

# The Perseverance of True Believers

## Colossians 1:21-23

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The title of this message is “The Perseverance of True Believers.” If you believe that you are converted and born again, this sermon will be of utmost importance to you. Now, when we begin reading in verse 21, I want you to recognize that verses 21, 22, and 23 are one long, continuous sentence. Paul, like me, had a tremendous fondness for run-on sentences. He could just go on and on; and he does that in this text.

*Colossians 1:21-23*

*And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled In the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unproveable in his sight: If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven; whereof I Paul am made a minister;*

Do you remember when you were an enemy of God? Do you remember when you were alienated from God? Do you remember when you had no confidence in your eternal security? Do you remember the time when you had no confidence in your eternal forgiveness of sins? Can you remember that time? Do you remember when the glorious God of mercy shined the Gospel down, deep into your soul, converted you, and made you a new creature in Christ?

God has a plan for your life. God has a distinct and individual plan for your life, and the plan is to present you as a chaste bride, cleansed from your sins, holy, righteous, and beyond reproof. Don't allow yourself to drift away from the hope of the Gospel. Don't allow yourself to move away from the power of the Gospel. Don't allow your mind to creep away from the centrality of the Gospel. Keep yourself focused on the Gospel. Keep your marriage focused on the Gospel. Keep the church focused on the Gospel.

Baptists communicate a confidence that the Word of God teaches that we are eternally secure in Christ. Sometimes, Baptists will say, “Once saved, always saved.” We use that affirmation and the confidence that we are born again. As such, we cannot lose our salvation. In fact, that is one of the things that would distinguish this church from a Free Will Baptist Church. A Free Will Baptist Church would affirm that one can lose his or her salvation. Let's ask a couple of questions:

**Question Number 1:** Is it possible for someone who has been radically changed by the power of the Gospel into a new creature in Christ to lose their salvation? Preacher, do I need to worry about losing my salvation? Preacher, is it possible that I could repent of my sins, put my faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, enter into a covenant relationship with Him, but because of my sin, drift so far away that I am cut away from God? I think that I'm a Christian, but is it possible that along the way I lost my salvation?

**Question Number 2:** Does the Bible give instructions to the believer concerning persevering in the faith? Does the Bible teach anything about continuing in the faith? Does the Bible just give me an assurance that, once I'm saved, I can just relax and say, “Good for me?” Or, does the Bible have specific teaching about God's expectations for me after I've been converted? Well, that is what we are going to cover today. We are going to do two things from the Word of God— Number One: We are going to comfort ourselves. We are going to get assurance. We are going to say, “Man, I'm glad that this is in the Word of God.” I need to know that. I am comforted by that. And then, Number Two: We are going to be challenged. We are going to get some solid

exhortation. I am not just going to walk out of this room and say, “Whew, I’m good to go,” but you will also say “the Word of God challenged me in my walk.”

So, here is the comfort. You didn’t have to reconcile yourself. God reconciled you to Himself through Jesus Christ. You don’t need to work your way to Heaven. You don’t need to say a certain number of “Hail Marys.” You don’t need to confess your sins to a priest. You don’t need to participate in the sacraments. You don’t need to do those kinds of things. Jesus Christ has bought your salvation. He has redeemed you. He has justified you. He has forgiven your sins. Look at what God has done for us. True Believers have been regenerated, justified, adopted, reconciled, and sanctified.

Regenerated: do you know what regenerated means? It means you have been made anew, made alive. We call that *born again*.

Justified: that means you are no longer held accountable to your sins. You have been made the righteousness of Jesus Christ.

Adopted: you are a member of His family. You are brought in as a son or daughter. You have been reconciled. The differences between you and God the Father and the sin that separated you from the Father have been removed. Now you can climb up on His lap and say, “Daddy, I need to talk to You.” You can go in your private prayer closet, get down on your knees and say, “Father, I am hurting today.” And, He says, “Come talk to Me, my son or daughter. I love you.” Isn’t that encouraging? Yes, it is. You can know that, if anything happens to you downrange or overseas, you are eternally secure in Jesus Christ.

