

CHAPTER 12.

PERSEVERANCE AND GLORIFICATION

The pastor longs for the day when God’s people will be completely free of sins of the tongue, and the peace within his congregation will never be disrupted by sharp or unwise words. Of course, he is realistic enough to know it will not happen in his lifetime, unless the Lord Jesus Christ returns, but he still longs for it. The recovering alcoholic yearns to be entirely and eternally free from the craving to drink in excess. However, he has been told often enough that the cravings never totally go away. The wife wishes that pride would no longer disrupt her marital bliss. Yet, time and again, she is disappointed that she looks too much to her own interests and too little to those of her husband (Phil 2:4). Her husband fails in this regard, too. He has said as much, more than once.

In short, God’s children still long for the day when every suffering and every struggle against sin will finally be over . . . forever. It is precisely to this topic that we now turn in the last chapter of this volume. The two remaining aspects in the doctrine of salvation are the perseverance of the saints and the final glorification. The doctrine of perseverance is aptly captured in Philippians 1:6 where the apostle Paul expresses his confidence that the Lord “who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.” Moreover, when that “day of Jesus Christ” arrives, the final glory will be also revealed. Then, as the apostle John assures us, “death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away” (Rev 21:4).

The Reformed teaching concerning perseverance is rather unique. It places such a strong confidence in God's faithfulness and steadfast grace that it does not hesitate to affirm that God's chosen ones "neither totally fall away from faith and grace nor remain in their downfall and are finally lost" (CoD 5.8). At times you may wonder whether such a statement is overly confident. After all, are there not many examples of people who appear, in every way, to be sincere Christians, yet at a certain point they turn their backs on the Lord and abandon the faith? How can we maintain the perseverance of the saints when everyday experience seems to teach something quite different?

In order to approach the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints profitably we need to make a conscious choice from the start. We must study this doctrine by means of faith and not by sight. That is to say, we must speak about perseverance of the saints based on what God has revealed to us in his Word (LD 7, Q&A 21) and not on the basis of what we experience from day to day. Of course, the truth of perseverance has a profound impact on our daily experience of the Christian life. However, there is an important difference between *basis* and *effect*. Perseverance affects our experience, but it is based upon God's promises. It is challenging to keep that line between basis and effect drawn sharply. Nevertheless, we must do our best. After all, just like all the other aspects of salvation, perseverance and glorification are gifts from God. Therefore, also concerning these final aspects of redemption, the words of Jonah ring true: "Salvation belongs to the LORD" (Jonah 2:9). Since it is all from the LORD, his Word has the final say in these matters.

PERSEVERANCE: GUARDED BY GOD'S POWER (1 PET 1:5)

Perseverance and God's Faithfulness

Just as our investigation of justification (chapter 10) began with an overview of justice as one of God's perfections, so also our treatment of perseverance should begin with God's own attributes. God preserves his chosen ones not because of who they are but because of who he is. To be

more specific, perseverance is linked to God's faithfulness, mercy, and power.

God's faithfulness, mercy, and power shine forth in all of Scripture, but the historical accounts of the Old Testament certainly portray them in rich and vivid colour. For example, the patriarchs demonstrated repeatedly how deceptive and unreliable they could be. Out of fear for his own life, Abraham put the purity of his own marriage at risk by telling others that Sarah was his sister, while hiding the fact that she was his wife. To add insult to injury, he did this not once, but twice (Gen 12:13; 20:2). Sadly, Abraham's son, Isaac, did not learn from his father's folly. Instead, he used exactly the same ploy to protect himself from the men of Gerar (Gen 26:7). A husband who knowingly exposes his own wife to the possibility of being trapped in an adulterous relationship is hardly a man of integrity, yet it did not stop there. Dishonesty became somewhat of a family trait since in the next generation Jacob lied about his identity right to his father's face (Gen 27:24) and did not hesitate to repeat this sin in his brother's face either (Gen 33:13–14).

Yet, in spite of all this patriarchal dishonesty, the LORD God remained faithful, upholding his promises from one generation to the next. From the outset, he promised Abraham many descendants and a bountiful land (Gen 15). Later he re-affirmed these words to Isaac (Gen 26:4–5). Later still, Jacob began to enjoy an initial fulfilment of them (Gen 29, 30). This thread of God's faithfulness throughout the lives of these dishonest patriarchs does not describe the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints as such. Still, it is important background. It shows that already from the earliest times, the LORD did not let sinfulness stop him from advancing the well-being of his people.

