

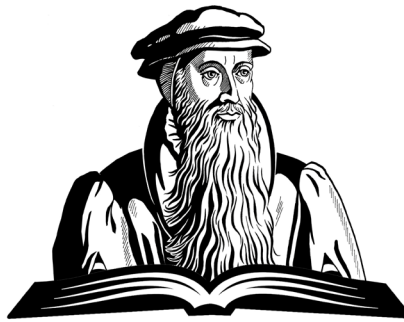
VIDEO LECTURE SERIES

# *The Application of Redemption*

by Rev. William Macleod

Lecture 11

## *The Perseverance of the Saints*



**The John Knox Institute  
of Higher Education**

*Entrusting our Reformed Inheritance to the Church Worldwide*

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Rev. William Macleod recently retired, after serving as minister of the gospel for 45 years at Knightswood Free Church of Scotland (Continuing), in Glasgow, Scotland. In addition, he was for many years the editor of the denominational magazine, *The Free Church Witness*. He was also Professor of Systematic Theology and Principal of the Free Church (Continuing) Seminary, in Inverness, Scotland. He is married and has three adult children and six grandchildren.

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# *The Application of Redemption*

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**12 Lectures**

1. The Order of Salvation
2. Total Depravity
3. Effectual Calling
4. Regeneration
5. Repentance
6. Saving Faith
7. Justification
8. Adoption
9. Sanctification
10. Union with Christ
11. Perseverance of the Saints
12. Glorification



We come now to lecture 11. This lecture is on *The Perseverance of the Saints*. What do we mean by the perseverance of the saints? Peter explains what it is, when he states that the Christian is “Kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation” (1 Peter chapter 1, verse 5). His epistle is addressed “to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia” (verse 1). These people were strangers on the earth, but they are the citizens of heaven, where an inheritance is awaiting them. Every true Christian is kept unto salvation, and so, preserved for that inheritance. They shall all enjoy heaven. Although they have many enemies on earth, yet they are safe and secure. They are feeble, and cannot keep themselves, yet God keeps them with his Almighty power. But this does not mean that they have no responsibility for themselves. They are kept through faith. The duty of the Christian is to believe, depend, follow, and pray, and it is only as he does this that he is kept, and all who trust in Christ will be kept. As gold emerges purified from the fire, so God will have his own precious ones prepared for glory. The dross is burnt up, but the child of God is kept safe and purified.

Now, thinking of the teaching of *Arminianism*. Arminian theologians object that the Scripture warn of the possibility of Christians falling away. Some verses seem to teach that this is a real danger. For example, Jesus’ words, where he says, “Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away:…If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered” (John 15, verses 2 and 6). Jesus also said, “He that endureth unto the end shall be saved” (Matthew 10, verse 22). Paul, the great Apostle, speaks of his fear of being a castaway: “But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway” (1 Corinthians 9, verse 27). These verses should be taken as warnings and challenges. Every true Christian will bear good fruit, and so, will not be cast away. Let us make sure that we are real Christians, and that we are bearing fruit. If we abide in Christ, we will be fruitful. Let us, then, abide in him. Those who endure unto the end will be saved, so, let us make sure that we endure. Paul warns of the danger of being a castaway. To make sure that he is not lost, he lives a disciplined life, laboring for the Master. None, who believe in Jesus as Savior, and follow him as Lord, will perish.

Thinking now, of *Theological Reasons for Believing in the Perseverance of the Saints*.

First, there's *God's electing love*, which has been set upon his people from before time began. This love of God is like God himself—it's infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, and therefore, God's people will always be loved.

Secondly, *Predestination is clearly taught in Scripture*. Predestination and the perseverance of the saints are intimately linked. God has foreordained all that comes to pass. He planned that the elect will be his holy children, and nothing will upset God's plan.

Third, *Christ has died for his people*. He has paid the price for all their sins, including their backslidings. His merit ensures heaven for his flock, whom he has purchased with his own blood. Limited atonement, that is, particular substitutionary atonement, and the perseverance of the saints go together. If Christ has suffered in our place, it would be unjust of God to require us also to suffer in hell.

Fourthly, *the Abiding Presence of the Spirit in the life of the believer guarantees heaven*. When a man is regenerated, the Holy Spirit comes to reside in his heart, and is there to unite him to Christ, to sanctify, and to glorify him. And the Spirit will not fail in this work.

Fifthly, *the Seed of God is within every Child of God*, and so he cannot sin unto death. He has been born of God.

Sixthly, *the Moment a Sinner Believes in Jesus, he is Justified*. That means that all his sins, past, present, and future, are forgiven. If all future sins are forgiven, how can his backslidings take him to hell?

Seventhly, *the Nature of the Covenant of Grace, as distinct from the Covenant of Works*, is such that the Christian will be preserved. Salvation is all of grace; it is not of works: "It is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy" (Romans 9, verse 16).

Next, looking at *the Prooftexts for Believing in the Perseverance of the Saints*. There are many verses of Scripture which would claim that the believer will be preserved. Jesus said, "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day" (John 6, verse 44). All who come to Christ will be raised up on the last day. In another place, he said, "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, verses 28 and 29). The Father is Almighty, and none, not even we ourselves, can pluck ourselves out of his hand. Paul wrote, "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" (Philippians 1, verse 6). When God begins working in a soul, he will complete it. He never leaves a job half done. Romans 8 contains a wonderful unbreakable chain, from foreknowledge for love, to glory: "For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate...whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified" (Romans 8, verses 29 and 30).