Sanctified: You have been sanctified. This means that you have been set apart. You have been made His own. He bought you with a price. You are becoming more like Christ every day. So the question is: Can a creature in Christ become irreconcilable?

When someone says, “Hey, you Baptist: What do you preach about eternal security?” You can tell them it’s not a Baptist thing, it’s a Bible thing! Then, you take them to John chapter 10. It describes the rescue of a sinner and the sinner becoming a sheep. It talks about what that transformation is like.

*John 10:27-30*

*My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all: and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father’s hand. I am my Father are one.*

Now, that is some pretty incredible assurance! I have asked little Christian to help us here in this illustration. Would you come up here please, Christian? I want to communicate what the Word of God says here. John 10:28 says, “They shall never perish.” John is describing how God rescues us, how He takes us out of sin and into deliverance. The best illustration I can give you is how I can reach down, grab this little boy, and just pick him right up. That is what God does with you. Let me tell you something: He doesn’t need your help to save you. You don’t have to give Him your two-cents worth. It is an easy thing for Him to save you. Now, I didn’t pick a big guy. I picked a light guy because I know my own strength. But God can deliver any of you; and He doesn’t require your help to do so. Christian can’t resist me—there is nothing this little guy can do to keep me from snatching him up. That is John chapter 10. Now, is that comforting to you? You don’t have to worry about the Father losing you. You don’t have to worry about the Son saying, “Wow, this is getting to be too much.” This is a light thing. He has got you right here. And then, Jesus said that, if this isn’t enough, the Father has got Me; and We are One. You are not going to lose your salvation. So, what you should be concerned about is, “Am I saved?”

I want you to see our text. Let's work our way through this. You see, we believe in eternal security in this church. Our Articles of Faith say that we believe in the eternal security and everlasting blessing of the saved and the eternal conscious punishing of the lost. The preservation of all believers rests upon the finished work of Christ, the promises of God, gracious election, and the Sovereign predestination of God. Did you notice that human needs are nowhere to be found in there? God can rescue you without your assistance. Christ did it all on the cross. It was the finished work. So, let's ask ourselves, should this security in Christ, independent of my actions and life, create indifference toward the moral and spiritual demands of the Gospel in the life of the believer? Since I subscribe to the saying "once saved, always saved," should this give me a lackadaisical attitude through which I can just prop up my feet and say, "Man, I'm saved. I'm good. I can relax."? Or, should I take something from this passage and apply it to my life? Let me ask you something: is there anything God-glorifying in the attitude that says, "I'm saved; now I can live like I want?" Is there anything God-glorifying in the scenario in which I kick back and say, "Whew, I'm good to go"? Does that fit into the character of God? In that scenario, let's ask ourselves: Who is God? I am God in that scenario. I am the idol because I choose the actions, I don't obey, and I don't listen. I do what I want, and I can relax because I'm saved. How does that reflect the grace of God and the power of the Gospel?

I thought that the power of God was supposed to make me a new creature in Christ. I thought that the power of the Gospel was supposed to reconcile marriages and friendships. I thought that the power of the Gospel was supposed to impact my life every single day. I thought that the power of the Gospel was supposed to make me a new creature in Christ, and you could see that I am radically changed because of the power of the Gospel. So, if I am over here living like the Devil, how in the world does that look like the Gospel in any way, shape, or form? If there are irreconcilable differences in my marriage, and it cannot get healed, how in the world does that look like the Gospel? If two church members cannot get along, and so, they sit on opposite ends of the church, how does that look like the Gospel? If one church member cannot say to the other, "I was in the flesh. Please forgive me," what does that look like?