In the time of the kings, this faithfulness of God is confirmed, and the added aspect of mercy becomes even more pronounced. The LORD made a commitment to David and his descendants: "Your throne shall be established forever" (2 Sam 7:16). Even though he would firmly discipline disobedient descendants, the LORD also made it clear that his "steadfast love will not depart" from them (2 Sam 7:15). And so it was.

Even though David's son Solomon took many wives, and let his wives lead him astray after other gods (1 Kgs 11:4), the LORD remained true to his original promise (1 Kgs 11:13, 32). Thereafter, many of Solomon's descendants—from Rehoboam to Jehoram to Mannaseh—followed in his footsteps and worshipped other, false gods. It is one thing for the LORD to remain faithful to patriarchs who could be very foolish, but it is a greater demonstration of his faithfulness and undeserved mercy that he continued to work among the descendants of David, despite their frequent spiritual adultery, that is, idolatry. Yet, as the LORD himself says, he kept the lamp of David's line burning (2 Kgs 8:19; 2 Chron 21:7), both for his own sake and for the sake of David (2 Kgs 19:34; 20:6).

Finally, during the time of the exile, the LORD displayed his merciful faithfulness in a most powerful way. God justly sent his people into a foreign land because they had stubbornly refused to listen to the prophets' warnings. The LORD would not have wronged them in any way if he had forsaken them for they had first forsaken him. However, for the sake of his own name, he did not abandon them, but rather called them and restored them to their former blessings (Isa 48:9; Ezek 20:44; 36:22; Dan 9:19). Yet what a task! The obstacles were innumerable. His people had been scattered among the Babylonians so they had to be gathered from "the four winds of heaven" (Zech 2:6). Their lives were entwined with that pagan society, so extracting them would be painful. If God's people returned to the land of Canaan, they would find the towns in ruin, the fields overrun with weeds, and the temple nothing more than a heap of rubble. To human eyes, the task was utterly hopeless. Yet the LORD is as powerful as he is faithful, and one by one, he overcame the obstacles. Again, this OT history provides important background for the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints. His sinful people may plunge themselves into dire predicaments, but the arm of the LORD is never too short to pull them up.

From the start, we committed to approaching this topic of perseverance by faith not by experience. From this brief overview of God's perfections of faithfulness, mercy, and power, it becomes clear that God does not

react to crises in the same way that we do. In predicaments, we tend to panic and despair, but the LORD perseveres and preserves.

Perseverance and God's Name

As we saw above, the LORD remains true to his promises, also when his people sin against him. But why? Especially if the sin is wilful and repeated, why doesn't the LORD simply abandon those particular people and focus on others who are more submissive? The answer to this question certainly does not lie with endearing attitudes of God's people. On the contrary, as the Psalms announces, it has everything to do with God's name. The well-known shepherd psalm includes this verse: "He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake" (Ps 23:3). Likewise, in Psalm 31:3 David sings, "For your name's sake you lead me and guide me," while in Psalm 143:11 he pleads, "For your name's sake, O LORD, preserve my life! In your righteousness bring my soul out of trouble!"

The LORD'S name is I AM WHO I AM (Exod 3:14). This unique name describes stability, consistency, and reliability. From one day to the next, we may change, turning from obedience toward disobedience, slipping from trust into doubt. However, that does not mean that the LORD has to follow in our footsteps and change himself. Far from it! The LORD remains the great I AM WHO I AM. In many ways, this name is the foundation that keeps the entire building of perseverance standing straight and upright.

In addition, Psalm 119 expands on this connection between God's name and perseverance. Indeed, Psalm 119 could rightly be called "the perseverance psalm," given how often the word *preserve* occurs. Here is a sample of the relevant verses. The psalmist prays that the Lord would preserve his life "according to your word" (vv. 25, 107). He also adds, "in your righteousness give me life" (v. 40), as well as praying for preservation according to "your steadfast love" (vv. 88, 159) and "your promise" (v. 154). The psalmist also confesses that the LORD uses his word as a means by which he preserves his people (v. 93) in the midst of afflictions (v. 92) and severe trials (see also Pss 66:7; 138:7).