Now, thinking of *Antinomianism*. A contrasting view from that of the Arminians is that of Antinomianism. Heresies often emerge simply by people laying too much stress upon a certain truth to the exclusion of other truths. This is the case here, where the saying "Once saved, always saved" is stretched to imply that you can relax and do as you please, and you will still get to heaven. The Apostle asks, "Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?" (Romans 6, verses 1 and 2). Away with such a wicked thought! Anyone who would argue in that way, but especially anyone who would live in that way is simply demonstrating that they were never born again.

Perseverance is a better work than “security” or “preservation.” It has the idea in it of the effort involved in keeping on going, as well as the concept of being kept. We will only be kept as we persevere. But by grace, true Christians will always persevere. Not every professing Christian is saved. Many think they are true Christians when they are not. It is possible to be accepted by the church as a Christian, and yet, not to be one. In the parable of the sower, the rocky-ground hearer could initially appear to grow quickly, and yet have no fruit. Some people receive the Word with joy, yet have no root, and so eventually wither away in times of trial. Judas Iscariot was like that. Hebrews chapter 6, verses 4 to 6 speaks of those who were once enlightened, tasted the heavenly gift, were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, tasted the good Word of God and the powers of the world to come, and yet are fallen away. Sadly, they cannot be renewed to repentance. They tasted many good things, but went no further than that. They were not truly converted. Similarly, Peter gives a description of professing Christians who eventually, like the dogs, return to their own vomit (2 Peter 2, verse 22). This proves that their dog nature had not been changed, though they dressed as children. Are you a true Christian? Satan can give you experiences similar to conversion in order to inoculate you against conversion. Do not just take it for granted that you are saved. Repent and believe afresh each day, that Christ is your Savior, and follow him at your Lord, then you will never perish.

*True Christians Can Fall.* Tempted by Satan and the world, and weakened by indwelling corruption, true Christians can backslide horribly. If they neglect the means of grace—the reading of the Word, prayer, preaching, the sacraments, and Christian fellowship—they are in great danger. But they will only fall for a time. David, Peter, and Mark backslid like this. Simon, in Acts chapter 8, is different. Though he appeared to begin well, and was baptized, he was really still “in the gall of bitterness and the bondage of iniquity” (Acts 8, verses 21 and 22). When a Christian backslides, he displeases the Father and grieves the Holy Spirit. He loses the graces and comforts which God gives his people. His heart is hardened, and his conscience is wounded. He hurts his fellow Christians, and his scandal becomes an offense to others in keeping them from Christ. Open sin and backsliding brings chastisement and temporary judgments for those involved. And these chastisements and judgments can be exceedingly painful. Yet, the Father will restore the true Christian. A Christian can rejoice, can say to the enemy, “Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy: when I fall, I shall arise; when I sit in darkness, the LORD shall be a light unto me” (Micah 7, verse 8). God assures Israel, “I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely: for mine anger is turned away from him” (Hosea 14, verse 4). God Cares for His Children. “My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: for whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth” (Hebrews 12, verses 5 and 6).

*Is Assurance Possible?* Arminians, if consistent, must believe that assurance of salvation is not possible in this life, since, at any stage, a person can fall away and be lost. Yet, most of the Lord’s servants in Scripture had assurance. We are encouraged to “draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith” (Hebrews 10, verse 22). Paul confidently speaks of “a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day” (2 Timothy 4, verse 8). Jesus describes the way to find out what sort of trees we are, whether good or bad: “By their fruits ye shall know them” (Matthew 7, verse 20). Such fruits as love to God, love to the brethren, delight in God’s law, longsuffering in persecutions and afflictions, humility, brokenheartedness over sin, and trust in the merits of Christ alone will not grow on the evil, natural tree. God also gives to his people the witness of the Holy Spirit with their spirit, to assure them that they are God’s children. “The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God” (Romans 8, verse

16).

But at the same time, Peter warns us that we must give diligence to make our calling and election sure, and be certain that ye are saved (2 Peter 1, verse 10). You do that by “giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 1, verses 5 to 8). He then assures believers, “If ye do these things, ye shall never fall” (verse 10). Our duty is to persevere. We have a duty to persevere. We must keep on going: “Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience”—with perseverance—“the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith” (Hebrews 12, verses 1 and 2). Forgetting what is behind, we must press on toward the mark (Philippians 3, verse 13 and 14). As the Calvinistic Rev. Kenneth MacRae (1883–1964), my own minister in childhood, wrote in his final letter to the congregation before his death, “Hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown” (Revelation 3, verse 11).

So, *the Promise*. There are glorious promises in Scripture for God’s people, such as, “They shall be mine, saith the LORD of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels” (Malachi 3, verse 17). And another, really, “I will never leave thee nor forsake thee” (Hebrews 13, verse 5). Paul can write, “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” (Romans 8, verses 38 and 39).

So, *How to do the Duty and Promise Fit Together?* On Paul’s journey to Rome as a prisoner, after prolonged prayer and fasting, he assured those on the ship with him that every life would be saved. They were in the midst of a terrible storm, yet they were going to be saved. He was sure of this, since the angel of God had revealed it to him. Yet, he warned, when the sailors were trying to escape out of the ship in a small boat, he warned, “Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved” (Acts 27, verse 31). God had ordained that all would be saved, but he has also ordained the means to that end. Rejoice as you fight the good fight. You shall be more than conquerors (Romans 8, verse 37). But you must “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure” (Philippians 2, verse 12 and 13). Isaiah gives a wonderful promise: “The mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the LORD that hath mercy on thee” (Isaiah 54, verse 10). Amen.