

The PRESERVATION of the Saints

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“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,” John 10:27-29.

There is an old saying, “Never say, Never; never is a mighty long time.” When somebody says, “I will never do thus and so,” about as often as not, he finally gets around to doing it. And it has been my observation that when somebody says, “Such and such will never happen,” about as often as not, he is trying harder to convince himself than he is to convince you. But when God says, “Never,” he means, “Never.” And when God says, “I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish,” you can be sure that his sheep, his people, are eternally secure in him.

I have heard it said that we do not actually have eternal life yet; we only have eternal life in prospect; we will receive eternal life at the resurrection. Well, that is not what the Bible says. “And this is the record that God *hath given* to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son,” I John 5:11. The gospel *record* is that God has already given us eternal life; we are already saved, already born of his Spirit.

Notice the words, “This is the record.” In other words, “This is the gospel.” John was giving the definition of the gospel. I believe everybody ought to own a good dictionary. Our dictionary gets a lot of use. It is falling apart; you have to pick it up with both hands. I have to look up the definition of a lot of words. It is not uncommon for me to pop out of bed just about the time I ought to be going to sleep, and go to the dictionary to look up a word. My wife usually wants to know, “Won't it wait until morning?” and my usual answer is, “In the morning I won't remember what the word was.”

It is important to know the meanings of words if you are going to use them. You can get in trouble using words, if you do not know what they mean. You might say something you did not mean to say at all.

If a person is going to preach the gospel, he, at least, ought to know what the gospel is. If a person spends four years in college and three years in seminary, and still does not know the definition of the gospel, I think he ought to ask for his money back. They did not teach him what he needs to know.

While a dictionary is a great benefit, the Bible defines its own terms better than the dictionary does. That is no reflection on those who compile dictionaries. All they try to do is to tell us what people mean when they use a particular word. The problem is that, especially in matters of religion, most people do not mean the same thing God does when he uses certain words. *Gospel* is one of those words that most people use to mean something entirely different than the Bible means when it uses the word.

Most religious people seem to think the gospel is an offer, a proposition. That is not the case at all. “These things have I written unto you, that believe on the name of the Son of God, *that ye may know that ye have eternal life*, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.” By definition *gospel* means good news. It is the good news of what God has done on behalf of his people. It is not a proposition of what he will do is they come to terms.

Most people have it just backwards. They think the gospel gives instructions on how to get eternal life. The text teaches that the gospel is given to teach us that we already have eternal life, and it gives us the signs and characteristics of those who do have eternal life. It provides assurances for those who are born again that heaven is their home.

A few years ago a well known evangelist wrote a book entitled *How to be Born Again*. That is not the first time anybody ever wrote a book on a subject he did not know anything about. The good brother had not learned the definition of the gospel. It is not the purpose of the gospel to teach people how to be born again. It is the purpose of the gospel to teach them to know that they are already born of God’s Spirit.

How do you know if you are born again? For one thing, if you have a genuine love for your fellow man, it is evidence that you are a child of God. The wicked do not have any such love. “Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and *everyone that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God*,” I John 4:7. That ought to be plain enough; if you love your fellow man, it is evidence that you love God, and that you are a child of God.

If you feel the Spirit of God stirring in your heart, it is evidence that you have been born again. “The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit that *we are the children of God*: and if children then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together,” Romans 8:16-17. God’s Spirit does not reside in the heart of the wicked. If God’s Spirit is in your heart, you are already heaven bought, heaven born, and heaven bound. But it is not

our intention to write on the evidences of life; we will write more about that at another time. Our subject at the moment is the eternal security of the children of God.

A few years ago I was talking to a man on the job where I worked. He was not a religious man. Going to church and reading the Bible had never been part of his experience. But he was the sort of person you enjoy working with. If everybody on the job was as easy to get along with as he was, it would be a lot easier place to earn a living.

Finally, the subject got around to religion. That usually happens with me. He really did not know anything about religion, but he wanted to carry his end of the conversation, and, for want of anything better to say, he said, "Harold, do you believe that doctrine, once saved, always saved?" I told him I did, and he said, "Well, I don't believe it." I am sure he did not have any idea what he believed, but he was sure he did not believe in eternal security.

I don't like to argue about religion, but he had challenged one of our most cherished principles, and I felt like I had to respond. I was sure it would be a waste of time to quote a list of proof texts. Most people believe you can prove anything you want to prove by the Bible, if you just find the right proof text. They believe every denomination has their own favorite proof texts, and those texts prove the doctrines of that denomination. That is not right; the only thing you can prove by the Bible is the truth of the Bible, and that truth is entirely consistent. There is not one verse that contradicts any other verse. You can lift a verse out of context, and make it look like it says something it does not say at all, but if you apply the verse properly, it will not prove anything but the truth.

