

INTRODUCTION

Today's topic is PERSEVERANCE – timely, in that I have just had to persevere through a couple tough weeks of two surgeries (one planned and one unexpected) and subsequent recoveries. During those two weeks we also had a few other “surprises” that could well have shaken our confidence. We received a county ordinance challenge to close down our home business and a call from the past revealing that one of our dear Christian friends who had recently been in pastoral ministry had made terrible life choices and may now spend the rest of his days in state penitentiary.

Yet we, the Crawshaws, don't have a corner on difficult twists and turns in life. You have your stories too – and ones that could pale ours. The point is that we all have to develop PERSEVERANCE to negotiate through life.

I have received many “get well” cards these last few weeks, each of them greatly appreciated. One stood out to me as I was preparing for this message – and you see it on the overhead. It reads: “Life is all about Plan B.” I guess it can be said that PERSEVERING through life is learning how to deal with all the “Plan B's” that come up – as well as “Plan C's,” “Plan D's” and so on. Most of the time we don't get to choose the plan – but we can choose with what attitude we face the new plan.

And that takes us to our topic of the day: PERSEVERANCE – specifically the doctrine that is called “PERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS.”

PERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS “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.”

In other words, “once a Christian, always a Christian.” As I look back on my life as a believer, I am amazed that I have persevered at all. There have been discouragement after discouragement, criticism after criticism, accusation after accusation, failure after failure, spiritual attack after spiritual attack – all to make me realize that it is not I who has caused me to persevere – but something, specifically SOMEONE who has caused me to persevere. And that SOMEONE is my God and Savior – the one who called me and is determined for me to succeed for His glory.

And the same if true for you, follower of Jesus. God has invested heavily in you, and is determined for you to navigate through the “Plan B's” and multiple traumas of life such that you will emerge strong in the Lord to His glory. **Let's commence our study with 4 key verses that teach the truth the GOD WILL CAUSE HIS OWN TO PERSEVERE.**

1 of 4: KEY VERSES THAT GOD WILL CAUSE HIS OWN TO PERSEVERE

Philippians 1:6 *For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.*

1. God wants me to be confident
2. God will complete (perfect) His salvation work in me
3. This is a life-long process

2 of 4: KEY VERSES THAT GOD WILL CAUSE HIS OWN TO PERSEVERE

Hebrews 12: 1-2a *... Let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfected of faith ...*

1. SHED the LEAD
2. PACE the RACE
3. EYES on the PRIZE

3 of 4: KEY VERSES THAT GOD WILL CAUSE HIS OWN TO PERSEVERE

Jude 24-25 *Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy, to the only God our Savior, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.*

1. God protects me in the process
2. God perfects me in the result
3. God's authority is my assurance (glory, majesty, dominion & authority)

4 of 4: KEY VERSES THAT GOD WILL CAUSE HIS OWN TO PERSEVERE

John 10:27-30 *[Jesus:] My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand.*

1. Christians will HEAR God's voice
2. Christians will FOLLOW God
3. Christians will ever be PROTECTED by God

These four verses, and many more we could cite, assure us that God Himself is the one who causes the PERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS. His promise of life eternal is an unconditional promise – not dependent upon my participation in the process.

THE TENSION

HOWEVER, there is a tension, for the Scripture also teaches that I am to persevere, be steadfast, overcome, and be diligent in my salvation.

This should remind us of the tension between ELECTION and FREE WILL which we discussed earlier in the salvation series. The Scripture clearly teaches that when God began the process of my salvation he CHOSE me. Yet the Scripture also teaches that I was given FREE WILL to choose Him. At that time we suggested that this tension can best be understood by different perspectives of the same truth. ELECTION is the heavenly perspective of God's sovereign choice, whereas FREE WILL is the earthly perspective of my FREE WILL of choice. Both are true – I choose Him because He first chose me. In the same sense, I can find resolution with God causing me to PERSEVERE and my call to PERSEVERE in that they are the same truth from heavenly and earthly perspective.