So, are you going to Heaven or to Hell? Paul tells us how a person can know if they have been reconciled unto God. Look at what Paul does not say as you look at the text. Look in your own Bibles because I do not want you to think that this is a Baptist thing. I want you to know that this is a Bible thing. While we are a Baptist church, first and foremost the Authority is the Word of God. Notice in verse 23 that these people are continuing in the faith. They are grounded and settled. They are not moved away from the hope of the Gospel. They are not out there flapping in the wind. They are continuing in the faith. Paul doesn't ask if they were sincere, if they really mean it, or if they were baptized. I am talking to counselors, school teachers, Sunday school teachers, deacons, and to my fellow preachers. He doesn't take them back to a previous time. He asks them, what are you currently doing with Christ?

Why are you so hard on this, Preacher? Because in this church that I have been a part of for 20 years, I know there are families that have worked in teaching or as deacons in the church for many years, and now they are not a part of any church anywhere in Fayetteville. Every Sunday morning, they are home; and they are not connected to a local church in any way. That just cannot happen. You have a responsibility before God to continue in the faith.

We are not to use our confidence as an excuse to run out here and ignore the Master. So, there is the challenge. The doctrine of eternal security of the believer is a comfort to me in knowing that Christ has rescued me; but in the same sentence, the same doctrine also challenges me to continue in the faith. Remain grounded, remain settled, and don't you dare be moved away from the hope of the Gospel. You stay with the Gospel. One of the most troubling things in my own personal life is the fact that I have no confidence whatsoever that my father is in Heaven. You see, during the last two or three years of my father's life, he began to drift away from the

Gospel to the point that he was into Native American Mysticism and all kinds of nonsense. I would love to know that I am going to spend an eternity with my father. The problem is, when I read a verse like this, I say, "You didn't continue, Dad. You didn't stay with the hope of the Gospel. You moved away; and so you leave me with no assurance. There is no comfort. I don't know." So, now I'm hoping that he was backslidden, and I'm hoping that there was that period of repentance; but I don't have any assurance. Moms and Dads, you have a responsibility to stay the course. Don't allow yourself to leave the hope of the Gospel. When a young person doubts their salvation, do not take them back to when they were three years old. Ask them where they are right now in their faith. Tell me where your hope is right now. If what you did in the past converted you, then your feet will be planted right now because the power of the Gospel is sufficient to keep you in the faith. You have to stay the course. I want to do that for my son more than anything in the world. God, keep me right here on the course, 10 years from now, 20 years from now, 30 years from now. God, keep me on the course.

Be not moved away from the hope of the Gospel. Close the church doors when we are no longer a Gospel-centered ministry. Close the Christian college when we are no longer a Gospel-centered ministry. The Gospel is the good news that God Almighty, through His Son Jesus Christ, is reconciling people each and every day so that they do not have to experience the wrath themselves. This should really challenge you.

We already received the comfort from John, chapter 10. Now, let's accept the challenge. Don't just give someone the comfort; give them the challenge. If you are going to preach the Gospel, then preach the whole Gospel. Give them the entire Truth. That is why you very rarely hear me say, "Once saved, always saved." That is not giving them the entire story. Verse 27 says, my sheep hear my voice. What else do my sheep do? They follow me. Sheep are characterized by listening to the Master. This is why I am so broken about my own father's eternal security, because he stopped listening to the Master. And oh, how I would love to ignore all that. Oh, how I would love to go back to a place where he asked Jesus into his heart; but that would be ignoring all these numerous exhortations in the Word of God to stay the course, to listen to the Master, and to follow Him.

You may say, "Preacher, do we get off course?" Yes, we get off course sometimes. "Preacher, are there people who are backslidden?" Yes, there is no question that there are those who are backslidden. Can you identify who they are? No, and I don't want to put my son and my wife through turmoil by getting off course. That's assuming I die before her and get into a mess and then she is wondering, "Was I married to a hypocrite? Was he really converted and got into sin, or what happened here?" You should not want to put your children through that. You want to leave a legacy. You should want to leave the legacy that you stayed the course by the grace of God. What do your kids think when Dad is here and there, here and there? Your sons and daughters are depending on you to stay the course.

