

“Preservation of the Saints”

Canons of Dort: Fifth Head, articles 6-8; Bible illustration: Romans 8:28-39

By Pastor Rand Lankheet, at New Horizon URC, Second sermon, on April 29, 2018

Introduction: T.U.L.I.P. It's an acronym (首字母缩略词)—each of these five letters represents a concept (概念).

And because the Synod of Dort (多特信经) was held on Dutch soil, T.U.L.I.P. is fitting. The tulip is the national flower of the Netherlands. These five teachings are also known as the Doctrines of Grace, or, sometimes, as the Five Points of Calvinism (加尔文主义).

We have now come to the fifth point, to the letter “P.”

This afternoon I want to explain how the Roman Catholic Church, in its official documents, agrees with the Arminian (阿民念的) group. Remember the Synod of Dort met in the early 17th century and disagreed with the teachings of the Arminians. Officially, the Roman Church is also Arminian.

-The letter “P” in T.U.L.I.P. stands for “preservation of the saints.” (圣徒的保守, 圣徒之坚韧)

By “saints” we simply mean Christians. Those sanctified (已成圣) in Christ Jesus, made holy, in Him. And the word “preservation” refers to the fact that our sovereign (有主权的) God “preserves” (保守, 保留) us in our salvation. Once God has truly saved us in Christ Jesus, He keeps us saved.

We summarize the teaching by this saying: “once saved, always saved.” (一次得救, 永远得救) [Repeat.

Now, of course, this is assuming that the person is indeed truly, genuinely (真正地) saved.

There are people in the Bible, and people we meet today, who at first SEEM saved.

But that are not TRULY saved. For example, in the Parable of the Sower (撒种的比喻), or the Parable of the Soils,

Jesus speaks of some people who hear the gospel. They spring up (发芽) quickly, like little plants. But then something happens. In the parable Jesus refers to the certain worries that people have, worries from the sinful world. The seeming new Christian, like newly sprouted seed, grows quickly at first. But then dies. So, Jesus says, there are people who appear, at first, to be saved. But they are not truly saved.

When we refer to the “preservation of the saints” or “once saved, always saved” we must

remember this. Not everyone who outwardly APPEARS saved is truly saved. So it was among Jesus' 12

disciples (门徒). One of the disciples, the man named Judas Iscariot, at first seemed saved. But in the end, he

betrayed Jesus. Judas was not a true convert (转变), not a true believer. Judas didn't “lose” his salvation. Rather, he never had salvation.

So we have to be clear that we are talking only about those truly saved, truly converted.

These will never become “unsaved” or “unconverted.” Now, it could also be that a true

Christian might go through a time of spiritual discouragement. Or might fall into some sin.

Observing that person, we might ask: is that person really saved? But even in the Bible we read of some true believers falling into very serious sins. Think of David, the king, who committed adultery (淫乱), and murder. Think of the disciple Peter, who in a moment of weakness denied that he knew Jesus. So, sometimes, true believers fell into serious sins.

But the Bible is clear: those whom God truly has saved, He keeps them saved. To the end.

2. Now let me give AN ILLUSTRATION (举例说明) of how the Roman Catholic church disagrees.

Rome does not believe in the “preservation of the saints.” I am speaking about the official teaching of Rome, as found in its official documents.

Let me quote from the official Roman Catechism (教理问答) of 1994, approved by the late Pope John Paul

the Second. It also bears the stamp (印章) of approval of retired pope (教皇), Pope Benedict. As you might know, Rome distinguishes (区别) between what they call “venial sins” (可赎的小罪, 轻罪) and “mortal

sins.” (不可饶恕的大罪) What is the difference between these two categories of sin? Well, in paragraphs 1855 and 1856 we read this: “Mortal sin destroys charity [that is, biblical love] in the heart of man by a grave violation of God's law; it turns man away from God.” “Mortal sin ... necessitates a new initiative of God's mercy and a conversation of heart.”

