

# SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY:

# SOTERIOLOGY

## WEEK 7: PERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS

### INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES

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- When you hear the word *soteriology*, what does mean to you?
- Some think of high theology, stuffy rooms, and old men arguing over large oak tables.
- Others think...I have no idea what that word means...and I probably don't care even if I did.
- Hopefully you land somewhere between these two descriptions.
- Simply put, soteriology is the study of salvation or the study of the doctrine of salvation.
- In other words, it is the study of what one group of people believe about salvation. That group can be anything from a church to a political party. For our purposes, we are going to study what the Bible says.
- It is important to have a full and broad understanding of what the Bible says about our salvation so that we know that we are saved and so that we know what comes with our salvation.
- There are many different ideas and teachings about salvation, and it is our responsibility to make sure that we know what God has ordained and expects from His creation.
- Here is schedule for the upcoming lessons:
  - 09/08: Introduction
  - 09/15: What is the atonement, both declarative and practical?
  - 09/22: What does effectual calling, faith and repentance mean?
  - 09/29: Missionary Share: Tim George from Mozambique
  - 10/06: What is justification or what does it mean to be justified?
  - 10/13: What does it mean to be adopted by God?
  - 10/20: What is progressive sanctification and how does it operate in my daily Christian life?
  - 10/27: Missionary Share: Jeff Street from Canada
  - *11/03: What does the perseverance of the saints mean for me today and for eternity?*

### INTRODUCTION

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- “The question of being saved is the supreme question of the Bible. The subject matter of the sacred Scriptures is the subject of salvation...*Salvation* means to be rescued from some calamity. However, the Bible also uses the term *salvation* in a specific sense to refer to our ultimate redemption from sin and reconciliation to God. In this sense, salvation is from the ultimate calamity—the judgment of God.”<sup>1</sup>
- The order of salvation (*ordo salutis*) involves the following logical steps which describe how God saves his people.<sup>2</sup>
  - Foreknowledge
  - Election
  - Predestination
  - Effectual Call
  - Regeneration
  - Conversion
  - Justification
  - Adoption
  - Sanctification
  - ***Perseverance***
  - Glorification
- The question that is often asked is whether one can lose their salvation.
  - The answer is—**NO!**
- Perseverance in the simplest of terms is once saved always saved.
  - “If we have it, we never lose it. If we lose it, we never had it”<sup>3</sup>
- Perseverance in our vernacular can commonly be misconstrued to mean that the continuity of faith and obedience is up to us as a believer.
  - A gracious work of God in fact preserves our salvation. “Preservation” of the saints helps direct credit for securing salvation away from the believer and to God where credit rightly belongs.
- A more thorough definition: The perseverance of the saints is the grace or gift of God whereby He gives the elect justified by faith and sanctified unconquerable constancy as they persist to struggle against sin and the troubles of this age or even to rise from falls through repentance in grace once given until the day of their redemption.<sup>4</sup>

## ARGUMENTS FOR PERSEVERANCE THROUGH THE EFFORT OF MAN

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<sup>1</sup> R. C. Sproul, *Essential Truths of the Christian Faith*, (159)

<sup>2</sup> Todd Dykstra, *Theology Class, Introduction to the Doctrine of Salvation* (8)

<sup>3</sup> R.C. Sproul, *What is Reformed Theology?*, (229)

<sup>4</sup> Heidegger, *The Concise Marrow of Christian Theology*, 24.1 (171)