I knew I could not prove anything to him by quoting the Bible, but I knew that he and his wife had four children, and I asked him, "If one of your children were to wind up in the flames of eternal damnation, and it is within your power to get him out, what would you do? Now, there is no doubt that he deserves to be there, but he still your child; what would you do?" I said, "You don't have to answer me today; think about it a few days, and tell me what you would do."

He said, "You dummy, you know I don't have to think about that; I would get him out." I said, "You believe in *once saved, always saved*; you just did not know it. That is all we insist on. If one of God's children ever wound up in that terrible place, God would take that place apart to get his child out. Do you believe you love your children more than God loves his children? Do you believe your love for your children is more constant and more unconditional than God's love is?"

“My Father which gave them me is greater than all, and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father’s hand,” [John 10:29](#). Did you ever try to take anything away from somebody, when he had it clutched in his hand? You mothers, did you ever have to take anything away from one of the children, when he had it clutched in his hand? Perhaps, he had a marble in his hand, and you knew that if you did not take it away, it would not be long till he would try to swallow it. It is in the nature of children to put everything they get hold of in their mouth. It was no real problem for you to take the marble away from him, but there is one thing necessary if you are going to take away anything somebody has clutched in his hand: you have to be bigger and stronger than he is. And if anybody ever takes away one that God has in his hand, it will have to be somebody bigger and stronger than God is.

I love the types and comparisons and parallels of the Bible. The Bible teaches us about things we do not understand by showing how they are like things we do understand. The Bible uses figurative language to call up images in our minds to make the thought more clear to us. The Bible refers to the Lord as the Water of Life, the Bread of Life, the Tree of Life, the Good Shepherd, the Great Physician, and so on. That is figurative language, and it teaches us by making comparisons. We all know what water is like, what bread is like, and so on. Well, the Lord is like all those things, and those expressions impress that fact on our minds.

There are also some lessons to be learned from the contrasts of the Bible. To the heaven born soul, three of the most beautiful words in the language are, “HE IS ABLE.” “For our conversation is in heaven, from whence also we look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall change our vile body that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby HE IS ABLE even to subdue all things to himself,” [Philippians 2:20-21](#). “Wherefore HE IS ABLE to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.”

I would like to stand in every pulpit in the land; I would like to preach on every radio station in America, and preach that simple message, “He is able—he is able—he is able.” “Wherefore HE IS ABLE to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them,” [Hebrews 7:25](#). And here is the contrast, “My Father which gave them me is greater than all, and NO MAN IS ABLE to pluck them out of my Father's hand” (John 10:29). God is able to save them to the uttermost, and no man is able to pluck them out of his hand.

That is the big difference between the doctrine of the Bible and the doctrine of the world and the world’s religion. The Bible says, “He is able,” and the doctrine of the

world says, "He is doing the best he can with the help he gets." Did anybody ever ask you for an explanation of the difference between the Primitive Baptists and other Baptists. When somebody asks that question, they usually do not want an hour long lecture; they just want a short statement of the difference. I cannot think of a shorter explanation, and it hits the nail right on the head. The doctrine of the Bible says, "He is able," and the doctrine of the world says, "He is doing the best he can with the help he gets."

The life of God is the ground, the foundation, of our life. Because he lives, we live. John 14:19, "Yet a little while, and the world seeth me no more, but ye see me, because I live, ye shall live also." This verse indicates a cause and effect relationship. His life is the cause; our life is the effect. You will have to remove the cause, if you are going to remove the effect. You will have to destroy the life of God, if you intend to destroy the spiritual life of one of his children. Because he lives, and we are, by grace, joined to him, we live.

There was an evil professor at Emory University, many years ago, who circulated the notion that God is dead. That does not surprise me. His god may be dead; his god was never really alive; but our God lives forever more. I like a little bumper sticker I saw a few days ago. It read: "You say that God is dead? Sorry to hear that; but my God is alive; I talked to him just this morning."

God provided Israel with six Cities of Refuge. When anybody fled to one of the Cities of Refuge, he could live there *as long as the high priest lived*. The Lord Jesus Christ is our Great High Priest. You and I are eternally secure *as long as he lives*. Hebrews 7:23-25, "And they truly were many priests, because they were not suffered to continue by reason of death. But this man, because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood. Wherefore he is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, *seeing he ever liveth* to make intercession for them."

Somehow, some people have gotten the idea that the doctrine of salvation by the sovereign grace of God is a hard doctrine. There were those who believed that in the Lord's day. In John 6 the Lord had preached the most beautiful sermon on the sovereignty of God. That chapter is just filled with good proof texts on sovereignty. But when the Lord finished that beautiful sermon on salvation by grace, a lot of the people said, "This is a hard saying; who can hear it" (John 6:60). If they did not believe that doctrine when the Lord preached it, you can be sure that a lot of people will not believe it when we preach it in this day. Far from being a hard doctrine, the doctrine of salvation by the sovereign grace of God is the sweetest, the most comforting, the most soul cheering doctrine, that has ever entertained the hearts and minds of poor sinners of Adam's race.