And, again, “Mortal sin”...causes exclusion (排除, 驱逐) from Christ's kingdom and [brings] the eternal death of hell” (in paragraphs 1861). Basically, a mortal sin causes a believer to lose true faith. To become an unbeliever.

Falling into a mortal sin requires that a person become converted again.

What are examples of some “mortal sins”? Their Catechism explains that “anger” can be a mortal sin, particularly when it is the “anger of revenge 报复” or “deliberate hatred 憎恨, wishing someone evil.” (Paragraph 2302-3). Envy is also a mortal sin. Envy is “sadness at the sight of ... [someone else’s] good things and a ... desire to acquire them” for yourself (Paragraph 2539). So, in the Roman system, if you have full knowledge as a Christian, and you commit the sin of anger, or envy, you lose true faith. You are no longer saved.

“Venial sins,” on the other hand, are lesser sins. They do not cancel out your salvation.

What did the delegates at the Synod of Dort say about Christians committing some terrible sin? Let me quote from article 6 of Head of Doctrine Five: “... God, who is rich in mercy, according to His unchangeable purpose of election (拣选), does not wholly withdraw (收回) the Holy Spirit from His own people even in their grievous [serious] falls [into sin]; nor does He allow them “to lose the grace of adoption (收养) and forfeit (丧失) the state of justification (称义).”

Even when committing a serious sin, true Christians do not lose their salvation.

In article 7 they say this: when believers commit serious sins, God [quote] “preserves in them the incorruptible (不会腐烂的) seed of regeneration (重生) from perishing or being totally lost.”

God, giving new spiritual life to our dead hearts, is called “regeneration.”

God will never take genuine regeneration away from any Christian.

Once we are given new life, God preserves us, He keeps us, in our new life, in Christ.

Oh, now this is also true: when we fall into serious sins, we lose the JOY of our salvation.

The JOY of our salvation. But, we never ultimately lose salvation itself.

3. Now there are MANY BIBLE VERSES which make this clear.

We read one of them earlier. From Romans chapter 8. Verses 29-30 of Romans 8 is sometimes called “the golden chain of redemption 救赎.” That is to say, each link of the chain is solid and cannot be broken.

Romans 8:29-30 says this: Those “whom He [God] foreknew (预先知道), He also predestined (预定) to be conformed to the image of His Son....moreover, whom He predestined, these He also called, these He also justified (称义); and whom He justified, these He also glorified (得荣耀).” Five links in that golden chain: God FOREKNEW whom He was electing. Those He ELECTED, in time God also CALLED them. Those he called, God JUSTIFIED. Those God justified, He someday, in heaven, will also GLORIFY. This is to say, none of God’s elect will ever fail to be taken to heaven.

If any of these links in the Golden Chain can be broken, what kind of God would we have?

If God’s sovereign plan can be cancelled out by us, then, God is a weak God. Human beings would then appear more powerful than God—if they can cancel out God’s eternal plan of salvation. So you see, God must be more powerful than any human sin. Once the blood of Jesus is truly applied to someone, that blood cannot be removed. Once sins are paid for, they remain paid for.

Later in Romans chapter 8, in verse 33, we read this: “Who shall bring any charge (控告) against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns?” Can anyone or anything bring a charge against those whom God has truly chosen from eternity? And we read this question in verse 35: “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation (患难), or distress, or persecution (逼迫), or famine, or nakedness, or peril (危险), or sword?”

And in verse 39 we read the answer: Nothing “shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Nothing can take us out of the redeeming plan of God, the redeeming love of God.

Some powerful forces are listed there, in vss. 38-39. Paul, who is writing these words, asks whether death can take us out of God’s love. No, he says, not death.

How about some angel or some demon (邪灵)? Can these powerful spiritual forces remove us from God’s love—saving us in Jesus? No, says Paul.

How about any other created thing? You know, even the devil himself is a created being.

A created angel, in the beginning. No, says Paul, not even the devil himself can take us out of God’s love.

You see if any of these things could remove our salvation, then God would not be sovereign.

