

The Perseverance of the Believer

God has a Plan

There is an appointed time for everything. And there is a time for every event under heaven-- Ecclesiastes 3:1

"From the divine viewpoint there is unbroken order and progress from the first beginnings of the creation to the end of the world and the ushering in of the kingdom of heaven in all its glory. If at one glance we could take in "the mighty spectacle of the natural world and the complex drama of human history," we should see the world as one harmonious unit manifesting the glorious perfections of God." (Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*)

The Nature of God's Plan

1. God's plan is eternal:

2 Timothy 1:9 (It is God) who saved us, and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before times eternal.

Psalms 33:11 The counsel of the LORD stands forever, The plans of His heart from generation to generation

Isaiah 37:26 Have you not heard how I have done it long ago, and formed it of ancient times?

Isaiah 46:9, 10 I am God and there is none like me; declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done.

2 Thessalonians 2:13 God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth.

Matthew 25:34 Then shall the King say unto them on His right hand, Come, you blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.

1 Peter 1:20 (Christ) who (as a sacrifice for sin) was foreknown before the foundation of the world.

Jeremiah 31:3 The LORD appeared to him from afar, saying, "I have loved you with an everlasting love; Therefore I have drawn you with lovingkindness.

Acts 15:18: SAYS THE LORD, WHO MAKES THESE THINGS KNOWN FROM LONG AGO.

Psalms 139:16 Your eyes have seen my unformed substance; And in Your book were all written The days that were ordained for me, When as yet there was not one of them.

2. *God's plan is unchangeable:*

James 1:17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom can be no variation, neither shadow that is cast by turning.

Isaiah 14:24 The Lord of hosts has sworn, saying, Surely, as I have thought, so shall it come to pass; and as I have purposed, so shall it stand.

Isaiah 46:10, 11 My counsel shall stand and I will do all my pleasure: . . . Indeed I have spoken it; I will also bring it to pass. I have purposed it; I will also do it.

Numbers 23:19 God is not a man, that He should lie, Neither the son of man, that He should repent; Hath He said, and shall He not do it; Or hath He spoken, and shall He not make It good?

3. *God's plan includes all the affairs in our lives:*

Jeremiah 15:2 And it shall be that when they say to you, 'Where should we go?' then you are to tell them, 'Thus says the LORD: "Those destined for death, to death; And those destined for the sword, to the sword; And those destined for famine, to famine; And those destined for captivity, to captivity."'

Job 14:5 Seeing that his days are determined, And the number of his months is with you, And you have appointed bounds that he cannot pass.

Psalms 139:16 Your eyes have seen my unformed substance; And in Your book were all written The days that were ordained for me, When as yet there was not one of them.

4. *God's plan includes our salvation:*

2 Timothy 1:9 (It is God) who saved us, and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before times eternal.

Acts 13:48 When the Gentiles heard this, they *began* rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.

Those appointed to eternal life (the destination) are the ones who believe. It is to be noted that men are appointed to eternal life - faith is part of the ordained process, but God does not give men faith that does not lead to the desired destination.

Romans 8:29-30 ²⁹ For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. ³⁰ And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

Some think that "whom He foreknew" merely means that God knows who will believe before it comes to pass. However, elsewhere in the Bible the word "to know" means to know and to regard with peculiar interest, to delight in, or to direct special affection toward (cf. Gen. 18:19; Exo. 2:25; Psalm 1:6; 144:3; Jer. 1:5; Amos 3:2; Hosea 13:5; Matt. 7:23; I Cor. 8:3; Gal.

4:9; II Tim. 2:29; I Jn. 3:1). In other words, when the Bible says that God foreknew who would be saved, it means that God saw fallen humanity and then fixed His mind on some whom He predestined for salvation.

But even if "foreknew" only meant that God knows who would be saved, the question of where faith comes from still remains. The only biblical answer is that faith is generated by God (cf. Jn. 3:3-8; 6:44, 45, 65; Eph 2:8; Phil. 1:29; I Pet. 1:2). Even in the present context, God is the active agent, not man. God predestined, God justified, God glorified. If God only saw which people decided to believe, to say that they are predestined becomes meaningless.