So, let's get Christian up here to look at the illustration of this concept one more time. Now, if you see Christian running away from me, do you think that he wants to be rescued? When I tell him, "Christian, lift your arms up," and he refuses, does he want to be rescued? When he is not following instructions, does he want to be rescued? No. I want to be the disciple that follows instructions so that when the Master says, "Lift your hands up," I do it.

Alright, let's turn Christian around. Now, Christian, turn your eyes on me and keep your eyes on me the whole time. Now, if you see his little head turning all over and drifting around, does that keep me from rescuing him? No, it doesn't; but it sure does call into question whether he wants to be rescued or not. When you see him flailing around out there and making it difficult for me to rescue him, do you think he wants to be rescued? When I tell Christian to look at me and follow me, and he does, and I can pull him right up here, isn't that sweet? Isn't that awesome? That is what God the Father does to us and expects us to do: listen to the Son, obey the Master, and follow instructions. Listen to me very closely. The reason we don't follow instructions well is because we have forgotten the pit of hell is hanging underneath us.

Niagara Falls is a pretty impressive thing. You certainly would not want to fall over the side. If you could understand that you are hanging over Niagara Falls, I bet you would listen to the rescuer. I bet when he said, "Cross your legs and look right at me," you would cross your legs and look right at your rescuer. I bet you would not take your eyes off the rescuer if you understood that the pit of Hell was waiting below you. The eternal security of the believer does not give me the license to look like the Devil, act like the Devil, and live like the Devil. Do I drift away sometimes? Yes, I do. But by God's grace, He snatches me up, reels me in, gets my attention, and says, "Look right here. Listen to me."

What we don't have is little Christian doing his thing while God the Father is trying to jerk him back and a huge competition. That is not what is happening here. That is not very God-honoring. What is God-honoring and God-glorifying is when I say, "Master, You tell me where to stand, and You tell me how to stand, and I will follow Your instructions." The way we make our lives God-honoring, God-glorifying, and Gospel-centered is by obeying Him. You see, this snap link is awesome because it's secure, and you are secure in Christ. But you do not take that security as a license to live like the Devil. We are challenged today. Listen to me. Do what I tell you. This is performance-oriented training. We understand that in the secular world. Move it to the spiritual world, and we will do well. There is no assurance of eternal life for those who don't hear the voice of the Master and obey His Word, unless they are being chastised. (Hebrews 12:8) So, counselors and teachers, ask them, "Have you ever experienced the chastisement of God? Do you understand what it is like to be convicted of your sin when no one else knows about your sin? Have you repented of a situation from which you were not threatened by punishment, and you just repented because repenting was the right thing to do?"

*Acts 11:23*

*Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord.[or] to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose,*

Just like Paul did back then, I am doing now. I am exhorting you, Berean Baptist Church, to stay the course. I am encouraging you. Turn to 1 John 2:19. I want everyone to see it in their own Bibles. This is one of the most troubling texts to me. This bothers me. This verse cannot be cut out of the Bible, and I cannot ignore it. It is in the Word of God. It is all inspired, all preserved; and in verse 19, the Apostle John writes, "they went out from us." There was a group of people that were part of the body of Christ, and "they went out from us." Wait a minute, look what he says. The conjunction "but" is a strong contrast. "They were not all of us." Wait a minute. You mean you can be in the church, look like the church, smell like the church, walk like the church, get baptized in the church, have your membership in the church, but not actually be part of the church? Notice what he says, please. "For if they had been of us they would no doubt have continued with us." It says *no doubt*, and that is why I say this is troubling to me. I look at my father's life and I say, "No doubt, he should have stayed the course." Godly people who want to encourage me say, "No, he was probably just backslidden." And oh, how I wish I could just grab a hold of that; but I am here to tell you that everyone is not backslidden. In Matthew 7, someone was never known of God. The Bible doesn't say wide is the path that goes to Heaven, and narrow is the path that goes to destruction. It is just the opposite. So, what is the exhortation to every dad? What is the exhortation to every spiritual leader? You stay the course. Don't you dare allow yourself to drift away!