He would not be supremely powerful King. Because at any time, God’s plan of salvation could be cancelled by us. By one of our actions. So the biblical teaching is clear:

Once we are truly saved by God, in Jesus, we shall remain saved, to the very end.

4. Let me close with SOME BENEFITS of this teaching.

There are many benefits of this teaching of the preservation of the saints.

But now let me mention just two of them. Next week, we will refer to more.

4.1. We as Christians can have full assurance (确据 , 保证) of our salvation. We have full assurance. Because, you see, God never does something halfway. Philippians 1:6 says this: That God, who began a good work in us, the good work of salvation, will surely bring that work to completion someday. What God has begun in us, He finishes.

Consider that sincere Roman Catholic person, who has committed some "mortal" sin.

Say, the sin of vengeful anger... or envy about someone else's good things, wanting those things for themselves.

According to official Roman teaching, the sin of anger means you lose your salvation. One day, you are saved by Jesus, the Lamb of God. But the next day, after showing vengeful anger, you are no longer saved. You must become converted again. So, say you get converted again. And life is going quite well, for two or three weeks. But then, one day, you fall into the sin of anger once again. And once again, you lose your salvation. So it goes—back and forth. Saved and unsaved. How can anyone really know that they are truly saved? How can anyone ever have any real assurance of salvation?

Many evangelical (福音派的) Christians have another practice in their churches. They will have annual "revival meetings." (奋兴会) In those meetings, Christians who have fallen into serious sins, will be called up to the front.

Sometimes they will be told to pray the "sinners prayer." Or they might be told to "recommit" (再次委身) their lives to Christ. Christians who attend these meetings are given the impression that they have lost their salvation. That they have to be saved again.

But when from the Bible we understand that God's plan of salvation is secure, then, we as

Christians can have assurance. That we don't have to live in doubt, in wondering. That we can say: "Jesus loves me, this I KNOW...for the Bible tells me so." That if we truly have trusted in Jesus, we know Jesus truly loves us. And he continues to love us. Always.

Our salvation in Jesus is not like a switch on the wall of a room, turning a light on and off. No!

Our salvation, according to God's plan, based on Jesus' finished sacrifice, is secure. So we have a solid foundation: it's not ourselves; it's not ultimately our performance (表现) , from day to day. It's not our feelings. No. Our salvation rests on the finished work of Jesus for us.

That, then, gives us a wonderful assurance.

4.2. Here's another benefit to us, because of this teaching. Preservation of the saints.

In the Roman Catholic system, and in the system of many evangelical Christians, almost everything depends on the Christian's effort. The Christian doing his best, her best. The Catholics and the Arminians emphasize doing the right things, to remain in a condition of being saved. To avoid all mortal sins. And to do your best to stay saved.

But can you see who, ultimately, then receives the credit, the praise, for salvation?

It is the believer. Believers can even become a bit proud, that they have remained free from all mortal sins. That they have only committed so-called "venial" sins... and have not done anything to take away their salvation.

Think of the Pharisee (法利赛人) in the parable which Jesus told. Jesus said that a Pharisee and a publican (征税员) , a tax collector (税吏) , went into the Temple to pray. The Pharisee prayed like this: "I thank you, Lord, that I am not like that publican, that sinner. I have done what is right. I have avoided sin." But the publican, did not even dare to lift up his head, when he prayed. In his prayer, he simply said: "God be merciful to me, a sinner." Jesus said that man, the publican, was forgiven. Not the Pharisee.

When we understand that our salvation is by God, from God, for God, then, we as believers should be more

humble (谦卑的) before God. Because God keeps on forgiving us our sins. And we should become more thankful to God. That even if we might fall into a serious sin, that our God in Christ will continue to show us His grace, His kindness. That if we have true faith in Jesus, it is through Jesus' sacrifice on the cross even that very bad sin, is completely forgiven. Once we are saved, we are always saved. To the very end. So God must receive all the thanks, and all the praise. Now and forevermore.