? He said, "It is finished." It's done. The work was finished. Redemption had been accomplished as he gave his life on the cross, and all that was left was for the Spirit to apply it to the elect in the following centuries and millennia to come until Christ returns. The work was finished. God's choice was established. The redemptive work of Christ on the cross, done. It's over. And then in individual lives, the Holy Spirit had come, regenerated them, placed a principle of new life in them. Again, a work of God. The choice of God, the redemptive work of God, the regenerating work of God, all of this wonderful blessing of salvation certified by the Triune God to everyone who believes. It's remarkable.

And so, as the Philippians were manifesting the ongoing fruit of the Spirit in their lives, their gift was one token among many; it was one representation among many that that work was real, and because it was real, here's the argument, because the work was real, it's definitely going to be carried out until the end. It couldn't be any other way because God the Father doesn't reverse his choice. The work of Christ on the cross cannot be undone. The work of the Spirit cannot be reversed. And so they, being Christians, were secure because of the author of their work. It has nothing to do with their strength, with their spiritual commitment or anything like that. What guarantees the outcome is who the author and the source of the work is in the first place.

Now, obviously, you and I know by direct personal experience that believers can fall into sin. We can be buffeted by temptation. We run hot and cold. But the continuance, the

keeping of our salvation, God did not deposit that into our ultimate power and our ultimate responsibility. If you and I had to keep our salvation, it would be lost instantly because even our faith is weak and imperfect. Our repentance is not all that it could be or should be. The nature of our faith is mixed with imperfection, and God requires perfection in order to enter into his kingdom. And so it's not a matter that the weight of keeping someone in Christ is left to the individual, God himself has taken the responsibility by starting the work, he's going to carry the work all the way through and Scripture makes this just so very abundantly clear.

Turn, for example, to John 6, the gospel of John 6. Yes, we can fall into sin and temptation, and it's sad that we do, and one of the marks of a maturing faith is a sense of weariness with our flesh. Paul spoke that way in Romans 7, didn't he? He said, "Who will set me free from the body of this death? I do what I don't want to do, and I don't do what I want to do." This is the Apostle Paul speaking like that. It is the Apostle Paul later in Philippians who says, "Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect." And so there's something else at work that makes us confident that we will arrive safely in heaven at the end.

Look at John 6:37 and look at how the Lord Jesus takes personal responsibility to keep his own until the end. In John 6:37, "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." Christ talking about what he will do, what the Father has done, the author of the work. And so it is the will of God that everyone that turns truly to Jesus Christ for salvation will have eternal life and that Christ will raise him up on the last day and no one's lost in the process.

Look, that gives you yet another insight, another measure of the love of Christ for your eternal soul, the love of Christ for you, that he loves you so much that the nature of salvation and the outcome of salvation, he says, "I'm not going to leave it up to you. I'm going to put that one on me." Christ takes the responsibility to ensure the outcome of your salvation because he knows that you do not have the power to carry that out on your own and so he loves you enough to guarantee your safety based on himself, not on what you are able to do. Think about it, those of you that have been parents, you've had impulsive young children who aren't aware of the risks and dangers and so you get out, you're on a sidewalk along a busy road or getting ready to cross a street, you don't leave it to that child to protect himself. The child doesn't know the dangers. The child is too ignorant. He's too weak. He's too impulsive. He's not trustworthy. And so what do you do? You just grab hold of his hand and you guarantee by the strength of your grip that that child is not able to run into mortal danger because you love him. It's not an indication that... the last thing a loving parent would do would just leave it up to the child to secure his own safety in places of dangers that are far too great for him to comprehend and defend himself against. And in using the language of Jesus in a different context, if you, being evil know to protect your children like that from earthly dangers, how much more

will your Father in heaven guarantee the safety of his own children that he's adopted into his family, how much more will he guarantee them by holding them in his own hand to make sure that they arrive safely in the destination that he appointed for them before the foundation of the world? To teach that a true Christian could lose his salvation is such an unspeakable assault on the love and character of God that everyone who's ever taught that should publicly repent, and if a man believes that that's truly the case, he should resign from ministry and stop the deception and stop the sense of fear that that place is in the heart that are supposedly true Christians. This is unthinkable to suggest such things.

