

Ultimate Perseverance.

Text: Heb 10:32-39

Suggested Hymns:

486, 490, 338, 236, 492

1) We Must Guard Against
Carnal Security And Despair.

2) We Must Place Our Hope Of Ultimate Perseverance
Not In Ourselves But In God.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Hebrews 10:32–39, ³² *But recall the former days in which, after you were illuminated, you endured a great struggle with sufferings: ³³ partly while you were made a spectacle both by reproaches and tribulations, and partly while you became companions of those who were so treated; ³⁴ for you had compassion on me in my chains, and joyfully accepted the plundering of your goods, knowing that you have a better and an enduring possession for yourselves in heaven.*

³⁵ *Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward. ³⁶ For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise: ³⁷ “For yet a little while, And He who is coming will come and will not tarry.*

³⁸ *Now the just shall live by faith; But if anyone draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him.” ³⁹ But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul. (NKJV)*

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

In speaking of the Latter Days our Lord Jesus says in Matthew 24:13, ¹³ *But he who endures to the end shall be saved.* In these words Jesus lays down final perseverance as a condition necessary to salvation.

This raises a very important question. Will I endure in faith unto the end? Can I be sure of my salvation? Is it not possible that I will lose my faith and be eternally condemned? Surely, there are many people who once believed and later fell away from the truth!

Do we not know some people who once attended church regularly and professed faith in the Lord Jesus Christ but who today are disinterested and give us every reason to believe that they have fallen from faith? Will we be numbered among them?

In order that we may not be driven to despair by such fear, or become carnally secure, let us consider *How We May Be Sure of Our Ultimate Perseverance*. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. We Must Guard Against Both Carnal Security And Despair.

Firstly, we need to acknowledge that faith can be lost. Our text says, ³⁵ *Therefore do not cast away your confidence. And But if anyone draws back. And ³⁹ But we are not of those who draw back to perdition.*

These verses make it very clear that it is possible to fall from faith. The apostle warns his readers, encourages them, and pleads with them, so that they will not “*draw back*.” The spiritually proud person ignores this important warning.

Calvinism teaches that it is impossible for a man who once truly believed to fall from faith. “Cromwell on his death-bed questioned his chaplain as to the doctrine of final perseverance and, on being assured that it was a certain truth, said: ‘*Then I am happy, for I am sure that I was once in a state of grace.*’”¹ This is a false hope.

Our text warns people not to “*Draw back to perdition*.” It is a false comfort to trust in the fact that we once believed. Let us not trust in a former religious state: “I used to go to Sunday-school, teach, sing in the choir, or serve as an office bearer in the church.”

There are many examples of people falling away in the Scriptures. In the Old Testament we read in Hosea 11:7, ⁷ *My people are bent on backsliding from Me. Though they call to the Most High, None at all exalt Him.*

And in Exodus 32:8, ⁸ *They have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them. They have made themselves a molded calf, and worshiped it and sacrificed to it, and said, ‘This is your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!’”*

And in Jeremiah 8:5, ⁵ *Why has this people slidden back, Jerusalem, in a perpetual backsliding? They hold fast to deceit, They refuse to return.*

Then in the New Testament we read of Demas in 2 Timothy 4:9–10. ⁹ *Be diligent to come to me quickly; ¹⁰ for Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world, and has departed for Thessalonica.*

We also read in Hebrews 10:26–29, ²⁶ *For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, ²⁷ but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries.*

²⁸ *Anyone who has rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. ²⁹ Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace?*

The object of faith is constant (being Jesus Christ), but the degree of faith is subject to change. It grows either weaker or stronger. It is the final state that counts.