- Pelagianism--It was the position of Pelagius that Adam's sin affected Adam and only Adam. That is to say, as a result of Adam's transgression there was no change wrought in the constituent nature of the human race. Man was born in a state of righteousness, and as one created in the image of God, he was created immutably so. Even though it was possible for him to sin, it was not possible for him to lose his basic human nature, which was capable always and everywhere to be obedient. Pelagius went on to say that it is, even after the sin of Adam, possible for every human being to live a life of perfect righteousness and that, indeed, some have achieved such status.<sup>5</sup>
- Semi Pelagianism teaches that a person may come to true authentic saving faith and fall away from the faith losing salvation. This is what the Roman Catholic church teaches.
- Arminianism—There are a few variations of Arminianism that range between Pelagianism and Semi Pelagianism.
- The issue with Pelagianism, Semi-Pelagianism, Arminianism is that one needs to ignore the whole counsel of scripture to hold to those “isms”
- What about Apostates?--are those who fall away from the true faith, abandoning what they formerly professed to believe.<sup>6</sup> Apostates were never true believers.
  - **1 John 2:19** <sup>19</sup> They went out from us, but they were not of us; for 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.
- What about the warnings? These warnings are to unbelievers so that they don't have false assurance.
  - **Matthew 7:21-23** <sup>21</sup> “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. <sup>22</sup> On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ <sup>23</sup> And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’

## ARGUMENTS FOR PERSEVERANCE AS GRACE FROM GOD

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<sup>5</sup> [https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/pelagian-controversy?srsId=AfmBOoruzIFQkub3MyxbjIFrTOaj-BLs7v\\_G53W90KmQ1\\_gyW420x7sg](https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/pelagian-controversy?srsId=AfmBOoruzIFQkub3MyxbjIFrTOaj-BLs7v_G53W90KmQ1_gyW420x7sg)

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.gty.org/library/questions/QA78/what-is-an-apostate>

- A correct understanding begins with a right view of God. (see Theology Class Attributes of God notes for more details) Why does this matter?
- “I believe there is scarcely an error in doctrine or a failure in applying Christian ethics that cannot be traced finally to imperfect and ignoble thoughts about God.”<sup>7</sup>
- The following limited attribute list will give us a small sampling of what God is like.:
  - God is omnipotent (all powerful consistent with his nature)
  - God is omnipresent (everywhere)
  - God is omniscient (knows everything)
  - Immutable (not changeable)
  - Impassible (no passions)
  - Infinite (not able to be fully comprehended)
    - These attributes are all incommunicable. (belong to God alone)
    - When considering all the attributes of God it leaves no room for our efforts in salvation.
    - His hand reached down and gave us new birth. Our best stuff is filthy and stinky in comparison. How could we possibly be able to dictate our salvation when we don’t have any of the above attributes?
- A proper understanding of perseverance also requires a correct view of God’s written word.
  - The 66 books of the bible are the complete, inerrant, and authoritative Word of God.
- God given perseverance is throughout scripture. Believers must read their bible. If we don’t we are led astray by false teaching. By the very Word of God we are kept and our minds are renewed.
- The following is a sampling of scripture supporting God’s grace to us in His work of perseverance.
- **Philippians 1:6** <sup>6</sup> *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.*
- **1 Corinthians 1:4-9** <sup>4</sup> *I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus,* <sup>5</sup> *that in every way you were enriched in him in all speech and all knowledge—* <sup>6</sup> *even as the testimony about Christ was confirmed among you—* <sup>7</sup> *so that you are not lacking in any gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ,* <sup>8</sup> *who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.* <sup>9</sup> *God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.*
- **Jude 1:1** <sup>1</sup> *Jude, a servant<sup>[a]</sup> of Jesus Christ and brother of James, To those who are called, beloved in God the Father and kept for<sup>[b]</sup> Jesus Christ:*

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<sup>7</sup> A.W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, (1-2)

- **Jude 1:24** <sup>24</sup> Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, <sup>25</sup> to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time<sup>[a]</sup> and now and forever. Amen.
  - **1 Thessalonians 5:23-24** <sup>23</sup> Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>24</sup> He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.
  - **1 Peter 1:3-5** <sup>3</sup> Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, <sup>4</sup> to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, <sup>5</sup> who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.
  - **John 27-30** <sup>27</sup> My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. <sup>28</sup> I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. <sup>29</sup> My Father, who has given them to me,<sup>[a]</sup> is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. <sup>30</sup> I and the Father are one.”
  - If we could lose our salvation...we would! The apostle Paul recognizes our human weakness.
    - o **Romans 7:15-20** <sup>15</sup> For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. <sup>16</sup> Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good. <sup>17</sup> So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. <sup>18</sup> For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. <sup>19</sup> For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. <sup>20</sup> Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.
  - JI Packer says “Your faith will not fail while God sustains it; you are not strong enough to fall away while God is resolved to hold you.” <sup>8</sup>
  - **Romans 8:28-39** <sup>28</sup> And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good,<sup>[l]</sup> for those who are called according to his purpose.<sup>29</sup> For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. <sup>30</sup> And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.
- <sup>31</sup> What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be<sup>[l]</sup> against us? <sup>32</sup> He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?
- <sup>33</sup> Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. <sup>34</sup> Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is