Now Jesus said these things in other places, didn't he? Look over, you're in the gospel of John, look over at John 10 for example. John 10 and we could look at verse 27, John 10:27. Jesus said, "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." There's a three-fold guarantee of the security of the believer right there, all based on the actions and the promise of our blessed Lord. He said, "I give them, I give them eternal life. They will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand." We stand, as it were, in the realm of the protection of Christ. He stands as a mighty King over the course of our souls, over the course of history, and he declares against all the forces of evil and all of those that would undermine our soul and seek to destroy our faith, Christ declares against all of them, "Not one of them, not one of mine, are ever going to be lost," and he places the responsibility for that outcome upon himself. He goes on to say in verse 29, "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."

And while we're on these lines, let's look also just briefly at the familiar words at the end of Romans 8:38 and 39. Well, we'll go to verse 35. I know I've been here before recently. But in verse 35, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" It's a rhetorical question. The answer is no one and no thing shall ever separate us from the love of Christ. "Tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?" Let's just lay out all the possibilities that we think might drive a wedge between a true believer and his Lord, between me and the one who loved me and gave himself up for me. List them all out and the answer is, nope, nope, nope, nope, nope, none of that. In fact, in verse 37, these threats to our soul, turns out that "in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us." And you read through the book of Revelation, we'll begin going through Revelation according to plan in February, conquerors, conquerors, the one who conquers, the one who conquers, the one who conquers, this is the mark of a true Christian, that they are overcomers so that Paul could say under the inspiration of the Spirit, here's the word sure again, circling all the way back to Philippians 1:6, "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." And beloved, it's not because we love Christ so much that nothing can separate us. It's just the opposite. It's because Christ loves us so much that he'll never allow that to happen. Just as you would never willingly let your child run free into a busy street to get run over by a truck, Christ is never going to let us run into a spiritual position that would terminate our salvation. It just is not going to happen, not because of anything in us, not

because of our faithfulness to Christ, but because of his faithfulness to us. Do you understand that? Do you believe it? Do you rest all of your hope on that distinction? Not based on your faithfulness to Christ are you secure, but based on Christ's faithfulness to you, you're secure.

Now, what's true of individuals is also true of the church corporately. Jesus said, "I will build my church," Matthew 16. Look at Ephesians 5 with me. Ephesians 5 and you know, aren't we, as you're turning to Ephesians 5:25, aren't we blessed? Hasn't God been remarkably, infinitely good to us, not only to save us, but to assure us of the outcome and allow us to gather together to consider these things in peace and realize and have the Spirit apply these things deeply to our soul so that we would be encouraged and strengthened in the battle in which we walk? So much so that we can look at impending death itself without fear, without concern, without worry about what will happen to us. A lot of people have written about some of these intellectuals in a human sense, great philosophers, weren't Christians, denied, were hostile to God, to the Bible, to the faith, and it seemed like they had such great arguments, but these men routinely died miserably, died questioning everything that they had done, everything that they had written, approached death without hope, and all of their godless humanistic philosophy bearing its ultimate fruit in the end of their own lives, and they died without hope. Beloved, you and I aren't in that position. We can look death square in the face and say, "The one who saved me in life will save me, will keep me in death, and bring me out safe on the other side. The one who is my Lord, the one who is Master of my soul, the one who keeps me, he went before me. He went into death. He went into the grave, and he came out safe on the other side. And not just safe, he came out powerfully on the other side and he is the one who will captain me, he is the one who will direct my soul through the very same process, approaching death, in death, in the grave, coming out safe on the other side. I'm not afraid." Doesn't mean that sometimes we don't quiver at the thought of, you know, what the dying process might be like, but when we're thinking rightly, we can lay our head on the pillow of our deathbed in peace. We can look up into the faces of the ones to whom we say goodbye for a time. and say, "I love you, my soul is safe in Christ, all is well." As Jonathan Edwards said to his family around his deathbed when the smallpox vaccine got the best of him at the age of 57, he looked at his family knowing he was dying, said, "Trust in Christ and all will be well." That is the power of these doctrines so that at the moment of greatest human extremity, we're prepared for it and the development of a Christian mind during our lifetime prepares us for the most extreme moment and allows us to enter into it triumphantly and come out safe on the other side. And the God who's with us when we first confessed Christ, the God that has been with us providentially and through his indwelling Spirit in all of those subsequent years, we've seen him faithful, seen him answer prayers and all of that, beloved, rest assured that when your time for death comes, he'll be with you and give you strength for that so that there's no cause for fear, none whatsoever because I am sure that he who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus. The author of our salvation who wrote the beginning of the story will write a glorious end to the story as well.

