

The Perseverance of the Savior

A Preview of Things to Come – Part V

Revelation 14:12-13

Introduction

A recent *USA Today* article covered the interview of a well-known media personality and self-made billionaire. This man is the largest landowner in America with more than 1.6 million acres in his column of assets. The interviewer gushed that behind all of his wealth and accomplishments lies a deeper desire for anything that promotes peace, harmony, and understanding.

Toward the end of the article, this individual answered specific questions about personal salvation. He said, “You know . . . almost every religion talks about a savior coming. [But] when you look in the mirror in the morning, when you’re putting on your lipstick or shaving, you’re looking at the savior. Nobody else is going to save you but yourself.”ⁱ

At first glance, you might think, “How can anyone say this? ‘You are your own savior’?!”

We almost expect to hear thunder from heaven or see a bolt of lightning fall.

Well, it might sound dramatic, but the core of what this man said is actually the foundational belief of nearly all organized religion on the planet – you really are your own savior. The core of what he said is actually a part of the depraved deception in our fallen nature.

Frankly, the most dramatic thing to me about this man’s comments is not that he thinks he is his savior, but that he thinks he *can* be; that he thinks he actually *qualifies* to save himself and is *capable* of doing so.

This, by the way, happens to be terribly convenient because now we can get rid of God – we do not need Him. A personal relationship with a

savior is no longer necessary because we have applied for the job of Messiah and have been accepted for the position. It is really whatever we think – because at the end of the day, we are the master of our fate.

This is one of the reasons we can pick up a newspaper or a magazine and read the most bizarre statements about spirituality from very sincere people. These are sincere people who have no basis for believing whatever they believe other than the same basis that this billionaire has. He said in his interview, “I just do what I do because I believe it’s right.”ⁱⁱ

In other words, “I don’t need God...the church...or anything I can’t control.”

The *Associated Press*, this month, revealed that more than 100,000 people living in Great Britain have recently downloaded “certificates of de-baptism” from the Internet to renounce their Christian faith.

This internet initiative was launched by a group called the National Secular Society that reported they are now producing (and I quote), “a certificate on parchment [that we are selling for] three pounds [or roughly four dollars] a pop.”ⁱⁱⁱ

This movement is catching fire. Certificates of de-baptism are becoming all the rage, sweeping through heavily populated Roman Catholic areas in Great Britain, Spain, and Italy. More than a thousand people per month, who were sprinkled as babies, are lining up, paying the fee, and getting their certificate of de-baptism.

In other words, “I don’t want anything to do with God or religion that I didn’t control.”

Although this news is alarming, it is really only a small minority who want one of these certificates. The majority of the human race wants to add to their spiritual bag whatever they think might connect them to God – not take away. “Let’s cover all the bases. Baptism, sure. . . . Cyber prayers, why not? . . . What can it hurt? And we’d better be careful. Maybe there is a God out there and we don’t want to totally offend the Almighty. So, just in case He is up there somewhere and listening, although I still don’t care about Him, or the church for that matter, there is a another solution – a cyber solution.”

Let me quote from a journal to which I subscribe that arrived a few days ago. “For those without time to pray, but yet unwilling to ditch religiosity altogether, [there is a solution of] prayer outsourcing. [A Protestant organization allows users to] subscribe and let the company’s computers recite prayers for them using text-to-speech software.” Evidently, text-to-speech software is needed because God can hear but cannot read. The advertisement continues, “Protestant subscribers can pay \$3.95 a month for a computer proxy to recite the Lord’s Prayer each day for them.”

This site boldly exhorts, “Show God you’re serious by purchasing [a prayer package] – [even] Catholics [can purchase] The Complete Rosary Package [for] \$50.” Since this is a Protestant organization, Catholics are charged more. And, “the site has prayers for Muslims too, [with] the promise to point their speakers toward Mecca.”^v

I suppose if someone is not sure, they can buy all three packages – they are covered!

Is it any surprise that the world is filled with religious hucksters and deceivers? People have God’s created intuitive sense that He exists (Romans 1). However, one of the reasons there are so many shortcuts, so many loopholes, and so much confusion is that while so many people want to cover their spiritual bases, they do not want to be spiritually obligated.

This is true even among the so-called spiritually committed. More than half the people polled some time ago by the Gallup organization, said they believed in God, yet only a minor fraction of them believed that His word, revealed in the Bible, had any authority over their lives.