To be sure, these psalms often speak, in the first place, about the preservation of physical life. Having said that, we should not make a rigid or false dichotomy between physical and spiritual life. Reading through Psalm 119 leaves one with the impression that the psalmist is as concerned with his spiritual well-being as he is with his physical. Moreover, he is convinced that the LORD, on the basis of his righteousness and love, and through his Word, will preserve his chosen ones.

This already begins to show the solid comfort that flows from the doctrine of perseverance. We speak about the perseverance of the saints, but no sooner do those words leave our lips and we should immediately confess God's perseveration of his people. After all, this teaching starts and ends with him—his attributes, or perfections, and his name. So, when our spiritual well-being, both now and in the future, is anchored in who God is rather than what we do, we receive an inexpressibly precious stability.

Perseverance and the Father's Gift

The lines we have explored so far in the Old Testament reach a point of fulfillment at the end of the first letter from the apostle Peter. There he encourages us by saying, "And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you" (1 Pet 5:10). One phrase that stands out in that statement is "in Christ." What role does Christ play in the perseverance of the saints? A short answer to that question might well be the following: a profound and indispensable one.

From Jesus' own mouth we learn something important about perseverance. In John 6:39, Jesus announces, "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." Thus, not only did the Father send his Son into the world, but he also gave him the names of all those whom he had chosen to be redeemed on the last day. For his part, the Son was divinely determined to make that happen. After all, he loves his Father and since his Father has entrusted him with that special group of people, he will not

disappoint his Father. Later on in the same gospel, Jesus says something similar:

I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand (John 10:28–29).

Since the Father and the Son are one, they are completely united in their goal to keep the chosen sheep in the hands of the Good Shepherd. No wolf (John 10:12) and no Ancient Serpent either (Rev 12:9) will be able to snatch them away. The Father has given these sheep to his Son, the Shepherd. Under no circumstances will this Good Shepherd allow any of those sheep to slip off into eternal death rather than eternal life. The Father's gift is just too precious for the Son to allow that to happen. So, again, when we look at doctrine of perseverance through the lens of this gift from one divine person, the Father, to another divine person, the Son, we gain confidence that would surely elude us if we only focused on ourselves.

Perseverance and Other Doctrines

The distinct truths of salvation all fit together in a most blessed harmony. It is not possible in this chapter to trace all the connections between perseverance of the saints and other doctrines, but we will at least explore some of them.

Following the lead of 1 Peter 5:10, let us begin with the doctrine of Christ. As Christ himself said, "I lay down my life for the sheep" (John 10:15). It is unthinkable that Christ would lay down his very own life for his people, only to have the blessed results of his death completely undermined by the failings of those same sheep. It is, of course, true that sheep wander. People do fall into sin, also grave and serious sins. Holy Scripture never attempts to conceal this fact. However, the precise goal of Christ's atoning death was to cover over sin. Now, if that same sin of those same people would actually be able to nullify the merits of Christ's death for them, then that would certainly be the height of tragic irony.

Thankfully, the Word of God speaks differently. The sheep for whom Christ died are the sheep to whom he will give eternal life. Within the context of John 10, the sheep of vv. 27–28 are not a diligent and pious subset of the sheep for whom Jesus Christ died in the vv. 14–15. They are one and the same flock (John 10:16), and from that flock none shall go missing (John 10:28–29).

In addition, Scripture speaks highly of the effectiveness of Christ’s intercession. After his return to heaven, the Saviour did not leave his beloved to her own devices. The bride of Christ does not have to fumble her way to the great wedding day, relying on her own strength, intelligence, and determination. On the contrary, the Bridegroom, who is also our eternal High Priest, is praying for her—constantly and fervently. This ongoing intercession of Christ is an indispensable part of any correct confession of the perseverance of the saints. From the book of Hebrews we learn, “Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them” (7:25). Perseverance and even final glory are clearly in view here. The phrase “to save to the uttermost” can also be translated “to save eternally.” Thus, complete and eternal salvation is granted to those who come to God in faith through Christ. However, it is granted only *because* Christ lives to intercede, and he lives always to intercede always. Would the Father ignore his Son’s ongoing requests for the complete salvation of God’s own people? Reading through Article 26 of the Belgic Confession provides a convincing answer: no, he will not. Instead, the Father will answer the intercession of his Beloved Son, and in this way, the preservation unto eternal salvation is secured for all God’s people.

