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**Mission 119 Ministries**

**DECONSTRUCTING CALVINISM  
EPISODE 20: WHAT IS  
PERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS?**

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**Hutson Smelley**

**[www.sermonaudio.com/forestbranch](http://www.sermonaudio.com/forestbranch)**

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# **SERIES GOALS**

- **Short, focused lessons**
  - **Explain Calvinism**
  - **Address claims of Calvinism**
    - **Exegetically**
    - **Historical**
    - **Philosophically**
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# EPISODE GOAL

- **Explain what “perseverance of the saints” — the “P” in TULIP — means based on popular Calvinist writings**



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# WESTMINSTER CONFSSION

“They whom God hath accepted in his Beloved, effectually called and sanctified by his Spirit, can neither totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace; but shall certainly persevere therein to the end, and be eternally saved.” — Article XVII

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# WAYNE GRUDEM

“The perseverance of the saints means that all those who are truly born again will be kept by God’s power and will persevere as Christians until the end of their lives, and that only those who persevere until the end have been truly born again... On the other hand, the second half of the definition makes it clear that continuing in the Christian life is one of the evidences that a person is truly born again. It is important to keep this aspect of the doctrine in mind as well, lest false assurance be given to people who were never really believers in the first place.” — *Systematic Theology*

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# ANTHONY HOEKEMA

“John Murray makes a strong plea for retaining the express “perseverance” rather than “preservation.” The term “perseverance,” he says, guards against the notion that believers are spiritually secure regardless of the extent to which they may fall into sin or become careless about their way of life. It is simply not biblical teaching to say that believers are secure regardless of how they live. The doctrine we are considering is the doctrine that believers persevere; it is only through the power of God that they are able to persevere, to be sure, but they do persevere. The security of believers is inseparable from their perseverance; did not Jesus say, “He who stands firm to the end will be saved” (Matt. 10:22)? Murray, in fact, puts it as strongly as this: “Perseverance means the engagement of our persons in the most intense and concentrated devotion to those means which God has ordained for the achievement of his saving purpose.” — *Saved By Grace*

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## R.I. DABNEY

“This perseverance does not imply that a man may be living in habitual and purposed sin, and yet be in a justified state, because he who is once justified cannot come into condemnation. We heartily join in everything which can be said against so odious a doctrine. It is impossible, because the living in such a state of sin proves that the man never was, and is not now, in a justified state, whatever may be his names and boasts.”

— *Syllabus and Notes of the Course of Systematic and Polemic Theology*

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# LOUIS BERKHOF

“Perseverance is that continuous operating of the Holy Spirit in the believer, by which the work of divine grace that is begun in the heart, is continued and brought to completion.” — *Manual of Christian Doctrine*

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# ROBERT CULVER

“The true doctrine (not the caricature often rejected by opponents of the supposed doctrine) means that the believer is kept in faith and obedience, partial and temporary lapses notwithstanding. It means that final apostasy does not take place, that sins committed in moments of neglect of the means of grace will be repented of rather than continued in. Those who live scandalous lives have no basis for assurance and are not to be received as Christians by the churches.” —  
*Systematic Theology*

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# WHAT IS FAITH?

- **In plain everyday English the noun “faith” is defined to mean “confidence or trust in a person or thing; belief in the truth of a statement or doctrine.” — The New Century Dictionary of the English Language Volume One (New York: D. Appleton-Century Company 1948).**
  - **In our New Testaments, the Greek word typically translated “faith” is the noun pistis.**
  - **According to the Greek lexicon BDAG, the noun pistis has the primary meaning of “that which evokes trust and faith” and a secondary meaning of a “state of believing on the basis of the reliability of the one trusted, trust, confidence, faith.**
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# WHAT IS FAITH?

- **The word typically translated as “believe” is the related verb *pisteuō*. According to the Greek lexicon BDAG, the verb *pisteuō* has the primary meaning “to consider something to be true and therefore worthy of one’s trust, believe.”**
  - **The elements of the “gospel” depend on how you define faith, and not everyone defines faith the same way.**
  - **Many Calvinists add in a commitment of obedience to Christ which is not a part of the lexical meaning of *pistis* or *pisteuō*.**
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# WHAT IS FAITH?