Most that are here at church today are a part of the small fraction who believes God has provided the answer in His word. If you are new at this church,

we meet weekly to reset our watches, so to speak, to heavenly time; we recalibrate our perspective according to God’s wisdom; we refresh our minds with God’s revealed truth.

So, how does the Bible describe someone who truly belongs to God?

One of the clearest definitions of genuine Christianity comes from the context of the Tribulation period that we have been studying. An angelic messenger commissioned by God delivers the definition. Turn to Revelation chapter 14.

Now remember, this angel will deliver this message during a time when most of the world will finally believe in the same god. And they will worship him! The problem is that they will be worshipping a god we know as the antichrist.

To those who worship him, accepting his name on their hand or forehead – whose sum is 666 – the angel has nothing good to say to them. For them, their idolatry and unbelief will lead to the wrath of God upon their lives in hell. Their suffering will be personal, terrible, painful, and eternal.

However, the angel then encourages those on planet Earth with a message.

Angel Messenger of God’s Encouragement to Saints

Let us pick this angel’s message up at Revelation 14:12-13.

Here is the perseverance of the saints who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus.

And I heard a voice from heaven, saying, “Write, ‘Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on!’” “Yes,” says the Spirit, “so that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow with them.”

Let me make a number of observations as this angel’s message comes to a close. Three words provide an outline to guide our thinking.

1. Perseverance is the first word.

This angel says, effectively, that those who capitulate and worship the antichrist are doomed, but the saints, that is, the true believers, will persevere.

Here is the perseverance of the saints . . .

This phrase reveals the wonderful truth that genuine believers never need to fear losing their salvation or being lost to God once they have been saved. Genuine salvation cannot be lost.

Some would say that the very presence of this phrase “the perseverance of the saints” means the opposite is a possibility – that some saints might not persevere.

However, this does not have to be the case at all. When the Bible says that heaven is eternal, it does not automatically mean that it is possible that heaven is temporary. When it says that Jesus Christ is the only way to the Father, it does not mean He might not be.

“The perseverance of the saints” is a wonderful, comforting doctrine that reinforces as a category all the verses of scripture that tell us that God will lose none of His (John 18:9).

From God’s perspective, “the perseverance of the saints” means that God will lose none of His children.

From the believer’s perspective, “the perseverance of the saints” means that the genuine believer will persevere in his relationship with Christ to the very end.

From God’s perspective, God will not abandon His children.

From the believer’s perspective, they will not abandon God.

What then, about those who fall away?

These were the ones that when the seed fell to the ground, they received it and it looked like it took root. However,

. . . when affliction or persecution [arose] because of the word, immediately they fell away. (Mark 4:16-17)

Hebrews 6 speaks to the same issue. These had the appearances of salvation. They seemed interested and even delighted. They tasted the things of God, but like Christ who tasted death, it was only temporarily. They were even involved in some kind of participation with the things of God, but then they abandoned the gospel and hardened their hearts. Nothing more could be given to them or taught to them – they were not interested. Even if Christ were crucified again, it would not make a difference.

Like Judas, these were associated with Christ, but did not believe in Christ as Lord and Savior. Judas, as you may remember, shocked everyone. When Jesus announced in the upper room that one of them would betray Him, the disciples did not look at Judas and say, “We knew it!” No, they all said,

. . . “Lord, is it I?” (Matthew 26:22)

Charles Templeton, a former preaching companion of Billy Graham, who, in fact, co-founded with him *Youth for Christ International*, walked away from God. Templeton basically said, “I don’t believe any of it anymore.” His last published book made headlines for its title, *Farewell to God*, and for its subtitle, *My reasons for rejecting the Christian faith*.

Did this mean Templeton lost his salvation? No, it means he never had it.

Rehearse again the awful scene of judgment in Matthew 7:22 when,

Many will say to [the Lord] on that day, “Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?”

We could add to this, “and publish books and sing songs for Jesus”. Continue to verse 23.

And then [the Lord] will declare to them, “I never knew you . . .”

Note, Jesus did not say, “I used to know you, but not anymore. We used to be related, but not after you pulled that stunt. You used be in the family of God, until you had that rebellious streak and never got around to praying for your salvation again. So, tough luck.”

No, Jesus said,

. . . “I never knew you . . .”