I've told the story. I can't help but repeating it here in this context. One of my seminary classmates, I sat next to him in like my very first seminary class. We got through

seminary, we graduated together, he was pastoring in Philadelphia with a good friend of his, went out to get donuts, drunk driver T-boned him and he instantly knew that he was dying. The paramedics, fire department arrived. He's got a two or three year old son in the back seat. He looks to his son and says, "You go with the firemen. I'm going to go see Jesus." And who thinks and who prepares for a moment like that? Do you think that at some point he just said, "Now if I get hit by a drunk driver with my son in the back seat, here's how I'm going to respond." No, no, what happened was the Spirit of God strengthened him in that most extreme moment to discharge his final responsibility as a parent and then to turn his eyes upward to heaven and with Stephen, I'm speaking metaphorically here, he looked up and saw the Son of God standing at the right hand of the Father and left behind a testimony that those who know it can't put it out of their mind 30 years later.

And you see, beloved, my whole point in mentioning that is not to glorify a former seminary student classmate of mine, but to give you assurance and confidence you don't need to be afraid of death. In light of the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints, in light of what each member of the Triune Godhead has done to secure your salvation, in light of the promises of Christ, no one will pluck them out of my hands, everyone that comes to me, I'll raise him up on the last day, no one can separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Beloved, the whole panoply of those considerations and those enemies of our soul, and death is an enemy, all of it, all of it, all of it bows down before the greater majesty of Christ and has no power over our soul in light of what he has done for us and the way that he keeps us. And that's why we can say that all those who are truly born of the Spirit and united to Christ by faith are kept secure in him by God's power and thus will persevere in faith until they go to be with Christ in death. Now let me ask you, those of you that aren't Christians, why not trade the insecurity and death and judgment and guilt and condemnation that are your present lot and state before God, why not exchange all of that for the hope of eternal life that's promised to you if you'll just come to Christ? Why would you say no to that? Why would you harden your heart again and reject that when such a great eternal security and gift is promised to you and to everyone who comes to him?

Well, Ephesians 5:25 through 27, we see this power of Christ in more of a corporate sense, you might say. Ephesians 5:25, "Husbands, love your wives, as 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." Christ loved the church, gave himself up for it, so that in the end the church might be with him in glory, without spot, without blemish, holy and without blame. We are holy without blame, as the hymn writer said.

James Montgomery Boice, if you haven't read anything by James Montgomery Boice, make it your goal in 2024 to change that; pick up any one of his books and read it cover to cover, and you'll be greatly edified and blessed. James Montgomery Boice, who died when he was 60. He died of liver cancer. I think it was liver cancer. He had some form of aggressive cancer. He was pastoring Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia, had a

flourishing ministry, greatly used by God in the defense of the inerrancy of Scripture, and written so many greatly valuable commentaries, one of the true heroes of the faith, in my opinion, in the 20th century. And he knew what it was like, and when he announced it to his congregation that he had cancer and that he didn't have long to live, perfect serenity kept doing what he was doing all the way to the end. I love men like that. I love those kinds of examples like that. If God gives me opportunity, I hope to die like he did. Anyway, James Montgomery Boice on this matter of perseverance said, back in 1972 when he was a young man starting in ministry, he said this, "No one whom God has brought to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ will ever be lost. No one whom God has brought to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ will ever be lost. he, though he is dead, continues to speak." And so, coming back to Philippians 1, coming back to Philippians 1, that's Boice, for those of you that maybe the name is new, B-O-I-C-E, James Montgomery Boice, B-O-I-C-E.