But I will tell you what is hard doctrine: that doctrine that says a person may be born of the Spirit of God, and for thirty or forty years he does the best he can to serve the Lord. For thirty or forty years he lives in prospect of seeing the face of his Maker, and for all that time, the prospect of living with God, and with all the family of God, is the one thing that lifts him up, and gives him strength to endure his darkest hours. And then to think that in the last years, or even the last weeks of his life, he might sin and lose it all—to think that God would mock his children, and tantalize them, by holding out the prospect of eternal heaven, and then at the last moment that he would snatch it away and plunge them off into the flames of eternal damnation—I tell you, that is hard doctrine; that is cruel doctrine. I would not accuse my worst enemy of treating his children the way those people who preach that doctrine accuse God of treating his own.

Over the years I have tried to come up with illustrations to explain these principles, and the best I can come up with is this: Suppose a man is out in the middle of the lake in a little boat, and a storm comes up. Before long the waves start to lap over the sides of the boat, and it goes down. He is in the water about to go under for the last time. He is half drowned and half conscious. At one moment his head is above the water, and the next moment it is below the water. It looks like any moment is going to be his last. About this time, two men come along in the biggest cabin cruiser you ever saw. They turn their boat and go over to where the man is. One of them throws him a life preserver. They tell me a drowning man will grab at anything, and he grabs the life preserver. He gets his hand on it, and works his arm through it, and as soon as he gets the life preserver up under his arm, one of the men says, “Hang on, fellow, I believe you will be alright now,” and he turns the boat and goes speeding on across the lake.

I really don't think that is what he ought to have done, do you? Let me ask you, when the good people in town hear about that, do you believe they might criticize those men? I think I might have some mean things to say about them, don't you? I believe they ought to have fished him out of the water and carried him to the other side of the lake, don't you? That is what the Lord does. He says, “He bare them, and carried them, all the days of old” (Isaiah 63:9). And yet I hear people talk as if God saves somebody, and then says, “Hang on, fellow, I will be back in thirty or forty years to see how you made out.”

Now you may object that nobody really preaches any such thing as that, but, quite the contrary, that seems to be the majority opinion among most religious people. It does not make any sense at all, but ever so many people believe it.

Several years ago, two other preachers and I were on our way to a special meeting. We stopped at a grocery store, and another car pulled in beside us, pulling a boat. One of the preachers said, “Brother Hunt, did you see the sign on that boat?” I had, and I said, “I have an idea I will preach on that before the day is out.” On the back of that boat was a little four by six sign saying, “I am saved, can I throw you a line?” One of their hymns is entitled “Throw Out the Life Line.” But God does not just throw out a life line, and he does not depend on careless sinners to throw out a life line to other sinners. He is the one and only Savior, and he does the saving himself. He does not depend on others to do the work for him.

When he saves somebody, they are safe. If a person is not safe, he is not saved, and if a person is forever in danger of falling away, losing his salvation, and suffering in eternal damnation, he is not safe—he is not saved.

Those who are born of the Spirit of God are not in danger of being lost. They are not in danger of eternal damnation. They are the children of God; they are the objects of his love, and he will not allow the objects of his love to suffer eternally.

Psalms 89:30,31, “If his children forsake my law, and walk not in my judgments; if they break my statutes, and keep not my commandments.”

He is talking about the children doing wrong. He says the same thing four different ways, so there can be no doubt as to what he is saying. I have heard people say, “I wish the Bible was easier to understand.” I wonder how plain they want it to be? How easy to understand does it need to be? He says the same thing four different ways, so that if we might not understand one expression, we could not possibly misunderstand all the others.

Then when he declares the security of his children in Christ Jesus, in spite of all the failures on our part, he says that four different times in four different ways. Psalms 89:32-34, “Then will I visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes; nevertheless, my lovingkindness will I not utterly take away from them, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail. My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips.”

He says that if his children disobey, he will chasten them, but that chastening will not in any way alter his lovingkindness toward them, and it will not alter the covenant he has made on their behalf. I sit here wondering what comment I should make on those four expressions he uses to declare the constancy of his love toward his children, and his determination to do all he has promised to do on their behalf. But I realize that no comment is necessary. The language is too clear to be

misunderstood. God loves his own; that love is eternal and unchangeable, and nothing in time or eternity can interfere with it. God will do all he has promised to do for his children; he will have every one of them with him in eternal heaven.