Wayne Grudem wrote in his *Systematic Theology* these insightful words, “The purpose [of this phrase, “the perseverance of the saints”] is not to make those who are trusting in Christ worry that at some time in the future they might fall away; rather [it can] warn those who are thinking of [walking] away that if they do, this will be a strong indication that they were never saved in the first place.”^v

Now, be careful Christian; be careful church. Do not get out your stopwatch and say, “Okay, looks like they’ve gotten off the usher rotation . . . I’ll give him three hours to repent. Uh, they’ve skipped the last three Sunday school activities . . .”

“They did what? They said what? Yeah, we didn’t think they were saved.”

We did not gain our salvation by being sinless and we cannot lose our salvation by sinning.

Paul preached the doctrine of abounding grace and people got all riled up and said, “You’re going to encourage people to sin with abandon if you teach this gospel of grace.”

No, Paul will not. Grace in the life of a genuine believer does not produce sinfulness – it produces gratitude.

In fact, you will sin after salvation. Have you discovered this yet? Have you studied Paul's personal battle in Romans chapter 7? I have thirty-seven sermons on this chapter. You can pick them up later with a wheelbarrow.

However, some think we need to be saved all over again . . . and again . . . and again . . . and again.

Ladies and gentlemen, compare scripture with scripture on this.

This is one to compare. The apostle John wrote in I John 2:1,

My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. . . .

In other words, "I'm instructing you so that you'll learn how to say 'No' to sin and grow in Christ's likeness." Then he adds,

. . . And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous;

"And if anyone sins" – remember our Advocate Jesus Christ who never sins and stands in our place as our Savior.

Ladies and gentlemen, "the perseverance of the saints" is, in the final analysis, the perseverance of our gracious Savior.

Paul would leave Romans chapter 7 and say in Romans chapter 8,

. . . there is . . . no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Jesus Christ – He guards us; He intercedes for us; He guides us; He holds us firmly in His hand; He instructs us; He empowers us; He disciplines us; He leads us; and then,

. . . He completes us in that day when we see Him. (Philippians 1:6 paraphrased)

The perseverance of the saints is not to our glory; the perseverance of the saints is the persevering passion of the Savior.

There is another word beyond the word perseverance in this text in Revelation 14:12.

2. Obedience is the second word.

This is where it gets even more personal. John writes,

Here is the perseverance of the saints who keep the commandments of God . . .

In other words, the genuine believer is one who keeps the commandments of God.

Now, there are some who would add to the end of this phrase the words, "without failure".

These words are not in the text. In fact, this is a present active participle from the Greek word "tereo" (τηρεω), which means "to observe".^{vi}

In other words, His commandments are our desire; we want to obey Him and it greatly troubles us when we do not.

The difference between a true believer and a false believer is not that the true believer never sins and the false believer does; the difference is that both of them sin and the genuine believer is disturbed by it, troubled by his sinfulness, agonizes over his failure, hurt that he hurt his fellowship with God his Father and Christ his Lord. The false believer is not troubled at all by his sin, apart from the consequences that may be troublesome.

However, let us not beg off too quickly. While obedience is not a condition to salvation, obedience is an evidence of salvation.

Let me put it this way – if you were arrested for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you in a court of law?

Anyone who really does not want to obey God and does not really care about what God says is someone in dire need of the warning of this angel.

I agree with one author who writes, "Obedience and genuine faith are mutually interpreting; obedience involves faith and faith involves obedience. Faith and obedience are not separate stages of the Christian experience."^{vii}

Paul wrote to the Ephesians,

For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them. (Ephesians 2:10)

Even though genuine faith is not a result of works, genuine faith works.

And the genuine believer lives with a daily sense of his failure in keeping the commandments and yet, they are his daily desire.

Listen to William Carey lament his oft failing heart and desire for Christ – he sounds like Paul in Romans 7. He wrote in August of 1793, "I have reason to lament over a barrenness of soul, and am sometimes much discouraged, for if I am so dead, how can I expect to be of any use among the [lost]?"^{viii}

On January 22, 1794, Carey wrote in his journal, "I wish I had more of God in my soul, and felt more submission to His will; this would set me above all things."^{ix}

Later, he became so sick his mission staff thought he was going to die. In fact, Carey had just finished his revision of the Bengali translation of the Bible and everyone assumed his work was finished. This same year, he wrote, "My soul is a jungle, when it ought to be a garden; I can scarcely tell whether I have the grace of God nor not; how shall I help India, with so little godliness myself?"^x

Several years later, he agonized before the Lord, "My crime is spiritual stupidity. I am, perhaps, the most inconsistent, cold creature that ever possessed the grace of Christ. I have no love. O God, make me a true Christian! If God uses me, none need despair."^{xi}

Can you imagine what his supporting pastors thought? Talk like this does not raise money for missions!