That is why Jonas asked Luther on his death-bed whether he still confessed the faith that he had taught. You may think that you could never lose your faith. Beware lest you confuse the faith of the head with that of the heart. Our text calls saving faith “confidence.” You could also use the word “trust.” The warning is in 1 Corinthians 10:12, ¹² *Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.*

Our weak faith in times of affliction may cause us to despair. We read in our text, ³² *But recall the former days in which, after you were illuminated, you endured a great struggle with sufferings: ³³ partly while you were made a spectacle both by reproaches and tribulations, and partly while you became companions of those who were so treated; ³⁴ for you had compassion on me in my chains, and joyfully accepted the plundering of your goods, knowing that you have a better and an enduring possession for yourselves in heaven.*

When the converted Jews came to faith in Christ, they had to endure afflictions. Their property was sometimes stolen. They suffered bodily

afflictions. They became a gazing-stock, and were publicly ridiculed. The apostle Paul feared that many of them might not endure such tribulations, but sacrifice their faith. So he encourages them to persevere in spite of affliction.

When the Holy Spirit had first lit up their hearts with faith, friends had forsaken them and foes had hounded them. Those earlier days had not been easy, but had been a *great struggle*.

Their suffering had been intense, but they *endured*. They had stood their ground. In the first flush of faith, like the early Christians in Jerusalem recorded in Acts 5:41, they had endured, rejoicing that *“that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name.”*

Details of the *“great struggle”* follow. Sometimes the believers were publicly exposed to insult and persecution. Those Hebrew Christians had been publicly exposed and disgraced by the enemies of the faith. Insults and persecutions always hurt, but even more so when publicly inflicted.

Other times the believers got into trouble because they stood “side by side” with those who were being persecuted. Though silence could have spelled safety for them, they instead bravely “sympathised with those in prison.”

In those days prisoners often had to depend on relatives and friends for daily provisions. This is one reason why Christ in Matthew 25:36 says, *“I was in prison and you came to visit me.”* To visit Christians in prison meant to be identified with them and run the risk of sharing their fate. Yet this risk those sympathetic Christians had bravely taken. When identified as Christians, they had also suffered personally as their homes were broken into and plundered.

Did the readers remember those earlier days? Then they also had to remember that only good had come out of them. Persecution had forged bonds of fellowship so that they stood side by side with fellow believers. Persecution had developed resiliency of faith so that they could *“joyfully”* accept the loss of property. Persecution had sharpened their priorities so that heaven’s “better and enduring possessions” were most highly prized.

Others may tolerate trouble, but only believers can take it joyfully. They have heard the Saviour promise in Matthew 5:11–12, ¹¹ *“Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for*

My sake. ¹² *Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*

We need such encouragement today. Our afflictions are little compared with those of the early Christians. They suffered bodily persecution on account of their faith. Few of us have had that experience.

We may have to endure some ridicule at the hand of the worldly-wise, or sickness, or unemployment, or business worries, or poverty, or criticism, or misunderstanding, or lack of appreciation of what we do in church and home, and so on.

These concerns may cause us to wonder: Is there a God? Does God know? Why does He let these things happen? Does it do me any good to believe? Does God really desire my eternal salvation?

Afflictions may cause us to give up church attendance. But these afflictions are not intended by God for such a purpose. The Hebrews had withstood the first persecutions. Our text says, ³² *But recall the former days in which, after you were illuminated, you endured a great struggle with sufferings.*

All the things mentioned above ought to drive us closer to our Saviour. He understands and He upholds. But away from Him or separated from Him we become despondent.

God does not want us to fall either into carnal security or into despair. God warns us against drawing back. Drawing back means to draw back to perdition. We cannot draw back to salvation.

The Bible uses a picturesque word “*backslide*” or a derivative of that word some 17 times. As an illustration, a mountain-climber becomes careless and does not follow the directions of the guide. He begins to slide, to slip, and then falls helplessly to his death. Ordinarily people do not hurl themselves headlong to perdition; they backslide. We must guard against carnal security, but we must also guard against despair!

2. We Must Place Our Hope Of Ultimate Perseverance Not In Ourselves But In God.

God will keep us. Our text says, ³⁸ *Now the just shall live by faith.* But faith is the gift of God. We read in *Luther's Small Catechism* “*I believe that I*

cannot by my own understanding or effort believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him. But the Holy Spirit has called me through the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, and sanctified and kept me in the true faith."

