

**“Timeless Classic Doctrine #10 – Perseverance of the Saints”**

For many Christians John Calvin is a timeless classic theologian. As Lutheran Christians there are points of doctrine in which we would agree with Calvin and others that we would strongly disagree with him and be concerned. John Calvin was 8 years old when Martin Luther posted the 95 Theses and the Lutheran Reformation of the Christian church took place in Germany. John Calvin was a reformer too and his work was carried out in France and Switzerland. John Calvin’s beliefs veer off the track when it comes to the challenging Biblical teaching of “Predestination.” Predestination is the Biblical doctrine that God chose Christians to be his followers and to go to Heaven before he created the universe. Predestination is a comforting doctrine of Scripture for those who are worried that they don’t have enough faith in Jesus and also for Christians as they do evangelism. However, we need to take a humble approach to the doctrine of Predestination and admit that this teaching is only fully understood in the realm of God and goes beyond human logic. If you dig too deeply into understanding this doctrine it can lead to some conclusions that aren’t in agreement with the rest of the Word of God. And that is exactly what happened to John Calvin. Thinking too deeply about Predestination led John Calvin to the non-Biblical conclusion that if God predestined some to go to Heaven then he must have also predestined some to go to Hell before he even created the universe (Double Predestination). If that were true, then God would be lying when he says through the Apostle Paul, **“This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth”** (1 Timothy 2:3-4). Today, our sermon lesson focuses our attention on the Timeless Classic doctrine – “The Perseverance of the Saints.” Once a person is a Christian, how do they remain a Christian until they go to Heaven. John Calvin famously answered that question this way:

**Perseverance of the Saints** – The people God has predestined cannot lose their salvation. If they fall away it will only be temporary.

The danger of this statement is that it can lull Christians into spiritual laziness that might be detrimental to their eternal future. The danger of this statement is that it applies the doctrine of Predestination in a way that God didn’t intend as it doesn’t take into account some of the other things God says in Scripture on this topic. The timeless classic doctrine of Scripture that we focus our attention on today is the “Perseverance of the Saints.” Our sermon lesson for today helps us to understand this God’s way, not John Calvin’s way. Romans 9:1-6.

**(1) I speak the truth in Christ-- I am not lying, my conscience confirms it in the Holy Spirit—  
(2) I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. (3) For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race, (4) the people of Israel. Theirs is the adoption as sons; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. (5) Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen. (6) It is not as though God's word had failed. For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel.**

The Apostle Paul was Jewish. So as he considered the spiritual history of his country and their present spiritual state (2000 years ago), it made him very sad. It made him sad because they had every spiritual advantage. **“Theirs is the adoption as sons...”** (vs. 4) as the nation of Israel was personally adopted or chosen by God, out of all the nations on earth, to be the nation from whom the Savior of the world, Jesus Christ, would come. **“Theirs is...the divine glory...”** (vs. 4) of God personally witnessed by Israel at the parting of the Red Sea, as he led them through the wilderness of Sinai with pillar of cloud by day and fire at night, and when God made the walls of Jericho crumble down - the first conquest in the land of Canaan. The examples of God’s divine glory being revealed to Israel are numerous as we read the Old Testament Scriptures. **“Theirs is...the covenants...”** (vs. 4) as God promised them they would remain a great nation and continue to live in Canaan if they would remain spiritually faithful to him. **“Theirs is...the receiving of the law...”** (vs. 4) as God personally took what is written on every human conscience and put it on paper and entrusted it to Israel at Mt. Sinai. **“Theirs is...the temple worship and the promises...”** (vs. 4) as Israel had a beautiful temple in Jerusalem and God’s very specific sacrificial worship practices that all pointed to the presence of God in their midst and to Jesus, the lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world. **“Theirs are...the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all”** (vs. 4). The Jewish nation could even make the claim that the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were their blood relatives. In fact, Jesus was their blood relative! The nation of Israel had every spiritual advantage and yet many of them, both in the past and the present, rejected God’s way of having a relationship with them and in unbelief they lost their faith or never had faith in the promised Savior and the eternal blessings he provides. Many in the nation of Israel thought and continue to think their physical connection to Abraham and their ritual attempts to strictly obey God’s law made and make them pleasing in the sight of God. That’s why Paul says, **“I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart...for not all who are descended from Israel are Israel”** (vs. 2, 6). The very people, many of them, who are the blood ancestors and descendents of Jesus – don’t believe he is their eternal Savior. They had it all and then they threw it away. That is sad.

