**Bethel Christian Fellowship**

**Fair Lawn, NJ**

**PERSEVERING FAITH**

**“Whatever God Starts, He Finishes”**

**November 17, 2024**

Every truth in the Bible gives us reason to rejoice, but perhaps none more so than the one before us today. It’s the declaration that we are saved by persevering faith, *and* that it’s God who keeps us persevering. It assures us that whatever God starts, He finishes. It’s God’s guarantee that if we have truly believed at some point in the past, we will wake up as believers tomorrow morning.**1**

This glorious truth is a tremendous source of joy. It gives us strength for today’s problems and peace for tomorrow’s threats. Why? Because we must persevere in faith in order to enter heaven, just as Jesus said: “*He who stands firm to the end will be saved*” (Mark 13:13); and as Paul taught; “*By this* gospel *you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I have preached to you*” (1 Cor. 15:2); and as the author of Hebrews explained, “*We have come to share in Christ if we hold firmly to the end the confidence we had at first*” (Heb. 3:14). But the flipside of this truth declares that our great God *preserves* us so that we will *persevere*!

As we surely know, the Christian life is not exactly a leisurely stroll down the yellow brick road. There are dangers and hardships and temptations that threaten to undo us, and to destroy us, and to lead us into despair and even unbelief. So what assurance do we have that we will continue in the faith, apart from which there is no eternal life? The answer is obvious. Our safety and protection is the fruit of God’s faithfulness; whatever He starts, He finishes.

We see this, for example, in John’s gospel. In the Bread of Life Discourse, Jesus reveals the will of the Father for those given to Him before the foundation of the world: “*And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. For my Father’s will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day*” (John 6:39-40).

John’s gospel also reveals that Jesus is the Good Shepherd, who promises that not one of His God-given sheep will ever perish: “*My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand. I and the Father are one*” (John 10:27-30). As we can see, the *perseverance* of the saints is due to the *preservation* of the Savior.

Finally, John’s gospel also records Jesus’ high-priestly prayer, in which He prays for you and me. He asks that all whom the Father had given Him would be preserved to share in His glory: “*Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world*” (John 17:24). It is inconceivable that His prayer for us, which still continues (Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:25), will go unanswered! So, the perseverance of the saints is also due to the *prayers* of the Savior.

As we have seen in our previous studies, God’s saving purpose for His elect has been likened to a golden chain consisting of five unbreakable links. It spans eternity past, when God foreloved us, to eternity future, when the justified will be glorified: “*For those God* ***foreknew*** (think foreloved) *he also* ***predestined*** *to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also* ***called****; those he called, he also* ***justified****; those who he justified, he also* ***glorified***” (Rom. 8:29-30). Not a single person is lost in the process. *Whatever* God starts, He finishes.

Based on this glorious truth, we also saw how Paul closed his argument by asking a question (Rom. 8:31a), which he then answers by asking five more questions (Rom. 8:31b-37). In each one, Paul assures us of our present and future security in the steadfast love of God. What follows is his *grand finale*: “*For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord*” (Rom. 8:38-39, NIV).

Elsewhere in Paul’s epistles he *rejoices* in the certainty that God will *finish* the good work that he started in the lives of his converts – and in all genuine believers. In today’s message, I want us to consider three of these passages. In each one, Paul’s emphasis is on God’s faithfulness to preserve us to the end; and to the end *we must* – and *will* – persevere.

**Exhibit A: Philippians 1:3-6**. “*I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus*” (NIV).

The “good work” which God began in the hearts of these Philippian believers is the new birth. That initial work of God’s saving grace *will be completed* on “*the day of Jesus Christ*” (cf. 1:10; 2:16), when Christ returns in glory to raise His people from the dead. *All* who have genuine saving faith will be kept secure until that day. Such was Paul’s confidence, which accounts for the joy that filled his heart every time he prayed on their behalf. He knew that *God* will do whatever it takes to guarantee that no genuine believer will ever walk away from their faith. He knew that God will do everything necessary to bring us safely into His presence – all the way through to the end of the age!

That’s not to say that the Philippians wouldn’t face many obstacles; they did. Nor is to say that the evil one had given up trying to deceive them and derail their faith; he didn’t. They were never beyond the possibility of failing or faltering in their faith. Nor are we. However, what Paul *is* saying is that God remains faithful to the work of grace that He has begun in our lives. What He has started, He will finish.

What, then, does this mean for us today? It means that if we are carrying a heavy burden, or filled with worry and fear, or overwhelmed with stress and anxiety, God will supply us with whatever it takes to get us through these hard times. He will keep us pressing on. Whatever God starts, He finishes.

**Exhibit B: 1 Corinthians 1:4-9**. “*I always thank God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus. For in him you have been enriched in every way – in all your speaking and in all your knowledge – because our testimony about Christ was confirmed in you. Therefore, you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed. He will keep you strong to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God, who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful*” (NIV).

Here is another clear declaration of God’s faithfulness in protecting and preserving those whom He has called into fellowship with His Son. It’s His commitment to sustain us “*to the end*,” which is clearly a reference to the second coming of Christ at the end of the age, or, “*the day of our Lord Jesus Christ*.”