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<sup>8</sup> Packer, *Knowing God*

interceding for us.<sup>[1]</sup> <sup>35</sup> Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? <sup>36</sup> As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered." <sup>37</sup> No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. <sup>38</sup> For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, <sup>39</sup> 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.

## IMPLICATIONS

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- Perseverance guarantees Glorification.
  - o Glorification, then, is the instantaneous change that will take place for the whole company of redeemed when Christ will come again the second time without sin unto salvation and will descend from heaven with the shout of triumph over the last enemy. <sup>9</sup>(1 Thes 4:16-17, 1 Cor15:51-52)
- Practically perseverance gives us confidence and comfort as we walk with the Lord through this life.
- Looking to yourself will cripple you. Look to Christ. We can't be saved one day and not the next.
  - o Practically speaking this flip flopping salvation is undoing the steps of salvation that we've already looked at and acknowledged come from God.
- How do we look to Christ?
  - o Fellowship with worshiping, believing, praying saints. It is by each other we are encouraged and kept from looking at ourselves
- Rejoice in your secure salvation! This is freeing in the sense that maintaining our salvation is not reliant on us. It is not a license to live anyway you want as seen with the antinomianism movement. A believer will desire to be obedient to God's standards, have a heart of gratitude and a spirit of Thanksgiving. Obedience to the scripture will yield a life worthy of our calling through means like faith, hope, and love. However, like Paul said in Romans 7 the believer will always fall short of achieving all of this perfectly.
- David knew he belonged to God, knew where his salvation came from, and knew God held him fast. These few verses from Psalm 86 summarize some of what we've looked at today.
  - o **Psalm 86:10-13** <sup>10</sup> For you are great and do wondrous things; you alone are God <sup>11</sup> Teach me your way, O Lord, that I may walk in your truth unite my heart to fear your name <sup>12</sup> I give thanks to you,

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<sup>9</sup> Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, (187)

*O Lord my God, with my whole heart, and I will glorify your name forever <sup>13</sup> For great is your steadfast love toward me; you have delivered my soul from the depths of Sheol.*

- Keep a proper mindset according to scripture.
  - So with the cross behind us and glory in front of us; we press on. We submit to his call, we resist the enemy, we follow him by faith, we fight to endure, and we do it all with joy, knowing what we have been given and looking forward to what is to come.<sup>10</sup>
  - **Philippians 3:12-14** <sup>12</sup> *Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. <sup>13</sup> Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, <sup>14</sup> I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.*
  - **Romans 8:28** <sup>28</sup> *And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good,<sup>l</sup> for those who are called according to his purpose.*
    - Believers are those who love God.
      - Check your heart—Do you love God and love what he loves? If you only know of God and don't love God reach out to the person in closest proximity to you after class and discuss. Maybe you need to hear the Gospel message that there is one Holy living God and by our sinful (totally depraved) nature we are subject to God's wrath. There is hope for us in the sinless God man Jesus Christ who died and bore the wrath we were due. Jesus (Son) raised himself from the dead and credited His righteousness to us so that we have a right relationship with God (Father). This gift of salvation is freely given to us at a great cost to Christ. Our reaction (if a true believer) will be to repent and yield our life fully to Jesus Christ through obedience to the scripture and putting all our faith and trust in him. John 3:16-17, John 14:6, Ephesians 2:4-5. This is the source of love for God. An unbeliever can't love God.
  - All things work together for the good of believers.
    - This means that sin, trials, unmet expectations—**Everything** is used by God for his purposes. There's no getting around his sovereign purposes. Hence the concept of falling in and out of salvation is essentially foiled in one verse. We know in this one

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<sup>10</sup> Tripp, *Do Your Believe?*, (420)

key passage that all that we experience in this life is ultimately for good. It doesn't mean that all things are good. It means all things are used for good purposes.