Ephesians 1:4-11 ⁴ For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love ⁵ he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will-- ⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. ⁷ In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace ⁸ that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding. ⁹ And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, ¹⁰ to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment-- to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ. ¹¹ In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will,

Note the repeated emphasis on the divine initiative in salvation as seen in the vocabulary related to God's will or purpose or plan: "according to the kind intention of His *will*" (v. 5), "the mystery of His *will*" (v. 9), "His kind *intention* which He *purposed*" (v. 9), "according to His *purpose*" (v. 11), "the *counsel* of His *will*" (v. 11). Indeed, no fewer than 11x in these verses do we find vocabulary reflective of divine sovereignty: he *chose* us (v. 4), he *predestined* us (v. 5), his *good pleasure* (v. 5), *God's will* (v. 5), *God's will* (v. 9), his *good pleasure* (v. 9), his *purpose* (v. 9), he *predestined* us (v. 11), his *plan* (v. 11), his *purpose* (v. 11), his *will* (v. 11).

Conclusion:

History in all its details is but the evolution of the unchangeable, eternal purposes of God. Whatever He does, He does purposely. Whatever He permits to occur, He purposed to permit. Nothing can occur He did not intend on. If God had not foreordained the course of events but waited until some undetermined condition was or was not fulfilled, His decrees could be neither eternal nor unchangeable. His plan must, therefore, include every event in the entire sweep of history.

If people are saved, it is because God intended it to be so and all He intends will surely come to pass. This is the first reason why we can believe that we cannot lose our salvation - only those whom God has appointed to be saved will be saved, and none can be lost for His plans cannot be frustrated.

Specific verses that demonstrate preservation

John 5:24 I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.

"Crossed over" is a perfect tense verb - a past action with continuing results. Believers have passed out of death into life at a point of time in the past and continue on in that state; the result is irrevocable.

John 6:37-39 ³⁷ "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out. ³⁸ "For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. ³⁹ "This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day.

All that the Father gives WILL come to Christ and verse 39 says that Jesus loses none given to Him. All who the Father gives will rise on the last day. There is no loss or falling out in the process.

John 10:27-29 ²⁷ "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; ²⁸ and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. 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."

Those who the Father gives are here called Jesus sheep. They are said they follow Him (present tense - "keep following") and are given eternal life and will not perish (οὐ μὴ ἀπόλωνται = the strongest possible negation in Greek - οὐ μὴ + the subjunctive of [ἀπόλλυμι]). Robertson calls it an emphatic double negative. "They shall not by any possible means perish throughout all eternity"

Note the use of the emphatic negative in places like John 4:14; 6:35; 8:12 that demonstrate that in every case it demonstrates that there is not chance that what Jesus promises will not come to pass. In John 4:14 and 6:35 those who drink the water He gives will not thirst - there is no chance that they will not be satisfied; In John 8:12 - those who follow Jesus will not walk in darkness - there is no chance at all that you could follow Him and still be in darkness. Likewise there is no chance that Jesus Sheep will perish.

The security of the believer is based on Christ's hold on them, not their hold on Him (no one, Jesus says, shall snatch them out of His hand). Some say a believer can let go - but that would make "no one" mean "most" cannot free themselves from Christ's grip on their lives. But Jesus makes it even stronger - He then says "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."

Romans 8:29-30 ²⁹ For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. ³⁰ And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

Here Paul tells us that certain people are predestined to be conformed to the image of Christ. These are also glorified. They are not simply predestined to initial faith that they need to maintain; they are predestined to a destiny - conformity to Christ.

This is followed by 8:38-39 which declares that NOTHING therefore, can separate us from the love of Christ. "Any other created thing" in verse 39 must include everyone.

1 Corinthians 1:8-9 ⁸ He will keep you strong to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹ God, who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful.

