

God's Preserving Grace: A Message of Comfort

It is a truth about which God's people never tire of hearing. It is a message of comfort for the people of God. If you are one of God's people -- one who truly believes the gospel of salvation conditioned on the atoning blood and imputed righteousness of Christ alone -- then be encouraged to meditate on the precious truths of God's Word that follow, and give praise and thanksgiving to our God of all grace. (Please note that when the words "our" or "us" are mentioned in this article, they are referring solely to God's people.)

Because every part of our salvation, from regeneration to final glory, is conditioned on the work of Christ alone, because law and justice has been satisfied in full forever on our behalf, then we can never come back under the curse of God. Nothing can undo what Christ has done.

"But whom He predestinated, these He also called; and whom He called, these He also justified; but whom He justified, these He also glorified. What then shall we say to these things? If God [be] for us, who [can be] against us? Truly [He] who did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all, how will He not freely give us all things with Him? Who will bring any charge against God's elect? God [is] the [One] justifying! Who [is he] condemning? [It is] Christ who has died, but rather also [is] raised, who also is at [the] right hand of God, who also intercedes for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? [Shall] tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? ... For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus, our Lord" (Romans 8:30-39). Glory to God! This love of God from which we can never be separated is IN CHRIST JESUS, whose obedience unto death established an everlasting righteousness for all whom He represented! The guilt and condemnation have been removed! Perfect righteousness has been freely charged to our account! We are declared NOT GUILTY!

All Scripture needs to be read by God's people in light of this precious truth. All commands to obedience must be seen in light of the fact that our obedience does not preserve us. We are to be motivated to obedience by the certain assurance of final glory based on the work of Christ alone. Our good works are performed out of love and gratitude for the One who has already worked out a righteousness that entitles us to all spiritual blessings, including an eternity in Heaven with Him.

There are other Scriptures which you might have never considered to be part of the comforting words of God's preserving grace. These Scriptures have to do with what the wicked believe and confess; they mention certain sins that are indicative of lostness. You might be wondering how these verses that seem so negative could be a part of God's comfort to His people. Read on! And be blessed by these comforting truths!

In Matthew 24:23-24 and Mark 13:21-22, Christ Jesus gives a warning about false christs and false prophets that will arise in the last days. But, right in the midst of the warning, what does He say? "... to lead astray, *IF POSSIBLE*, even the elect." Christ Jesus is saying that those false teachers will come with their subtle deceits and certainly will lead many astray -- but it is IMPOSSIBLE to lead the elect astray! God preserves His people from being led astray by the false gospels of these false prophets! Now one might ask about the elect who are not yet saved. It is true that before

salvation, they are among those who are deceived by false gospels. But Christ Jesus is here speaking of God's elect who have heard His voice and have followed Him, who "*NEVER follow a stranger, but will flee from him, because they do not know the voice of strangers*" (John 10:5). When God saves one of His people, that person will NEVER -- NO, NEVER -- follow a stranger. God's preserving grace has made it IMPOSSIBLE for him to follow a stranger! Why is it impossible? Because "*My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give eternal life to them, and they shall never perish to the age, and not anyone shall pluck them out of My hand. My father who has given [them] to Me is greater than all, and no one is able to pluck them out of My Father's hand*" (John 10:27-29). Notice how closely connected God's preserving grace is to His people's hearing Christ's voice and never following a counterfeit! Not only does God make it impossible for His people to lose their salvation, but He also makes it impossible for them to be deceived by a counterfeit christ and a counterfeit gospel!