What about you.....Israel? Did you know that you are true Israel? Paul, by inspiration of the Holy Spirit said this earlier in Romans (2:28-29). **“A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a man’s praise is not from men, but from God.”** True Israel claims a spiritual connection to Abraham, not just a physical one. True Israel, by grace and faith alone, enjoys God’s adoption as sons, Jesus perfect keeping of God’s law for us, and the precious promises of God that we are fully forgiven of all wrongdoing and heirs of his eternal/heavenly kingdom. Most of us have enjoyed that status since we were baptized as babies. Most of us have enjoyed being confirmed in our Christian faith as teenagers and communicant members of a Christian congregation. You and I, we have it all – a peaceful relationship with God and his promise that through Word and Sacrament he will keep us in the one true faith until life everlasting. And for those who have it all, how easy it is to take for granted and to not fully appreciate what we have. How easy it is to forget that God clothed himself with human flesh and willingly subjected himself to suffering Hell’s curse for you and for me when he died on the cross. How easy it is to stand next to the empty tomb of Jesus and yawn because we’ve seen this movie before. How easy it is to bypass opportunities to worship, study

God's word, and share our Christian faith with others because we've heard it all before and there will always be more opportunities for that, but this certain activity in my life is only happening today. Paul's lesson for us today is simple, take care of your God given faith in Jesus Christ as your Savior! Don't throw it all away like many people in Israel did and do. **"So if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall" (1 Cor. 10:12).** Christians wandering from the Christian faith and losing their Christian is not only possible, but it happens often. It has happened in the past. The nation of Israel is exhibit A. It continues to happen in the present as exhibit B would be people from our own families and congregation. John Calvin teaches "Perseverance of the Saints" this way – once a Christian, always a Christian. If that were true, then why would the Apostle Paul warn us in our sermon lesson to not follow the example of the nation of Israel? Why would Paul warn us in 1 Corinthians 10:12 to be careful that we don't fall from the Christian faith? If it's not possible for a Christian to lose their faith then what are we to think happened to people like King Saul (1 Samuel 28:15-17), Judas (Acts 1:15-25), Hymenaeus and Philetus (2 Timothy 2:17)? If it's not possible for a Christian to lose their faith then why are there countless passages in Scripture that warn against it (1 Tim. 6:20-21, Revelation 22:18-19). Why would Jesus even say that a sign that the end of the world is near is that **"many (Christians) will turn away from the faith"** (Matt. 24:10).

The timeless classic doctrine that Paul is talking about is the "Perseverance of the Saints." Yet Paul is not encouraging us to have John Calvin's view of that expression which encourages spiritual laziness. Instead the "Perseverance of the Saints" that he is encouraging is this: take the necessary precautions so that you will never lose your Christian faith and end up in Hell. Learn from Israel's history so that you don't follow their sad spiritual footsteps. Don't be a statistic come judgment day. Take care of your faith by feeding it regularly through study of the Bible. Take care of your Christian faith by drowning your old sinful self, daily. in repentance, remembering that you are a baptized forgiven child of God, and rising each day to live a Christian life as a baptized child of God. Take care of your Christian faith by receiving the Sacrament of Holy Communion regularly so that God can give you that personal reassurance that he forgives you in Christ. And do what you can to also take care of your neighbor's faith. We can learn from Paul just how concerned God's wants us to be about the faith of our neighbor through these words. **"I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race, the people of Israel" (vs. 2-4a)?** Paul wished he could be cursed to Hell in order that his fellow Jews would believe in Jesus and so be saved. Now that's compassion and concern for your neighbor and if we even show half that kind of concern as we pray for and as we lovingly talk to our neighbor concerning God's Word – they will be blessed through us.

Despite the many privileges which children of God enjoy, the danger of losing that glorious position through unbelief is always present. You and I, we have it all as a gift from God – His presence, His love, His peace, His forgiveness, His joy, His security, proper motivation and powerful ability to live on earth as His children. When it comes to your faith and that of your neighbor – let's allow God to take care of it through Word and Sacrament and let's use our faith so that we don't lose it. That is the true meaning of "Perseverance of the Saints." Amen.