Perseverance of the saints is also connected to the doctrine of election. God chose us in Christ before the creation of the world (Eph 1:4), yet no sooner does election come into view and our eyes are drawn toward final glory. For instance, the apostle Paul takes us rapidly from before the beginning right to the end when he writes, “And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified” (Rom 8:30). One thing that is often overlooked in this famous verse is that glorification, which is yet

in the future, is described using the past tense. The apostle does not say, “those whom he justified, he will glorify,” but rather, “those whom he justified, he also glorified.” The use of the past tense here indicates just how certain the Lord’s decree really is. Even though it is yet to happen, it is as certain as if it had already happened, and all this because of God’s faithfulness. With our human plans there is always a contingency factor. Our intentions do not always result in accomplishments. Thankfully, such is not the case with our God. Those whom he predestined he will also preserve.

In this respect, the doctrine of the Holy Spirit is also applicable. He is the “guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it” (Eph 1:14). Even when sinful human beings put down a financial deposit there is no guarantee that they will follow through with the rest of the financial deal. Some people default on their commitments; however, the Lord is different. The Spirit of God does not say one thing and do another. Since *he* is the deposit guaranteeing our eternal inheritance, we know for certain that we will receive what we do not yet see. In addition, the Holy Spirit is not inclined on a whim to move about from here to there—beginning his work in someone, only later to back out and abandon the project. That is out of character for God the Holy Spirit. Instead, our Saviour said, “And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth” (John 14:16–17).

In short, the doctrines of Christ, the Holy Spirit, and election are all intimately bound up with the doctrine of perseverance. This also means that we cannot question the perseverance of the saints under the impression that we are only altering one, isolated area of doctrine. Quite the opposite. Denying perseverance of the saints not only calls into question the attributes and name of God, but it would also negatively affect the doctrines of Christ, the Holy Spirit, and election. In this way it is obvious that perseverance of the saints is an integral part of the gospel, not just a particular and peculiar teaching of the Reformed faith.

Perseverance of the Saints Summarized

We have already covered quite a bit of territory concerning perseverance of the saints. At this point, it may be helpful to step back and summarize. The *ground*, or basis, for perseverance is the same as all the other aspects of our salvation: God's sovereign grace. Perseverance does not spring forth from our own spiritual stamina, but rather it is received, as a gift, from the generous mercy of our God. Thus, the Canons of Dort sums the matter up saying that from the point of view of sinful human beings, it not only could, but most definitely would, happen that they fall away from grace. However, with respect to God, the matter is entirely different:

But with respect to God this cannot possibly happen, since his counsel cannot be changed, his promise cannot fail, the calling according to his purpose cannot be revoked, the merit, intercession, and preservation of Christ cannot be nullified, and the sealing of the Holy Spirit can neither be frustrated nor destroyed (5.8).

The *means* by which our Triune God accomplishes his work of preserving his chosen ones will be familiar by now. As Psalm 119:93 indicates, the LORD preserves through his Word. In fact, the stern warnings in God's Word concerning apostasy (e.g., Matt 24:12; Heb 6:4–6; Rev 2:4–5) are a key tool in the Holy Spirit's hand by which he prods wandering sheep back onto the path of life everlasting. By the same token, the warm encouragement of Scripture (Matt 11:28; 2 Cor 1:3–4; 1 Pet 5:10) is another instrument by which the Spirit strengthens the spirits of those who are on the verge of despair. The sacraments, which portray the gospel before our sore and yearning eyes, are another means by which the Spirit of Christ sustains those who are discouraged and corrects those who are presumptuous. Again the Canons of Dort aptly put it all together with these words:

Just as it has pleased God to begin this work of grace in us by the preaching of the gospel, so he maintains, continues, and perfects it by the hearing and reading of his Word, by meditation on it, by its exhortations, threats and promises, and by the use of the sacraments (5.14).