This connection can also be seen in 2 Thessalonians 2:3-17. After warning the Thessalonians about the falling away, the man of sin, the son of perdition, and God's sending "*a working of error, for them to believe the lie, that all may be judged, those not believing the truth, but who have delighted in unrighteousness*" (v. 11), Paul then states, "*BUT we ought to thank God always concerning you, brothers, beloved by the Lord, because God chose you from the beginning to salvation in sanctification of [the] spirit and belief of [the] truth, to which He called you through our gospel, to obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ*" (vv. 13-14). Notice the contrast! He talks of those who are deceived into believing the lie and delighting in unrighteousness, and he contrasts this with those who have been sanctified by the spirit and have believed the truth of the gospel. Paul is saying to the Thessalonian believers, and to all of us who are regenerate, that it is IMPOSSIBLE for us to believe the lie and delight in unrighteousness! God preserves us from these things! Do we still sin? Yes, we constantly fall short of the glory of God revealed in the face of Jesus Christ, and we constantly cry "*O wretched man [that] I [am]!*" (Romans 7:24). How then could it be said that we never delight in unrighteousness? The unrighteousness to which Paul is referring is directly connected to believing the lie. To delight in unrighteousness is to highly esteem that which is an abomination to God (Luke 16:15); that is, to consider one's own character and conduct to form at least some part of the righteousness that God requires for salvation. When the world delights in what they think is righteousness, it is in actuality a delighting in unrighteousness! And this is something a believer will never do. God's preserving grace keeps him from doing it.

Another example of a contrast between the regenerate and the unregenerate is in Matthew 7:15-20 and Luke 6:43-45. Christ Jesus uses very strong and clear language to describe the impossibilities in both cases: "*A good tree CANNOT produce evil fruits, NOR a corrupt tree good fruits.*" "*For there is NOT a good tree that produces bad fruit, NOR a bad tree that produces good fruit.*" Christ Jesus is here speaking of an IMPOSSIBILITY. It is JUST AS IMPOSSIBLE for a regenerate man to produce evil fruit as it is for a totally depraved man to produce good fruit!! Do you see the impact of that statement? We know about the impossibility of totally depraved man to bring forth good fruit (and we need to keep hearing it!). But in the exact opposite direction, and just as strongly, it is impossible for a regenerate man to bring forth bad fruit! Is this talking about sinless perfection? Obviously not. Luke 6:45 gives us the answer: "*The good man brings forth good out of the good treasure of his heart. And the evil man brings forth evil out of the evil*

treasure of his heart, for his mouth speaks out of the abundance of his heart.” This is not talking about all the thoughts, words, and deeds of either the regenerate or unregenerate man; it is talking specifically about what GOSPEL the men believe and confess. It is IMPOSSIBLE for a regenerate man to believe and confess a false gospel!! Those who are in the flesh bear fruit unto death, and those who are in the Spirit bear fruit unto God (Romans 7:4-5), and it is JUST AS IMPOSSIBLE for one who is in the Spirit to bear fruit unto death as it is for one who is in the flesh to bear fruit unto God.

There are many other instances in God’s Word in which He gives a description of unbelievers (things that are indicative of lostness) and either does or does not contrast them with believers. We can benefit from these verses in many ways. In these verses, God gives us His standard by which we judge someone to be lost. In these verses, God also gives us descriptions of what the false gospel entails so we might be able to detect it. But let us also never forget that in these verses, God gives His people comfort in His preserving grace, showing us that because He loves us in Christ, He will never have us to believe or confess a false gospel, for all who believe or confess a false gospel are lost, and we can never become lost again! We know that God has made it impossible for us to commit sins that are indicative of lostness. The following are some examples of such Scriptures.