- Job was a key figure in the Old Testament to spur us on. Job was allowed by God to experience extreme trials, yet he still loved God. He was unwavering and is a model of proper mindset. He experienced horrible evil, which was evil, but God used it for good purposes.
- Peter was a key figure in the New Testament to illustrate that salvation is secure. Look at how many times Peter screwed up. Jesus himself even told him to get behind me Satan. Peter denied Christ three times at the crucifixion, yet Christ makes him the cornerstone of the church. You'd think Peter would have learned his lesson with that but then Paul rebukes Peter for his fear of man as the gentiles and Jews wrap their minds around whether circumcision is necessary to be God's chosen people in Galatians 2:11-13. If losing our salvation was possible certainly God would have addressed it with Peter! If Peter is in, we are in. He was no different than us. Just a man.

- In 1763 Augustus Toplady was new in the pastorate, not long out of college, and that was the year he wrote what he is probably most famous for: his beloved hymn, "Rock of Ages, Cleft for Me." There is a bit of folklore about him being on a journey, getting caught in a thunderstorm, and hiding under a large boulder, and that becoming the inspiration for the song. That tale may or may not be true, but this hymn's beautiful lyrics drive home what it means that our salvation is a work of Christ. "Nothing in my hand I bring. Simply to thy cross I cling. Naked, come to thee for dress. Helpless, look to thee for grace. Foul, I to the fountain fly. Wash me, Savior, or I die." Oh, the urgency in what Toplady is saying here!

Toplady knew that, apart from Christ, it's not that we simply won't become better people. We're not just "okay people" apart from Christ. No, we're headed for the wrath of God over us, and unless Christ washes us with his precious blood and gives us his righteousness, we die. We die. That's what Toplady tells us in this hymn.

A wonderful line tells us how Christ is the "double cure" for our sin. The guilt of our sin puts us under the wrath of God, and the power of sin causes us to do things we don't want to do. But Toplady has us clinging



to Christ, that rock of ages who is our double cure, freeing us from both sin's power and sin's guilt. And that is the life of Augustus Montague Toplady, and his great hymn, "Rock of Ages, Cleft for Me."<sup>11</sup>

- **A Debtor to Mercy Alone—Augustus Montague Toplady**

A debtor to mercy alone, of covenant mercy I sing;  
Nor fear, with Thy righteousness on, my person and off'ring to bring.  
The terrors of law and of God with me can have nothing to do;  
My Savior's obedience and blood hide all my transgressions from view.

The work which His goodness began, the arm of His strength will complete;  
His promise is Yea and Amen, and never was forfeited yet.  
Things future, nor things that are now, nor all things below or above,  
Can make Him His purpose forgo, or sever my soul from His love.

My name from the palms of His hands eternity will not erase;  
Impressed on His heart it remains, in marks of indelible grace.  
Yes, I to the end shall endure, as sure as the earnest is giv'n;  
More happy, but not more secure, the glorified spirits in heav'n.

- The canons of Dort were written by reformers in response to the unbiblical views of Jacobus Arminius and others.
- Canons of Dort Article 15: This teaching about the perseverance of true believers and saints, and about their assurance of it—a teaching that God has very richly revealed in his Word for the glory of his name and for the comfort of the godly in which he impresses on the heart of believers—is something that the flesh does not understand, Satan hates, the world ridicules, the ignorant and hypocrites abuse, and the spirit of error attacks. The bride of Christ, on the other hand, has always loved this teaching very tenderly and defended it steadfastly as a priceless treasure; and God, against whom no plan can avail and no strength can prevail, will endure that she will continue to do this. To this God alone, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, be honor and glory forever. Amen.

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<sup>11</sup> <https://www.ligonier.org/podcasts/5-minutes-in-church-history-with-stephen-nichols/augustus-toplady?srltid=AfmBOoqlJ8lKl0UakW5IyHYcFBspFJckEEw1WrsZrPukTvTQrYrgiLh>