Another word for "kept" is "preserved", the "*Holy Spirit ... has preserved me in the true faith.*"

The remembrance of God's help in earlier days sets the stage for the exhortation, "³⁵ ***Therefore do not cast away your confidence.***" Under the strain of present persecution, they were not to reject recklessly what they had recognised earlier as being so valuable. Regardless of what came, they were to cling to their confidence in Christ. "***It will be richly rewarded,***" is the promise. The heaven that God has promised us is for real and rich beyond measure.

This is no time to lose confidence and drop out like drained athletes or battle-weary soldiers. Instead, they needed to "***persevere,***" a rich word meaning to bear up patiently under heavy loads. What awaited them was just too valuable to lose. The words of Revelation 2:10, ***Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life,*** are a good explanation on this verse.

"***He who is coming***" refers to Christ, who came to Bethlehem and will come again on the Last Day. He "***will come,***" the author reminds the readers positively and then reinforces it negatively, "***He will not delay.***"

The persecution coming on those Christians might be drastic, and Christ's return might seem distant, but it was just a "***little while***" when compared to eternity. God's beleaguered people have always found encouragement in the message of the coming of Christ. While we wait through this little while, faithfulness is so important.

We who have been declared "righteous" through faith in Christ "***Shall live by faith.***" We live in an atmosphere of trust, leaning on God's promises, learning to see the invisible, looking ahead to eternity.

Which would it be for those hesitating Hebrew Christians? The author has warned them strongly, but he is not ready to give up on them. Identifying himself with them, he confidently states, ³⁹ ***But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul.***

Are any tired Christians reading these words? Any weary warriors who have found that the world still knows how to persecute souls who dare to speak out for Christ? Any licking invisible wounds received for standing against what is wrong and for what is right? Any, perhaps for the sake of ease, tempted to let the Saviour's banner dip and the scriptural confession drag? Then it is time to re-read these verses of Hebrews.

Martin Luther, expounding on this section of Hebrews to his students in that extremely difficult year of 1517 when he nailed up the Ninety-five Theses, remarked, "*He who relies on Christ through faith is carried on the shoulders of Christ.*" The faithful are carried on the shoulders of a loving Saviour. He bears them safely to the very mansions of heaven. To Him we draw near, not shrink back. And that is done only through His Word!

Let us remember that perseverance in the faith is the work of God. We read in 1 Peter 1:5 that we *are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.* And in Philippians 1:6 that *He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.*

Jesus Himself tells us in John 10:27–28, ²⁷ *My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.* ²⁸ *And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand.* Not one! If we trust ourselves, we will lose our faith. We will fail. But God will not. All the glory is His, also that of keeping us faithful unto the end. Let us comfort ourselves with this truth.

God will do it through His Word as we learn in Romans 10:17, ¹⁷ *So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.* By continually hearing, we firmly believe that Christ is coming again as our text says. This means that the all-important matter in life is to persevere in faith. We know that eternal joys are only for those who remain faithful.

By hearing the Word of God regularly we will remember that perseverance, confidence, and boldness in faith "*has great reward,*"² that "*you may receive the promise.*"³ God has promised eternal life to those who steadfastly believe His Word.

Our text tells us in the closing verse that *we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul.* That confidence

must be yours. God has given you His Word. God has sent His Son. Why? For your salvation. God has called you to faith. Why? For your salvation. Here we see God's earnest determination to save you.

The Word of God comforts us with the assurance that God will keep us from falling. Therefore use the means that God has given to us, the Word and the Sacraments.

Let us close with this word of Scripture Jude 24–25, ²⁴ *Now to **Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, And to present you faultless Before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy,*** ²⁵ *To God our Savior, Who alone is wise, Be glory and majesty, Dominion and power, Both now and forever. Amen.*

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ F. Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, St. Louis, Miss: CPH, 1953, Volume 3, p90

² v. 35

³ v. 36