God says that saying in one’s heart, “There is no God” is indicative of lostness (Psalm 14:1); thus, it is impossible for a regenerate person to say in his heart, “There is no God.” God says that praying to a god who cannot save is indicative of lostness (Isaiah 45:20); thus, it is impossible for a regenerate person to pray to a god who cannot save. God says that being ignorant of the righteousness of God, seeking to establish one’s own righteousness, and not submitting to the righteousness of God are indicative of lostness (Romans 10:3); thus, it is impossible for a regenerate person to be ignorant of God’s righteousness, to seek to establish his own righteousness, or to not be submitted to God’s righteousness. God says that preaching a false gospel is indicative of lostness (Galatians 1:8-9); thus, it is impossible for a regenerate person to preach a false gospel. God says that saying we have no sin and saying we have not sinned are indicative of lostness (1 John 1:8,10); thus, it is impossible for a regenerate person to say he has no sin or say he has not sinned. God says that denying that Jesus is the Christ is indicative of lostness (1 John 2:22); thus, it is impossible for a regenerate person to deny that Jesus is the Christ. God says that not abiding in the doctrine of Christ is indicative of lostness (2 John 9); thus, it is impossible for a regenerate person to not abide in the doctrine of Christ. God says that speaking peace to one who brings a false gospel is indicative of lostness (2 John 11); thus, it is impossible for a regenerate person to speak peace to one who brings a false gospel. PRAISE GOD for His preserving grace!!

“Isn’t this promoting perfectionism?” one might ask. May it never be! Believers are and will remain sinners until they die. The sin principle remains a powerful principle working in them, and they give in to temptations all too often. Their character and conduct always falls short of the standard of sinless perfection that God requires. But they *always* believe the gospel and *never* believe a false gospel, because God has ordained that salvation and belief of the gospel *always* go hand-in-hand. There is no one who believes a false gospel who is saved, and there is no one who believes the true gospel who is not saved. God, in His grace, preserves His people.

“Wait a minute,” another reader might ask, “Isn’t it risky, to say the least, to talk about sins that it is impossible for a believer to commit? Won’t this give people a false sense of security?” It is just as risky to talk about sins that it is impossible for a believer to commit as it is to say that none of a believer’s sins, no matter how much he sins, can bring him back under the condemnation of God. There will always be people who will say that this gives believers a license to sin. Of course, we need to be careful when we talk of sins that believers cannot commit and make sure that it is clear we are talking about *salvation* and *gospel* issues and not the many sins of character and conduct that believers can and do commit.

Think of those who claim that a regenerate person can fall into the sin of believing or confessing a false gospel. This is actually a denial of Efficacious Grace! It is a doctrine of a god who is helpless to keep his people from dishonoring his redemptive glory! It is a doctrine of a god whose people sometimes believe and confess salvation conditioned on the sinner! Remember -- salvation is God glorifying Himself in the hearts of sinners. If God sometimes fails to glorify Himself in the hearts of His people because His people sometimes fall into believing or confessing a false gospel, then His people are saved and then lost and then saved and then lost! And a god who cannot constantly glorify Himself in the hearts of His people is no God at all.

To those of you who do not believe the gospel (including all who think that a believer can lose his salvation): The verses mentioned above are not a comfort to you. They are a terror to you. When God mentions sins that are indicative of lostness, He is showing you that you are void of a righteousness that answers the demands of God’s law and justice. He is showing you that you are under His curse. He is showing you that you are bringing forth fruit unto death and that it is IMPOSSIBLE for you to bring forth good fruit. But Christ Jesus promises that all whom God the Father gives to Him, who come to Him pleading His atoning blood and imputed righteousness as the only ground of their salvation and who repent of ever thinking that salvation was conditioned on themselves will NEVER -- NO, NEVER -- be cast out, because He will not lose ANY of His sheep (John 6:37-39).

To those of you who believe the gospel: Rejoice! Be exceedingly glad! We have a God who not only causes us to believe the gospel (thus glorifying Himself in our hearts) when He saves us, but He KEEPS us believing the gospel and never lets us go! We will NEVER fall into believing a false gospel and thus losing our salvation, because God is One “*Who holds our soul in life and does not allow our foot to slide*” (Psalm 66:9); “*He will keep you; He will not give the righteous to waver, forever*” (Psalm 55:22).

“*Now to Him being able to KEEP YOU WITHOUT STUMBLING [KJV: KEEP YOU FROM FALLING], and to set you before His glory without blemish, with unspeakable joy; to the only wise God, our Savior, [be] glory and majesty and might and authority, even now and forever. Amen*” (Jude 24-25).

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