When Paul says, "I'm sure of this, that he who began a good work in you," as Paul is giving thanks for the Philippians and expressing that kind of confidence, understand this, that Paul's thanks to God for them was grounded in his confidence in God. He gives thanks to God because of his confidence in God and he knows that nothing will hinder God from completely and finally saving his people. And so this church that he loved, this church that supported him, Paul looks at them and rather than saying thank you, he thanks God for the greatness of the work that God was doing in the midst of that wonderful congregation. He thanks God because God was the ultimate source, the ultimate author of all the good that was coming out of them. That's why Scripture can say, "Not to us, not to us, O Lord, but to thy name be the glory."

Now obviously, there's a question that we need to answer in light of this, because some might find this a little too simple, you might say, in light of experience that they have as they observe the nature of the church. You're in church life for any period of time, you know Christians in other spheres, so-called people that claim to be Christians in other spheres of life, they look so strong, they flourish, it seems like. You know, and you have people that seem to be Christians that make you feel ashamed of, you know, "Why don't I have their zeal?" And then over time, you find that they drift away. They turn away from Christ. They divorce their spouse and go after someone younger. They leave their family. They turn around and deny and attack the faith that they once held. And oh, is the internet filled with people who like to say, "You know, I once was at MacArthur's church but now I know what the truth is and I don't want anything to do with that." What are we to do with things like that, these people that join a church based on a profession of faith in Christ, and then they either vocally, outwardly, dogmatically reject the faith that they once had, or by their lifestyle show that they have no interest in Christ. What a sad thing to see that. What a sad thing.

You want to know what it's like to be a pastor? Here's one aspect of it. There are a lot of wonderful things about being a pastor but here's one of the heart-wrenching things that you never really quite get over. You baptize someone on a profession of faith in Christ. By the way, if you listen to me carefully when I baptize someone, I will never say, I will never say because you are a Christian I baptize you in the name of the Father, Son, and

Holy Spirit. I say something just a little bit different. I say based on your testimony of faith in Jesus Christ, I now baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. I'm baptizing you on the basis of your testimony. I can't look all the way into your heart and know if there's a contrary reality to what you say with your lips. But having baptized dozens and dozens of people over the years, one of the greatest wrenching things in my life is to watch it play out over time and to see those that were baptized with a smile and joy seemingly on their face having turned away. Some, if I've not baptized them personally, I know the stories, outwardly pursuing homosexual lifestyle, showing no interest in the things of Christ, turning and attacking those that loved them, whether it be parents or pastors, elders, turning against it, and just showing that there's no reality there. I thought it was real. You know, we had hope for you. We found joy in you. We prayed for you. We taught you. We loved you. We had you in our homes. And now look at you. You're an enemy of Christ. You know what? That's nothing new in the 21st century and I say this not to defend myself, but to defend other brothers in ministry who come under attack, it's no reflection on the ones that ministered to them at all. Jesus said there's wheat and there's tares. Tares looks just like the wheat. It's not until it comes to maturity that you see that it wasn't real.

If you want to look at this and you want to see a biblical example of the sorrow that I'm describing, well, I think the Apostle Paul understood it just exactly like I just described it for you. Look at Philippians 3. He said in Philippians 3:17, he said, "Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us. For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things." Paul said there are many that walked for a time and then they turned away and now they're enemies of Christ.

How are we to understand that in light of the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints? Look at 1 John 2. 1 John 2 after Hebrews, after the letters of Peter. 1 John 2. 1 John 2:18, one of the marks of the presence of the Spirit of antichrist at work in our age and even within the walls of the outward visible church. Verse 18, "Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. Therefore we know that it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they were not of us." And what Paul is saying is, they were within our circle, they were in our midst. We accepted and loved them as brothers and sisters in Christ. They were with us. "But they went out, because they were not of us." They weren't really sharers in Christ with us. They didn't share the same Spirit after all, and time proved forth the ultimate reality. Time and truth went hand-in-hand with them because "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." When we see that happen, when we see someone baptized on a profession of faith in Christ, and then they turn and walk away, they abandon what they testified to, it's an indication that they were never a Christian to begin with because if they had been truly converted, if they had been truly born again, they would have continued on because the author of the work would make sure that it continued. But they go out in order to show that they're not all of us. That's what we're to make of it. They were never Christians to begin with. And I say this with great heartfelt sympathy to those of you parents who have

had children profess Christ and then turn away, the sad reality that Scripture points us to is that this is to be expected, that for whatever reason people make a confession, maybe at the time they think it's sincere based on what they understand, but subsequent events show that their heart was never changed, or like Demas who loved the world and went back to it.