The tension: MY PART / GOD'S PART

Philippians 2:12-13 *So then, my beloved, ... work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.*

- ✓ I STRIVE TO PERSEVERE – with fear of displeasing my Lord
- ✓ GOD GIVES THE WILL and the MEANS for me to persevere

Analogy: If my young child is riding his tricycle in our driveway, I am diligently on guard as parent to assure that he will not fail by riding into the street and being injured. It is my responsibility as parent to assure that he PERSEVERES in the success of his tricycle riding. Yet at the same time I continually instruct and coach him not to get too close to the street or go into the street. I challenge him to PERSEVERE in safety, and hopefully by my instruction he learns to so PERSEVERE. So who caused his safety? Answer: Ultimately, me the parent, but in truth both of us participated in his safety, depending upon the perspective of the parent or child.

PERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS "I am challenged by God to persevere in my faith, in the sense that I must pursue God to tap into His strength to help me. Ultimately, my persevering is dependent on Him, for He alone keeps me from falling away."

In our Bible there is one book that is especially strong in teaching my role in PERSEVERING in my salvation. **It is the book of HEBREWS.** If this were the only Biblical teaching on the subject, I would be forced to conclude that it was my responsibility for me to succeed in my spiritual life, and that there was no eternal security, apart from my lifelong diligence to assure my salvation. Hebrews does not contradict the Biblical teaching on eternal security, but it gives the earthly perspective of the importance of my being diligent. The primary criticism of the doctrine of eternal security is that it takes away our motivation to strive to remain faithful. Hebrew, I believe, is God's message to us to be steadfast and diligent. Let us look at the primary verses that teach our responsibility in PERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS.

CHALLENGES TO PERSEVERANCE in the book of HEBREWS

2:1 For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away from it.

2:3 How will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?

3:12 Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God

3:14 For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end.

4:1 Therefore, let us fear if, while a promise remains of entering His rest, any one of you may seem to have come short of it.

4:11 Therefore let us be diligent to enter that rest, so that no one will fall, through following the same example of disobedience.

4:14 ...Let us hold fast our confession.

6:4-6 For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance ...

6:11-12 And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end, so that you will not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

10:26-29 For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a terrifying expectation of judgment and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries.

10:35-36 Therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised.

10:39 But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul.

12:3 For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

And then, remember the letters to the 7 churches in chapters 2 and 3 of Revelation? At the end of each of the 7 letters, Jesus writes a challenge that always includes "to him who overcomes." This is a call to each individual believer and each individual church to be diligent in pursuing God at every turn, that He might have our cooperation in helping us to PERSEVERE.

CHALLENGES TO PERSEVERANCE in the book of REVELATION

2:7 ...To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God.

2:10-11 Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life. ...He who overcomes will not be hurt by the second death.

2:17 To him who overcomes, to him I will give some of the hidden manna ...

2:25-26 Nevertheless what you have, hold fast until I come. He who overcomes, and he who keeps My deeds until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations.

3:5 He who overcomes will thus be clothed in white garments; and I will not erase his name from the book of life ...

3:11-12 I am coming quickly; hold fast what you have, so that no one will take your crown. He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God ...

3:21 He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne ...

21:7 He who overcomes will inherit these things, and I will be his God and he will be My son.

ADDITIONAL CHALLENGES and FINAL THOUGHTS

2 Corinthians 13:5 *Test yourself to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you – unless indeed you fail the test?*

✓ Sincere self-evaluation is a sign of my perseverance

I must ever be diligent to keep my pursuit of Jesus and His holiness at highest priority, Jesus said that His sheep follow Him, so my following Him with passion is a constant reminder that I am in His fold and that he ever "has my back"

1 John 2:19 *They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, so that it would be shown that they all are not of us.*

✓ Consistency is a sign of my perseverance

We can never be sure if a professed Christian who is wandering is simply a prodigal who will come back to the fold, or whether that wandering is a sign that he/she was never a true believer to begin with. Every time I say "yes" to the godly way and "no" to a wrong choice or attitude I can rejoice in God's causing me to PERSEVERE. Praise God that He will not let me stumble and fall. Oh how I need his guiding and protecting hand ever step of my journey!