Though the church had many faults, they were promised to be kept by God until the end. Their ability is not based on their own strength but the faithfulness of God.

Ephesians 4:30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

AND

2 Corinthians 1:21-22 ²¹ Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, ²² set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.

It is possible to sin and grieve the Holy Spirit - yet He remains our seal until the Day of Redemption. We are marked with the ownership of God.

Philippians 1:6 ⁶ 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.

God, who began the good work, will bring it to completion. "Completion" rests on God's shoulders, not man.

2 Timothy 4:18 The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

"Rescue" is the normal word meaning "to save." Paul is confident that the Lord will save us from evil until we will be brought into the kingdom.

Hebrews 7:25 Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.

Christ is able to save us in totality. . . . because He intercedes on our behalf. It is inconceivable that Christ's prayers would not be answered.

1 Peter 1:3-5 ³ Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade-- kept in heaven for you, ⁵ who through faith

are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.

Our inheritance will never perish - spoil or fade - it is shielded by the power of God through faith.

ADDITIONAL VERSES:

1 Corinthians 1:8-9 ⁸ He will keep you strong to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹ God, who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful.

1 Thessalonians 5:23-24 ²³ 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. ²⁴ The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it.

2 Thessalonians 3:2-4 ² And pray that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men, for not everyone has faith. ³ But the Lord is faithful, and he will strengthen and protect you from the evil one. ⁴ We have confidence in the Lord that you are doing and will continue to do the things we command.

2 Timothy 1:12 ¹² That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day.

PERSEVERANCE GOD KEEPS HIS PEOPLE SAFE

by J.I. Packer

And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified. ROMANS 8:30

Let it first be said that in declaring the eternal security of God's people it is clearer to speak of their preservation than, as is commonly done, of their perseverance. Perseverance means persistence under discouragement and contrary pressure. The assertion that believers persevere in faith and obedience despite everything is true, but the reason is that Jesus Christ through the Spirit persists in preserving them.

Scripture emphasizes this. John tells us that Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd, is under promise to his Father (John 6:37-40) and to his sheep directly (John 10:28-29) to keep them so that they never perish. In his high-priestly prayer before his passion Jesus asked that those whom the Father had given him (John 17:2, 6, 9, 24) would be preserved to glory, and it is inconceivable that his prayer, which still continues (Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:25), will go unanswered.

Paul sees the sovereign plan of God for the salvation of his elect as a unitary whole, of which the glorifying of the justified is part (Rom. 8:29-30). On this basis he builds the triumphant peroration of Romans 8:31-39, in which he celebrates the present and future security of the saints in the almighty love of God. Elsewhere he rejoices in the certainty that God will complete the "good work" that he began in the lives of those Paul addresses (Phil. 1:6; cf. 1 Cor. 1:8-9; 1 Thess. 5:23-24; 2 Thess. 3:3; 2 Tim. 1:12; 4:18).

The doctrine declares that the regenerate are saved through persevering in faith and Christian living to the end (Heb. 3:6; 6:11; 10:35-39), and that it is God who keeps them persevering. That does not mean that all who ever professed conversion will be saved. False professions are made; short-term enthusiasts fall away (Matt. 13:20-22); many who say to Jesus, "Lord, Lord," will not be acknowledged (Matt. 7:21-23). Only those who show themselves to be regenerate by pursuing heart-holiness and true neighbor-love as they pass through this world are entitled to believe themselves secure in Christ. Persevering in faith and penitence, not just in Christian formalism, is the path to glory. To suppose that believing in perseverance leads to careless living and arrogant presumption is a total misconception.

Sometimes the regenerate backslide and fall into gross sin. But in this they act out of character, do violence to their own new nature, and make themselves deeply miserable, so that eventually they seek and find restoration to righteousness. In retrospect, their lapse seems to them to have been madness. When regenerate believers act in character, they manifest a humble, grateful desire to please the God who saved them; and the knowledge that he is pledged to keep them safe forever simply increases this desire.

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