And so, what do we do in light of that? What do you do in light of that reality? And what should we do as a church in light of that reality? Well, it becomes very important, in the words of 2 Corinthians 13:5, to start with your own heart and to make sure that you yourself are really in the faith. "God, is my salvation real?" What are the affections of your heart? Do you have real, genuine, abiding affections for Christ, for his word, for his people and all of those very simple things we pointed out last week as being the mark of the presence of the Spirit of God within you? Well, you can look at those things and say, man, the fruit's imperfect. You know, there's fruit on the tree. Some of it's kind of shriveled. Some of it's half eaten. But, you know, there's some fruit that's real. What this teaching does is it humbles you and causes you to come back dependently to your Savior and say, like the eleven disciples around the table, "Lord, it's not I, am I? It's not me, is it, that's going to betray you? Lord, don't let that be true. Don't let that be true of me." So you don't become introspective and doubtful and fearful, you just come back and say is my salvation real? Here it is, do I believe that Jesus Christ is the unique eternal Son of God who alone is the Savior of the world? You start there, asking yourself what you believe about Christ. Do you really believe that? "I do believe that." Do you believe that Jesus Christ gave his life on the cross a sacrifice for sinners that they might be eternally reconciled to God? "I do believe that. I can do no other. God help me. Amen. Yes, I absolutely believe that." Have you put your faith in Christ? "As best I know I have." Do you see a change in affections? Do you see biblical affections in your life? Do you enjoy being with the people of God? Do you love the word of God? Do you read the word of God at some point in your life? Does your heart naturally turn to God in prayer? Then you can know that your salvation is real and that you'll never be lost because that's the biblical test of, that's how you test your faith biblically. It's not easy, and it's not comfortable, and it's hard work, but it's worth the process to come out on the other side and say, "Yeah, I've checked myself again, and the Spirit of God affirms to me what the Bible says in my heart that it's real."

Here's another thing, I mean, looking at it from another perspective. You know, if someone in spiritual leadership, qualified elder, comes to you and says, "I'm concerned about you. I'm concerned about the drift of your life." How do you respond to that? Do you even care? It's amazing to me, and I'm being far too transparent, and it's amazing to me after 30 years of ministry, to see how easily, how quickly, how coldly people will turn against those that have done nothing but love their soul, and at the first sign of concern, expression of concern and accountability, they'll turn, make accusations, and walk away and become whatever they become. Why? Why would someone who has any concern for their own soul resent a qualified elder, a pastor, a sincere Christian friend saying, "I'm concerned about you. Can we talk? Can we talk about the direction of your life, the direction of your faith? Can we talk about that?" Beloved, you in this room, you would be shocked at how many people say, "No, I will not talk to you." But you're a member of the

church. You stood up front and said you would. "I don't care. Leave me alone." Comes with the territory, I guess, but boy, pastors grieve over things like that, not because of someone leaving the church, because of what it very well may indicate about the real state of their souls.

And so as we gather together as the people of Christ here tonight, you know, we've talked about the need to pray, the need to pray for the Spirit of God to help us. This is part of the aspect of how we need him to help us is to work in the hearts of those recalcitrant, cold people who by all appearances seem to have abandoned the faith they once professed. And we gather together as humble, dependent believers, and we pray for people like that, whether we know them by name or just the general principle, saying, "God..." Paul knew what it was like to have people that looked like disciples to turn away and be enemies of the cross. The Apostle John knew what it was like. Jesus knew what it was like to have one of the twelve turn against him. That's a little bit different. Jesus knew that was going to happen but still the principle is the same, outward attachment without inward reality ultimately manifesting itself by a departure. But in the context of the perseverance of the saints, I want to circle back and not lose sight of the theme of tonight's message. That doesn't happen with real believers, those that have really been born again. They continue in grace all the way to the end because God continues it. I simply tried to help you understand, see from Scripture that there is an explanation for the other that does not involve saying, that person lost his salvation. Now, he was never saved to begin with.