- **Since Calvinists insist that God must give us our faith, by defining faith to include a commitment of obedience, God's gift of faith to us ensures our obedience in the faith to the end of our lives.**
  - **Wayne Grudem says that repentance is also necessary for salvation and that "repentance is a heartfelt sorrow for sin, a renouncing of it, and a sincere commitment to forsake it and walk in obedience to Christ." — *Systematic Theology***
  - **A.A. Hodge likewise says that faith necessarily leads to good works and also speaks of saving repentance as entailing "[g]rief and hatred of sin, a resolute turning from it unto God, and a persistent endeavor after a new life of holy obedience." — *Outlines of Theology***
  - **Augustus Strong affirms that faith includes a "voluntary element" (so-called fiducia), which means: "Surrender of the soul, as guilty and defiled, to Christ's governance." — *Systematic Theology***
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# WHAT IS FAITH?

- **In his *Systematic Theology*, Robert Culver (like many Calvinists) says there are 3 elements of saving faith.**
  - **The first element, not to be neglected, is, indeed, intellectual assent -- to the facts of biblical history and of redemption provided. This is sometimes called historical faith....**
  - **The second element in saving faith is appropriation -- of Christ as Lord and Savior.**
  - **A third element in saving faith is commitment to Christ... And that is exactly what a contrite sinner does, having been convinced in mind that Jesus is, indeed, the Savior, and having received the Savior to himself -- he commits himself, his hopes, ambitions and things to Jesus.**
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# WHAT IS FAITH?

- **R.C. Sproul: “At issue here is the question of genuine faith. The Reformers taught that 'justification is by faith alone, but not by a faith that is alone.' True faith is never alone. It always manifests itself in works. Works that flow out of faith, however, are in no way the ground of our justification. They contribute nothing of merit before God. The only ground or basis of our justification is the merit of Christ. Nor is faith itself a meritorious work or the ground of our justification. Faith is a gift of God's grace, so it possesses no merit of its own.” — *What Is Reformed Theology?***
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# WHAT IS FAITH?

- **J.I. Packer: “The truth is that, though we are justified by faith alone, the faith that justifies is never alone. It produces moral fruit ... it transforms one's way of living; it begets virtue. This is not only because holiness is commanded, but also because the regenerate heart, of which fiducia is the expression, desires holiness and can find full contentment only in seeking it.” — *Concise Theology***
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# WHAT IS FAITH?

- **By giving the term “faith” this special definition, which finds no support whatsoever in the lexical meaning of the term, Reformed theologians insist that salvation is by faith alone while also maintaining that no one can enter heaven without sufficient works (i.e., with faith alone).**
  - **Any first year philosophy student knows this is illogical. Your eternal destiny with God is secured by faith alone, or it is not, but it cannot be both at the same time.**
  - **Reformed theologians speak of “spurious faith” or head faith or mental assent as the type of faith that is not saving faith because it lacks the commitment to obedience to Christ.**
  - **The irony is that Calvinists teach that believing is a work, but fail to see that a commitment to good works is a work.**
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# WHAT IS FAITH?

- **Charles Ryrie explains: “Faith means confidence, trust, to hold something as true. Of course, faith must have content; there must be confidence or trust about something. To have faith in Christ unto salvation means to have confidence that He can remove the guilt of sin and grant eternal life.” — *Basic Theology***
  - **Charlie Bing explains, believing is simply believing: “Let’s be clear about what it means to believe. To believe something means that we are convinced or persuaded that it is true. We cannot almost believe something. We either believe it or we don’t.” — *Simply By Grace***
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# SUMMARY

- **The Calvinists' doctrine of perseverance of the saints is that the Bible teaches that those who are truly and genuinely saved / justified will persist in faithfulness until the end of their lives.**
  - **The flip side of the coin is that if a "professed" Christian fails to persist that person was never a Christian to begin with.**
  - **Doctrine flows from how "faith" is defined.**
  - **SOME Calvinists reject this doctrine and replace the "P" in TULIP with "preservation of the saints" though they still call it perseverance, and by this they only mean eternal security — which I agree with.**
  - **Pillar proof text are James 2:14**
  - **Other Proof Texts: Romans 8:29-39; Romans 11:20; 1 Corinthians 1:8-9, 13:7-13; Philippians 1:3-6; 2 Thessalonians 3:3; 1 Peter 1:5; 2 Timothy 2:12; Galatians 5:21; Matthew 24:13**
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