Finally, we would be amiss if we did not touch on the whole matter of how believers *experience* perseverance. How do we gain personal assurance that God will certainly shield us until we step over the threshold of death and into the Father's house of final glory (John 14:2–3)? In short, it can be said that perseverance is certainly not like travelling down a straight, smoothly paved freeway. No child of God cruises calmly, directly, and effortlessly from rebirth through perseverance and into final glory. On the contrary, the road is rough, narrow, twisted, and filled with spiritual potholes (Matt 7:13–14). Sins, and serious ones at times, are committed. King David and the apostle Peter provide ample evidence of that (CoD 5.4). The sense of God's favour can be lost for a time (CoD 5.5). Yet by focusing upon the sure promises of God's unfailing Word and not seeking after dramatic, personal revelations (CoD 5.10), the assurance once again returns, as the Spirit does his reviving work (CoD 5.11).

So, if your spiritual journey is a hard one, filled with many foolish stubbles and emotional swings, do not be surprised. In God's household full of adopted sinners, that is the rule rather than the exception. However, in the midst of it all, we may also experience that the Father of all comfort will not let us be tempted beyond our strength, but with the temptation will also provide the way of escape, and by the Holy Spirit will again revive in us the certainty of perseverance (CoD 5.11).

Objections to Perseverance

Typically, there are three main objections to the doctrine of perseverance. The first is that this teaching will inevitably produce lazy and careless Christians. The concern is that no sooner are Christians assured that God will preserve them to the end, and they will feel free to commit whatever sins they like. After all, so the argument goes, why should they be diligent about piety now, if in the end eternal life is guaranteed anyways? In response to this objection, it should first be stated that spiritual slothfulness is always the result of our own rebellious attitude, not the consequence of scriptural doctrine. Sin begins in the human heart, not the truths of the gospel. However, secondly, this objection disconnects sanc-

tification and perseverance. The same Holy Spirit who preserves God's children is the one who renews their hearts. Concerning these two doctrines it is never either-or but always both-and. Having received the double gift of grace that both forgives and preserves, the true child of God is not less thankful, but rather even more eager to serve the Lord. As the Canons of Dort explain, "to those who fear God the contemplation of His face is sweeter than life, but its withdrawal is more bitter than death" (5.13).

The second objection is that if the warnings against apostasy in Scripture are to be genuine, there must also be a real possibility of apostasy. To be concrete, why would the apostle John warn, "Little children, keep yourselves from idols" (1 John 5:21), unless it is entirely conceivable that they would abandon the Lord and worship false gods instead? The proper response to this objection begins with a careful distinction between a serious, yet temporary, fall into sin and a hardening in apostasy. King David became guilty of adultery and murder. For a time he also refused to confess those sins (Ps 32:3–5). Was David an apostate? Evidently not. The LORD sent the prophet Nathan to him and, through the Word, David was brought to repentance once again (2 Sam 12). Wallowing for some time in the mire of iniquity is inexcusable, but it is not necessarily apostasy. This also reminds us to be circumspect about our abilities to evaluate other human beings. Is the one who sinned grievously really a hypocrite who is hard of heart? Perhaps, but the Lord alone knows for sure. Will the one who sinned grievously repent later, even as David did? The Lord alone knows. So, following the direction laid out for us in Deuteronomy 29:29, we must leave these secret things with the Lord. This does not mean, though, that the power and purpose of all those warnings against sin in Scripture are neutralized. Quite the opposite, these warnings are the very means by which the Lord accomplishes his final goal of preserving all his chosen ones in the true faith (CoD 5.14).

The final objection is that the doctrine of perseverance leaves no room for the exercise of the human will. What shall we say about this? Does perseverance turn God's children into stones that are simply airlifted

from the mire of unbelief straight into the majesty of final glory. In response, we must repeat what has already be said: more often than not, the path of perseverance involves many emotional trials and heart-wrenching decisions. Thus, our human will is not avoided, coerced, or overridden by the doctrine of perseverance. On the contrary, as we already learned earlier about regeneration (chapter 8) the human will itself is renewed as part of the process of salvation. That also applies here in the doctrine of perseverance. God must preserve the will in its state of restoration; otherwise, it surely would default back in the direction of rebellion.