Let's go quickly to point number two, the nature of the work. The nature of the work, and we'll cover these final two points rather quickly. The nature of the work, Philippians 1. Philippians 1 here. The nature of the work that God does is something that he does in the heart. It's something that he does deep in the recesses of the inner man. Look at Philippians 1:6. Paul says, "I'm sure of this, that he who began a good work in you." He did a work in your heart. God does not look on the outward appearance, but he looks on the heart, 1 Samuel 16:7. And this is just another reminder of what we've been saying for so many weeks, that true Christianity is not a work of outward human morality or human effort. Christianity is a supernatural religion, air quotes around the word religion. It's a supernatural reality, God doing a work in the inner man that the man could not do himself. God, as it were, changing the spots on the leopard. God changing the stripes on the tiger. God changing the skin of the Ethiopian, doing that which is impossible for the man to do to himself, God does in them. And so in our hearts, God has given life where death once prevailed. In our hearts, God has shined the light of the knowledge of Jesus Christ where darkness had once prevailed. He does work in us. It's a change of the inner man. And so here with the Philippians, their gift was an outward token of the greater prior inner work of God within them that was carrying on.

Look at Philippians 2. Philippians 2:12 and 13. The nature of the work is that God does an inner work in the man. Philippians 2:12, "Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." Work it out. Don't work for it. Work it out. Carry it out in your life. Apply it to your life. And he says in verse 13, "for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure." The Spirit of God does a

continuing ongoing work of sanctification in the hearts of believers to cause them to desire spiritual growth, to desire the glory of Christ, to desire to continue on. There is an inward shoveling of coal on the fire that takes place. The inward fire, God continually adds fuel to it by his Spirit in order to keep the fire going. He does a work in us so that we continue on in Christ. That's the nature of the work, and it's an inward work that God does.

Now let's go thirdly and finally to the purpose of the work. The purpose of the work. Why does God bother with all of this? Why does God bother working in the hearts of recalcitrant people to even bring them to Christ, why does God bother continuing working in us when we stumble in the same ways again and again, when we let our hearts grow cold, we stumble around? Why does God even bother? Why did God bother in the first place? He didn't need us. His essence was already perfect and complete. He was perfect and content within himself and within the Triune communion of the Godhead, they needed nothing. We didn't contribute anything that made them better, the persons of the Godhead better, the essence of God better than what it was. So why did he bother? Well, there is purpose to it all. Look at Philippians 1:6 one final time here. Paul says, "I'm sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will," ah, there's a future dimension to this, I see, "he will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ." He started a work because he has a goal in mind. This work will be completed when Christ returns, when we are with Christ. Paul here is looking ahead to the final reward of believers. Jesus Christ will return for his church. He says in John 14, you know, "If I go away I will come again so that you can be with me where I am." Christ genuinely, actually loves us and wants us to be with him so that he can share and shower his blessing upon us throughout all of eternity. That's why. That's why. It's a motivation that comes entirely from within God's own glorious, loving essence. It's out of his own goodness and his grace and he would have us know the joy of the completion of our salvation. He would have us be with him. He would receive our praises and bless us and let us share in his glory because he wants to just bless us in that way. Man, you feel this big in light of such undeserved, unrequited love, such grace, such goodness, such love and mercy and patience and kindness poured out because he wanted to because that's who he is, and because he wants us to know the fullness of that day, he works to make sure that we reach that day, and the fullness of the work of Christ is accomplished, and the outcome is achieved. It's for that purpose, beloved, that you are being fashioned.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones, there's another name of somebody's books that you should be reading on a regular basis. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, James Montgomery Boice, Sinclair Ferguson. Lloyd-Jones says this, and I love this quote. You know, Martyn Lloyd-Jones, you read biographies about him, especially the stuff that Iain Murray has written, and you just see that this was a man who loved Christ independently of the gift of preaching that he had, independently of the ministry that he had. He supremely loved Christ and supremely looked forward to being with him so that when it was time for him to stop preaching, he could say, "I was never living for the preaching anyway." You know, I mean, one of the great preachers of all time, who understood salvation from the perspective from which we speak so feebly here this evening, and that he could say that Christ is far greater than the preaching. The preaching was only incidental, I'm