When you sinned, did you feel like this? When you walked out of fellowship with the Lord, did you struggle with how you could ever be His?

I hope so – it becomes sweet evidence that you long for His approval and as a result, berate yourself for your failure. This is like Paul, who said,

"Oh wretched man that I am!..."
(Romans 7:24)

Do you then have to be born again all over again? No. In fact, the agony you felt over your inconsistency and your sin is among the evidences that you are genuinely converted.

3. Reliance is the third word.

Another mark of a genuine believer is they rely upon the Savior alone for their salvation. John writes,

... [these] saints ... keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus.

In this immediate context, this means these saints refused to put their faith in the antichrist. They refused to put their faith, like the billionaire I mentioned earlier, in themselves. They did not consider themselves their own savior.

This faith, by the way, is not some vague belief but active loyalty.^{xii}

I have met people who have nothing to do with Jesus Christ but believe they are on their way to heaven because they prayed a prayer at an evangelistic rally years earlier, or walked an aisle and

joined a church, or were baptized. This is where, perhaps, eternal security communicates a watered down version of perseverance, obedience, and loyalty.

I believe in eternal security. It is impossible to be called by the Father, born again from spiritual death, sealed by the Spirit, forgiven of all our sin – past, present and future – and then, lose it or, worse yet, decide to give it back. Anyone who wants to give it back, never got it.

I fear that the church in holding to eternal security can effectively tell people that if they have prayed that prayer sometime in the past and they have been baptized sometime in the past that no matter how they live beyond the point of that prayer, it does not matter.

Understand that there is a difference in saying people cannot lose their salvation because of sinning, and saying unrepentant sinners who do not care about Christ, His word, His church, or His will do not ever need to wonder if they are not saved because, "Remember, you prayed a prayer at the front of a church or in front of the television and then you got baptized to boot."

This is a present active loyalty to the cross work and sacrifice of Christ.

Those who walk away from Christ and live a life no differently from the one they lived before coming to Christ are not eternally secure; they are more than likely eternally deceived.^{xiii}

This is the reason Paul told the Corinthians to examine themselves to see if they were in the faith (II Corinthians 13:5).

This does not mean a Christian cannot backslide, or disobey the Lord, or even walk away from the Lord for a season – the disciples did this. However, the individual who says they were once a Christian, but are now happily reunited with the world, the flesh, and the devil, never came to Christ to begin with. The one who says, "I used to have faith in Christ, but now I don't believe in Him any more," never was a genuine believer.

I will never forget getting an illustration of this first hand as a college freshman while walking down the sidewalk of the little town near the small Bible college I attended. A man dressed in old clothes and an old overcoat stepped toward me and said, "Hey, friend, can you spare some money?"

I answered, "I'm a college student at the Bible college – which is another way of saying, I have no money."

He asked, “Are you sure you can’t spare some change?”

I said, “Listen, I don’t have any money, but I’ve got something that will last longer than my spare change.”

He seemed interested, so I continued. After sharing the gospel with this man, I asked him if he would like to pray to give his life to Jesus Christ and receive from Christ forgiveness and eternal life. Tears filled his eyes and to my surprise, he said, “I sure would.”

Right there on that city sidewalk, we knelt down together and he prayed a glorious prayer of salvation. We got up from our knees and I was so thrilled. I could hardly wait to get back to my dormitory and spread the news that the next Great Awakening was breaking loose. The man literally dried the tears from his eyes, and then said, “Can you spare some money?”

I replied, “I don’t have any, but let me take you to the Union Mission where they’ll have food and a place to stay while you get started in your new life.”

His entire face clouded over, and he said, “You mean you don’t have any money?”

I said, “Listen, sir, like I said before, I don’t have a dime on me.”

The man began to curse at me and use every word imaginable. Some of them were not even in the King James Version. And he stomped away, cussing and fuming with every step he took.

I was stunned. I guess there would be no Great Awakening.

I have never seen the distance between a conversion based on loyalty to someone other than Christ and open abandonment of Christ more than on that day. However, I have seen many more with not much distance between the prayer and the apostasy.

How many came to church for a season and went through the motions, but in the end, were only in church because they wanted a place to network; they wanted to meet potential clients; they came looking for affirmation; they came to be served; they came looking for a spouse and once they found him or her, they quickly abandoned their religious affections; they came because they wanted to be viewed as respectable; they came because it looked good on their community profile.