Once again, this is a promise, not a “hope-so” wish. Paul assures the Corinthians that the God of grace, who had begun His work of grace in their lives, could be trusted to complete that work. For Paul says, “*He will keep you strong to the end*;” not, He *might* keep you strong, or He *may* keep you strong.

The reason we can be sure of this is because “*God is faithful*.” He is reliable. He is trustworthy. The faithfulness of God is the guarantee that we *will be* sustained to the end *and* declared guiltless both now and forever. When we came to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, Christ’s righteousness was imputed to us, so that we were declared guiltless at the time (justification). Because God is faithful, that verdict will never be overturned. We will *remain* guiltless in His sight right up through and until the very end – when we will stand “blameless” in His presence at Christ’s return.

Until that time comes, He will continue to sustain us, and to provide for our every need. To be sure, the Corinthians had a long way to go before their Christian lives matched their righteous status before God. The same is true for us today. But despite their setbacks and struggles and the severe rebukes that Paul had sent their way, he reassures them that the God who has called and redeemed them will keep them strong in their faith to the end. Small wonder that Paul always gave God thanks for His ongoing, never-ending, preserving grace. We should too!

**Exhibit C: 1 Thessalonians 5:23, 24 and 2 Thessalonians 3:1-3**. When viewed together, both passages assure us of God’s commitment to sanctify us completely and to guard us against every assault of the evil one. In both passages we are assured that He is faithful to do both!

“*May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul, and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.* ***The One who calls you is faithful****, and he will do it*” (1 Thess. 5:23-24). “*Finally, brothers, pray for us that the message of the Lord may spread rapidly and be honored, just as it was with you. And pray that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men, for not everyone has faith.* ***But the Lord is faithful****, and he will strengthen and protect you from the evil one*” (2 Thess. 3:1-3).

If our faithful God is committed to sanctify us through and through, and to sustain us until the coming of Christ, then we will persevere in our faith. We won’t abandon it, or apostatize. God has committed Himself to do everything necessary to ensure that we will continue in faith, love, and obedience. What God starts, He finishes.

Further, if our faithful God promises to guard us against the attack of the evil one, then we can be assured that the arch enemy of our souls will not destroy or derail our faith. We can rest assured that he can never deceive us to the point of abandoning or rejecting the faith.

Our great God “faithfully supplies every need, all the power, every incentive, and whatever spiritual resolve is needed so that each of us who knows Jesus truly will finally stand in His presence blameless and whole.”**2**

There is a wonderful illustration of this in Pilgrim’s Progress. At the beginning of his journey, Christian arrives at the House of the Interpreter. Interpreter, who represents the Holy Spirit, takes him on a guided tour, room by room. In each room, Interpreter explains a Biblical truth that Christian will need to know before he continues his journey. In one of these rooms, Christian learns that persevering faith is the work of God’s sovereign grace.

*Then I saw in my dream that Interpreter took Christian by the hand and led him in*

*a place where a Fire was burning against a wall. Someone was standing beside it*

*trying to put the Fire out by constantly pouring great amounts of water upon it. Yet*

*the Fire continued to burn higher and hotter.*

*“What does this mean?” asked Christian.*

*Interpreter answered, “This Fire is the work of Grace that is formed in the*

*heart. The one who throws water on it to extinguish it is the Devil. But as you can see,*

*the Fire is burning higher and hotter in spite of this, and now you will see the reason*

*why.” So he took Christian around to the back side of the wall where they saw a Man*

*with a container of oil in His hand. Secretly this Man was continuously pouring oil*

*into the Fire.*

*Then Christian asked, “What does this mean?”*

*Interpreter answered, “This is Christ, who with the Oil of His Grace, continually*

*maintains the work already begun in the heart. Because of this, in spite of what the Devil*

*can do, the souls of His people will continue to walk in His Grace. The fact that the*

*Man was standing behind the wall to maintain the Fire is meant to teach you that it is*

*difficult for those experiencing temptation to see how this work of Grace is being*

*maintained in their souls.*”**3**

When we come to faith in Christ, He ignites our hearts with a blazing devotion to Him. The devil, who despises this saving work of grace, tries hard to extinguish our faith. So, he douses us with his water. **Q.** What’s in his bucket? **A.** Harassing temptations and doubts, trials, distractions and bitter disappointments. Yet despite his best efforts, he fails. The fire not only continues to burn, it burns even higher and hotter. How can this be? Our faithful God secretly but steadily feeds the flame with the oil of His preserving grace.

As time goes by, we discover that our hearts still burn with a love for God. We have grown deeper in the faith and more humble and Christ-like in character. Our desire to serve Him and follow Him is more intense than ever. We soon learn the reason. God’s grace keeps us aflame. Because it is *His* grace, *He* gets the glory, and we learn to rejoice in the preserving oil of His grace. Why? Because persevering in faith is the path to eternal glory! *Soli Deo Gloria*!

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**1**Kept for Jesus, Sam Storms, Crossway Books, p. 189. 2015.

**2**Ibid. p. 126.

**3**The Pilgrim’s Progress Devotional, Cheryl Ford, Crossway Books, p. 65.