paraphrasing, the preaching was incidental to the greater reality of simply belonging to Christ and being with him forever. That Martyn Lloyd-Jones said this, "When Christ returns, you will stand before him and receive your reward. You will enter into your inheritance, into that magnificent and amazing consummation, the day of Jesus Christ." Ah, to stand before him complete in the Beloved. Ah, to stand before him accepted in the Beloved. Oh, to stand before him, and however this works out, to look into his glorious resurrected countenance, to tell him face to face, faith having become sight, "Lord, thank you," and to know that somehow we'll know that Christ will be pleased to have paid that price for us to be there in his presence. Oh, the great, magnificent, amazing day of Jesus Christ and you know, I hope in talking about the different afflictions that we go through, they're real, they're difficult, I get weighed down by my afflictions just like you get weighed down by yours, but understand something very transcendent that is independent of the details of those afflictions and sorrows of heart, whether as an individual Christian or as a spiritual leader: everything that God is doing in your life, the joys and the afflictions that he sends to you, beloved, everything is done from God's perspective with the design that you would be perfectly prepared for the ultimate enjoyment of that final day when you are face to face with Jesus Christ. That is the goal of it all. God does not get so caught up in the process like you and I do, and we wonder how this or that's going to work out, this or that different relationship, and all of that. God sees beyond that. God sees the end from the beginning, and he uses these heartfelt afflictions in order to humble us, to wean us from our love for the world so that we would long for nothing else but to see our Lord face to face, and as we experientially enter into the knowledge and the reality that there is nothing in this world that is worth setting my final affections on, that there is nothing in this world that can be kept, there is nothing in this world to love in comparison to Christ, as we start to learn that, as life disappoints us, is it sometimes difficult and discouraging? Understand that that ultimate goal, seeing Christ face to face, is what God has in mind, and that changes our whole perspective on it.

Let me close by pointing you to Philippians 3:20. Christian, right here, these are verses worth memorizing. Verse 20, chapter 3, verse 20, "But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself." Look at that again. He will transform our lowly body, the state of our earthly existence will be transformed, it will be transmuted into something infinitely better. We will be transformed into his image, having one day a body that is somehow like his glorious resurrected body and it's guaranteed to happen because Christ, by his power as the author of the work of our salvation in us, will bring it to its final consummation for certain, none of his disciples having been lost along the way. That's what lies ahead for us, for you and for me, to see Christ face to face, to be made like him, and the doctrine of perseverance means no one gets lost along the way. If you're in Christ tonight, beloved, this is the outcome for you. This is your final destiny. This is what makes it all worthwhile.

Let's pray together.

Father, we thank you for your wonderful promises to your people. I pray for each one under the sound of my voice that's truly in Christ that you would strengthen and build their confidence in your great and lofty promises, that you would give them strength to go through every adversity, every affliction of body, soul, and spirit, every discouragement, every sin that we confess to realize that you won't leave us in sin, but one day you will bring us out of it and perfect us in your presence because, Father, it always and could only come out well for true believers in the end. And so as we reflect on these things, Father, I pray that your Spirit would swiftly bear witness in the heart of every true believer under the sound of my voice, "Yes, you are a child of God. Yes, I am in Christ. Yes, this will be the outcome for me." And Father, for those deceived about their salvation, as I certainly once was, God, I pray, I pray for your intervention in old men and old women who have not much time left, Father, intervene and awaken their souls for young men and for young women, Lord, who have professed Christ but now show no interest, Father. We pray that you would bring them to the reality that we once thought they possessed whether it's restoring them through a profound repentance or whether it's bringing the converting, regenerating power of your Spirit upon their souls for the very first time. Father, we can't sort any of that out from our perspective. We just commend them to you and to you, the one who alone is able to save them and to resolve all these things. Gracious Lord Jesus, we honor your great and holy name. You loved us and gave yourself up for us and now having saved us and accomplished the purposes that you intended on the cross of Calvary, we know that no one will pluck us out of your hand. We believe you to keep your promise and therefore we are content, we are secure, we are assured as we walk out of the building tonight that we belong to Christ and nothing can change that and it will come out well in the end. And no wonder, Father, our hearts beat with extra strength in this hour as we give thanks to you for all of the wonderful goodness that you have showered upon us in our Lord Jesus Christ. We give you thanks for your abundant grace, your abundant blessings, and pray that all under the sound of our voice would enter in. In Jesus' name, amen.

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