What about Jesus Christ? He was never the attraction; His name was affirmed only because it might be to their advantage.

These people are no different than a drunk praying a prayer to get some money – they just make it look more respectable; their clothes are nicer; they smell better. They are just as disingenuous.

What Jesus Christ’s name could offer them on Earth is their only attraction. What the church can provide is their only connection.

This is not active loyalty to the object of our faith – the Lord Jesus Christ.

Perhaps the angel is warning you today.

John is also implying in this text in Revelation 14 that this person does not switch their faith from Christ to someone or something else. Christ remains the object of their faith for salvation to the end.

Can you imagine the challenge and encouragement this will be to these Tribulation saints – who have accepted Christ after the rapture – who are now living in the horrific days of persecution and martyrdom?

There will be no advantages to being a Christian on Earth in these days. These saints will die in their faith, their loyalty to their Lord being the cause of death.^{xiv}

However, their genuine faith will be revealed in their unwillingness to abandon Christ as their Savior and Lord.

Now, for them, and for every one of us, what happens next is the timeless promise of heaven.

The Spirit’s Amen

This promise of heaven is two-fold. The saints are promised rest and reward in Revelation 14:13.

And I heard a voice from heaven, saying, “Write, ‘Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on!’” “Yes,” says the Spirit, “so that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow with them.”

1. There is the promise of rest!

There is the promise of rest from labor. The word is “κοπον” (κοπον), which describes hard, difficult, exhausting toil.

This is working, not to gain entrance into heaven, but for the glory of Christ and the coming Kingdom on Earth.

By the way, this is not a word that signifies the cessation of activity. We will serve Christ in the Kingdom based on our use of talents given to us now.

This word is used to refer to irritation and trouble. We will rest from the irritations and annoyances that

plagued our fallen nature as we attempted to serve Christ. We will cease from the daily wrestling with our undisciplined flesh over tasks in which we knew we could do more and could serve better.

This quality of service will be over forever as we serve Christ with glorified bodies and minds, without the hindrances of our fallen flesh that will be stripped away.

2. There is the promise of reward!

John writes in verse 13b,

“ . . . for their deeds follow with them.”

It will be reward enough to be in His presence; then to serve with Him in the Kingdom; then to anticipate a new heaven and a new earth forever.

What more could we want?

Yet, can you imagine the grace of God in this verse?

For God is not unjust so as to forget your work and the love which you have shown

toward His name, in having ministered and in still ministering to the saints. (Hebrews 6:10)

What grace.

The perseverance of the saints is really the perseverance of the Savior.

The rewards for the saints are really the rewarding of the Savior's work through us. It is no wonder we will give them back.

I am convinced on that day, we will simply weep over the truths that engulf us there in His presence – as we grasp the eternal significance that we have been saved *from* the wrath of God forever; we have been saved *for* the worship and service of God forever.

We have been saved from *somewhere* that is hideous;

When we were saved by *Someone* who is spotless;

Who saved us for *someplace* that is glorious.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 4/19/2009 by Stephen Davey.

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ⁱ Jill Lieber, “He Wants to Save the World,” USA Today (Feb. 17, 2000), pp. 1-2c.

ⁱⁱ Ibid.

ⁱⁱⁱ “Following Atheist Trend, Britons Seek ‘De-baptism’,” (Mar. 29, 2009),

http://www.breitbart.com/article.php?id=CNG.ae71a038e9b3b47af4f0e9eac9598fd8.2b1&show_article=1.

^{iv} World Magazine (Apr. 25, 2009), p. 14.

^v Wayne Grudem, Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine (Zondervan, 1994), p. 793.

^{vi} Fritz Rienecker and Cleon Rogers, Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament (Regency, 1976), p. 845.

^{vii} Douglas Moo, New International Commentary, Romans (Eerdmans Publishing, 1996), p. 52.

^{viii} S. Pearce Cary, William Carey (The Wakeman Trust, 1923), p. 126.

^{ix} Ibid., p. 138.

^x Ibid., p. 149.

^{xi} Ibid., p. 171.

^{xii} Stewart Custer, From Patmos to Paradise (BJU Press, 2004), p. 162.

^{xiii} Grudem, p. 806.

^{xiv} Robert L. Thomas, Revelation: Volume 2 (Moody Press, 1995), p. 215.