In one way or the other, each of these approaches allows the miserable experiences of daily life to begin shaping our understanding of the perseverance of saints. However, that is the wrong starting point. Perseverance is a teaching that certainly affects daily living, but it ought not to be based on human experience. The Word of God is clear. Those whom he predestined he glorifies (Rom 8:30). God is faithful and he will himself restore you (1 Pet 5:10). In addition, God has given us new birth into “an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God’s power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time” (1 Pet 1:3–5). On this scriptural basis, the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints is firmly founded, and we are richer and more spiritually stable as a result.

GLORIFICATION: “AN ETERNAL WEIGHT OF GLORY BEYOND ALL COMPARISON” (2 COR 4:17)

Most often the topic of glorification is included with a study of the last things, otherwise known as eschatology. We hope to come to that area of doctrine in the next volume of *Growing in the Gospel*. However, having come this far in studying all the various aspects of our salvation it is only fitting that we glimpse briefly at this doctrine, which is the final jewel in the crown of redemption.

Typically, we use the word *glory* with a certain chronology in our minds. The basic idea is that *after* our struggle with sin, sorrow, and death is over, *then* we will enter final glory. As such, there is nothing wrong with

this understanding. In fact, it is supported in Scripture. For example, the psalmist Asaph declares to the LORD, “You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will receive me to glory” (Ps 73:24). However, at bottom the word *glory* has more to do with a weigh scale than a wristwatch. It speaks of something that is full and heavy rather than incomplete and lightweight.

Before the state of glory, our salvation is real but still so partial and inadequate, lacking in luster and abounding in deficiencies. However, when glory arrives, all of that changes. Deficiency is replaced by perfection. Dull is exchanged for radiant. The apostle Paul emphasizes the fullness of final glory when he writes, “For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal *weight* of glory beyond all comparison” (2 Cor 4:17). This movement from partial to full captures the essence of the doctrine of glorification and can be applied to each of the other jewels of salvation that make up the crown of redemption. In succinct fashion, we will now do precisely that.

Calling

Right from the start God’s people are called to eternal glory (1 Pet 5:10). Indeed, the call is there and the call is genuine for it comes from God. Yet so long as they still belong to this present age, God’s children do not actually experiences that to which they have been called. After all, Paul says, “Who hopes for what he sees?” (Rom 8:24) Yet when glory comes, hope will be replaced by sight. Surely, the experience of eternal glory will far outweigh the expectation of final glory.

Regeneration

Already in this life, believers enjoy new life by the power of the Holy Spirit (1 Pet 1:3). They even begin to feel, in the hearts, the beginning of the joy of eternal life (LD 22, Q&A 58). Still, to feel a beginning is hardly comparable to enjoying “perfect blessedness, such as no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived—a blessedness in which to praise God forever” (LD 22, Q&A 58). It is obvious that the latter outweighs the former.

Repentance

Conversion, also called repentance, involves turning away from sin and turning toward activity that is pleasing to God. Yet there are so many turns to be made in so many areas of life concerning each of the commandments of God. Here in this life, one quickly feels that he is never finished redirecting. There is always one more sin that needs to be turned away from; there are always more things that we could do unto the praise of God's name. Once our Saviour ushers us into final glory, we will not need to make any more turns of repentance. Sin will never again distract the glorified believer, enticing him to the right or the left. In glory, all eyes, hearts, and hands are unwaveringly focused on praising God and his Lamb (Rev 7:9–10).

Faith

In Mark 9, the father of the demon-possessed boy said it well when he exclaimed, "I believe; help my unbelief" (v. 24). Those who genuinely believe still genuinely struggle with certain doubts. There are days when they question the Lord, even though they wish earnestly that those questions would just leave their minds—once and for all time. There are days when the promises of salvation somehow fall flat in their hearts, not inspiring the joy and confidence that they really should. In this life, the knowledge of faith is partial (1 Cor 13:9) and the confidence of faith is imperfect. However, on the other side, in glory, all doubt will be removed, and we will finally know what it is to have a faith that can move mountains (Matt 17:20; 21:21; 1 Cor 13:2).