*Look at Acts 14:22.*

*Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.*

He exhorted them "in the faith." You see, when I hear the flippant, "Once saved, always saved," I don't hear the exhortation to continue in the faith. Where is the exhortation in that phrase to stay the course? It is not there. I am here to encourage every single adult believer and every single teenager to stay on course.

Fact: It is unbiblical to give someone assurance of their salvation if they are not presently living in the faith and hope of the Gospel. It doesn't mean that they cannot be saved. I am not suggesting that, because only God knows the heart. All you know is what the Word of God says, and the Word of God says that genuine followers of Christ continue in the faith. You say, Pastor, are there backslidden people? Yes. There are backslidden people; but backslidden people are characterized by returning to the faith. Why? Because God chastises them, pulls at them, and draws them in. Why? Because they are His own. If there is no chastisement in your life and you are backslidden, you are in fact, illegitimate, according to the Word of God. And so, if I am in sin, and I do not feel any chastisement, that should be of tremendous concern to me. Men, if you are in deep, dark sin, and no one knows about it, and you are not feeling chastisement about it, don't dare to have confidence in your eternal security.

#### BBC Article of Faith #12

We believe in the eternal security and everlasting blessedness of the saved, and the eternal conscious punishment of the lost. The preservation of all believers rests upon the finished work of Christ, the promises of God, the gracious election, and the sovereign predestination of God.

We are not working our way to Heaven with this. No one is suggesting this in any way, shape, or form. But we are suggesting that people of the faith are characterized by godly living.

Turn to Acts 27: 22, 31. God's Sovereignty and human responsibility are both presented in this passage. Let's put this together: God's Sovereignty and human responsibility. Up here on this platform, God is Sovereign. God snatches Christian up; God rescues Christian. God doesn't need Christian's help one bit. God has already determined that Christian is reconciled. He is being reconciled, and he will continue to be reconciled. There is no need to help Him. God can do it all. That is Sovereignty.

What is human responsibility? "Turn around. Look at me. Put your hands up. Do what I tell you to do." It's not that you can help God save you; but you have a responsibility to obey the Master. If the Master says to cross your legs because that is better for the rescue attempt, then you cross your legs. If the Master says to look right here, then you look right here.

Okay, so let's see this in the text. Acts 27 is the story of Paul making preparations to go to Rome. He is on his final journey, and he is being held captive. He has a centurion and a company of soldiers guarding him. They have rented or leased a ship to move this prisoner back to Rome. So, there are soldiers on the ship as guards, there are sailors on the ship to take care of the ship, and there is a centurion as a guard. They get into a tremendous storm. They should not have set sail. Paul had told them not to set sail. They ignored him, and they moved forward. Lives are being threatened and people think that they are going to die. In verse 22, Paul gets word from the Angel of God that everyone is going to make it. No one is going to die. I have already ordained that this ship is going forward. So, at that point, does that give everyone the freedom to rest? No. In verse 31 the sailors don't believe in the promise of God. They become very nervous and begin to abandon ship. They sneak off into these little small boats while the ship is going to crash. In addition, please notice what verse 31 says. Paul tells them that unless they "abide in the ship" they are going to perish. Do you know what that was? That was human responsibility. What was the means whereby God had ordained to save the crew? The sailors were. Don't allow the doctrine of eternal security of the believer to lull you into a false sense of security that allows you to live like the devil and act like the devil.

#### *2 Peter 1:10*

*Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall:*

You give diligence. Do you know what that is? That is a challenge from the Word of God. You make certain that your election is sure. You stay the course. These hit-and-miss devotions, this hit-and-miss church attendance—every now and then showing up to the house of God—does not sound like diligence to me. Diligence is staying the course, focusing on the Word of God, listening to the Master. That is giving diligence. Now, here is the promise for those that give diligence: “for so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”

Did you get that? There is the comfort right there. I’m challenged to give diligence, and I’m comforted to know that He holds me in His hands. While little Christian is commanded to look this way, if he drifts away and gets off course, the Master can turn him around, and if he drifts off course, the Master can pull him back in, but we are instructed clearly from the Word of God to stay the course.