God gave his Son as the redemption price to pay the sin debt of his people. That chain of redemption is a golden chain which reaches all the way from eternity past to eternity to come.

Romans 8:28-30, “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them that are called according to his purpose. For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover, whom he did predestinate, them he also called, and whom he called, them he also justified, and whom he justified, them he also glorified.”

Notice that those who were chosen in eternity past are exactly the same people who will be glorified in eternity to come. Notice how Paul traces these same people from their being foreknown to their being glorified. No distinction is made between them; they are the same people.

One of the worst faults most people have is in failing to carry through with what they start. I have certainly had that problem. If I had carried through with all the sales campaigns I ever started, I would have made a lot more money than I ever did make. If I had carried through on all the study plans I ever started, I would probably preach a lot better than I do. But you can be sure that God carries through on what he starts. The religious world does not believe that. They believe he redeemed a lot more people than he will ever glorify. They believe he is doing the best he can with help he gets, but he would do a lot better if he could get more help, if he could get better organized, if he could get more financial backing. But not so, God finishes what he starts.

Philippians 1:6, “Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.” If God redeemed you by his grace, and quickened you by his Spirit, you can be sure that, one day, by his grace, he will finish the work. One day he will carry you home to glory. He does not begin a work, and never finish. He does not promise and never deliver.

Romans 8:35-36, “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long, we are accounted as sheep for the

slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.”

Paul lists seven terrible calamities, and shows that none of them is able to separate any child of God from his love. Seven is a complete number. It signifies all of whatever is under consideration. If none of these great tragedies can separate any child of God from his love, there is nothing that can do it, because there is nothing bad that ever happened to anybody that is not contained in one or more of these expressions.

Tribulation: that is all the worst things that ever happened to anybody.

Distress: that is when you are in such trouble you don't know what to do, nor which way to turn.

Persecution: that is when people are mean to you, because of who you are, or what you stand for.

Famine: that is when you cannot provide yourself and those near and dear to you with sufficient food to sustain life.

Nakedness: that is when you cannot obtain the bare material necessities of life.

Peril: that just means danger, danger of being harmed, or danger of suffering great loss.

Sword: that goes beyond danger; it signifies actual bodily injury.

Paul could not paint a darker picture of great and terrible tragedies, and he assures us that none of these things can separate God's children from his love.

Having said all of that, you would think Paul had made his argument as strong as it could possibly be made. There is nothing bad that ever happened to anybody that is not covered by one or more of those seven expressions. But then he makes his argument even stronger.

Romans 8:38-39. “For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Sometimes human language is not sufficient to carry the burden that is loaded on it. This is one such case. Human language groans under the load, and cannot entirely support it, but it does sufficiently express the thought, that there should be no doubt in anybody's mind as to what is being said. There is absolutely nothing which "shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." If this language does not make the point, the point cannot be made.

Neither life nor death: nothing living nor dead can do it. That covers a lot of territory.

Nor angels: no one on earth knows how powerful the angels are, but they cannot do it.

Nor principalities nor powers: no organization of men can do it. No coalition of men can do it. No government of men can do it.

We hear a lot nowadays about world-wide conspiracies, occult conspiracies, conspiracies of international bankers to rule the world, and so on. Somebody is forever asking me, "Do you believe there is any such conspiracy." Of course there is a conspiracy to rule the world. That has been the motive of every conqueror and empire builder in every age of time. Name as many of them as you will: Nebuchadnezzar, Alexander the Great, the Roman Caesars (they came closer than anybody else ever did), Napoleon Bonaparte, Adolph Hitler, Worldwide Communism, the United Nations. They all have and have had the same goal. They want to rule the world. But men can put together as many organizations and coalitions as they will, but all their combined efforts can never separate one little child of God from his love.

Nor things present nor things to come: nothing that is, nothing that ever has been, and nothing that ever will be, can do it.

Nor height nor depth: nothing above us and nothing below us can do it.

Nor any other creature: that is the catch all. God is the one and only Creator. Everything outside of him is a creature. If the other expressions do not cover the ground (but they do) then this one does. There is nothing that can separate any child of God from his love.

In the last five verses of this chapter Paul is very nearly on shouting ground, and he builds to a crescendo, talking about the grace of God. I can almost see him now, as

his chin begins to tremble, his hand shakes, and his eyes run over. Paul, the chief of sinners, has his eyes firmly fixed on his Redeemer. He cannot find any ground of hope in himself, and he will not even try. He knows, as every sinner should, that if he receives what he deserves, he will suffer eternally. Not one of us deserves a home in heaven, and if we were judged on our own merit, not one of us would ever be there. But Paul is not looking to himself, nor to any merit of his own. That is not the ground of his hope. He is looking to Christ, and his unchangeable, unwavering love of his own, as the basis of his hope of heaven.