Justification

If there were one aspect of salvation that would seem to be already in a state of glory, it would be this one. Pardon for sins, all of our sins, is a full reality, right here and now (1 John 1:7, 9). While it is true that pardon for our sins is already complete now, it remains true that we will experience the joy of this justification in an even fuller measure in glory. At present we still do not realize how great a blessing justification really is. There are still so many of our faults that we have not yet discerned

and remain hidden to our minds (Ps 19:12). In glory we will be delighted to discover that the sheer scope of justification by grace through faith is far wider, higher, and deeper than we ever imagined.

Adoption

We are God's children, here and now. We are God's children, fully and legally. The apostle John leaves no doubt about that (1 John 3:1). However, right now our dwelling is here below and our Father lives in heaven. Our enjoyment of our adoption is hindered by the distance that separates us, as well as the sinfulness that yet lingers in us. Yet when glory arrives, that distance will disappear. The dwelling of God will be with men (Rev 21:3), and a few verses later we hear that, in a much richer way, the Lord will say, "I will be his God and he will be my son" (Rev 21:7).

Sanctification

Already in this life the Holy Spirit does an immense work, purifying our hearts and hands from all that is impure and restoring us to our God-given purpose of living in grateful devotion to him. Still, each day confirms the lamentable truth that there is still so much impurity that clings to us. What is perfectly pure piety really like? In this age, we thirst for such purity, but do not taste it. In glory, we will drink it and never thirst again (Rev 7:16).

Perseverance

As we discovered in this chapter, perseverance of the saints is like being on a battlefield, not a luxurious resort. Satan attacks each day again, and unless the Holy Spirit holds us up, we cannot stand, not even for a moment (LD 52, Q&A 127). Constantly there are struggles. There are always more doubts to overcome and more temptations to avoid. At a certain point, the child of God cries out, "How long, O Lord? How long?" Thankfully, the struggle of perseverance, one day, ends in the rest of eternal glory. In glory all present struggles are replaced by everlasting splendor.

Suggested Readings: 2 Corinthians 4:7–18; 1 Peter 1:3–12

QUESTIONS FOR UNDERSTANDING

1. Sometimes we speak of *perseverance* of the saints while other times we refer to their *preservation*. The spelling of these words differs by only a few letters, so they are easily confused. What is the distinction between the two? Note that *preserve* or *preservation* is used in CoD 5.3, 8, 9, whereas *persevere* or *perseverance* is used in the title of CoD 5, as well as in CoD 5.9, 14, 15. Why is this distinction important for our own spiritual well-being?
2. Often when it comes to perseverance of the saints, we quickly turn to passages such as John 10:28–29 or Romans 8:30. These texts are certainly valid, but there is an advantage to building up this doctrine by starting in the OT. Identify two key benefits of rooting this teaching in the OT.
3. Read Hebrews 6:4–12. Verses 4–8 seem to suggest that true believers might fall away completely, while vv. 9–12 speak of “better things” including “the full assurance of hope until the end.” How do we hold together the two sections of this passage in a coherent way? You may need to consult a reliable commentary to help your discussion.
4. Since we experience the beginning of eternal life already now (LD 22), what will be the main difference between this present life and final glory? What are you personally looking forward to the most?

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION

1. Concerning the gift of perseverance, the Roman Catholic Church has made this official statement: “Let no one promise himself anything as certain with absolute certainty; though all ought to place and repose the most firm hope in God’s help” (*Decrees of Trent*, Session 6, Chapter 13). Similarly, the *Treatise of the Faith of Freewill Baptists* (1834) says, “As the regenerate are placed in a state of trial during this life, their future obedience and final salvation are neither determined nor certain” (Chapter 2). Are these

statements scripturally incorrect or wisely cautious? Is one statement better than the other? Discuss.

2. Having grown up in a secular environment, Joe comes to embrace the Christian faith. During the course of five years, he grows steadily in knowing Scripture and serving fellow believers. Then, one day it is discovered that he has committed adultery. He quickly abandons his wife and two children, as well as his fellow believers, and begins to live an unrepentant lifestyle. Has perseverance of the saints failed in this particular case? How do we discuss this with his wife? What about explaining it to his two young children?
3. Romans 8:17 teaches us that just as Christ went through suffering to reach glory, we also need to follow the same path. If we truly believe this, are sufferings something that we should endure in humility or enjoy with a view to final glory? How does James 1:2 fit into this? Is enjoying suffering realistically possible?

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