**GRACE (#5)**

***Perseverance of the Saints***

Martin Luther and John Calvin are the two greatest names in the Protestant Reformation movement. Catholicism, with its powerful grip on the religious world of Europe from the fourth to the fourteenth centuries, had dictated a *works* salvation. The rise of the Catholic hierarchy had dominated the minds of Christians by insisting they devoutly obey all that the priests, bishops, archbishops, cardinals and pope demanded. If they wanted to go to heaven they must strictly keep the new “Pharisaic traditions” invented by the Roman clergy (Note: It would take several pages to list all the doctrines of the Catholic Church that became law and required absolute obedience to be saved).

But it was the selling of Indulgences, introduced in 1190 A.D., that triggered Luther’s rebellion on October 31, 1517. These man-made “works” that had to be obeyed had driven this simple German monk to despair. He had had enough. His study of the Bible, particularly Galatians and Romans, led him to his new position of “*Sola Gratia* – *Sola Fide*.” He said man is justified by *Grace Alone* by *Faith Alone*.

In Luther’s German translation of the Bible he wrote in Romans 3:28 *“Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith* ***alone*** *apart from the deeds of the law.”* He argued the word “*alone*” was implied and should be inserted. He argued wrong! The inspired James contradicted him by writing, *“Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect?”* (Jam. 2:22).

Martin Luther became a prolific preacher and writer, not only translating the entire Bible for the German people, but also publishing commentaries and sermons covering the whole Bible. His work caused a religious earthquake that still shakes the world. A few years later John Calvin came along and organized these doctrines of the Reformation into what is known as the T.U.L.I.P system. This acronym stands for:

**T**-otal depravity (all men inherit Adam’s sin and are born depraved).
**U**-nconditional election (God in His sovereign will chooses the destiny of all men and
 saves by His grace all those selected unconditionally = no works).
**L**-imited atonement (Jesus died for only this limited number of elected people).
**I**-rrisistable grace (God sends His Holy Spirit to pronounce a sinner has been saved, thus
 receiving His grace without anything the sinner might say or do).
**P**-erseverance of the Saints (i.e. Once saved, always saved. Eternal security.
 Impossibility of apostasy).

John Wesley, in his *Articles of Religion of the Church of England,* wrote this about being justified by faith alone leading to the Perseverance of the Saints:
 "We are accounted righteous before God, only for the merit of our Lord and Saviour
 Jesus Christ by faith, and not for our own works or deservings. Wherefore that we
 are justified by ***faith only*** is a most wholesome doctrine, and very full of comfort.”

If this doctrine were true it would indeed be “a most wholesome doctrine, very full of comfort.” I would love to think that my ticket to heaven was punched and that there was no way I could ever be “*fallen from grace*” (Gal. 5:4). The idea that God’s grace would arbitrarily and unconditionally “elect” me to be saved, then hold me from ever falling, would be a joy beyond compare. If it were only true …

But the doctrine of Perseverance of the Saints is not supported by scripture. Stop and think for a moment about the very purpose of the 21 epistles written to Christians. All of them in one way or another warned of the possibility of apostasy. The many, many warnings to Christians to remain faithful are meaningless if salvation is a “one and done” proposition. God’s grace can be accepted, then later rejected. Here is proof:

Can you name anyone in the Old Testament who was once in God’s favor (i.e. grace) then fell from it? Quickly scan the O.T. and think about that question. How about Adam and Eve (Gen. 3)? Or the Israelites out of Egypt (Exo.- Deut.)? Or Nadab and Abihu (Lev. 10)? Or king Saul (I Sam. 16:14)? There are many others, all of which reveal a man can be in God’s fellowship, only to lose it and be lost. Paul speaks of these OT souls when he says, *“Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. There-fore let him who thinks he stands take heed* ***lest he fall****”* (I Cor. 10:11-12).

In the New Testament nothing changes. I’m sure most of us would say an elder in the church is saved. But look what God said can happen to him:
*“not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he* ***fall*** *into the same condemnation as the devil. Moreover he must have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest he* ***fall*** *into reproach and the snare of the devil”* (I Tim. 3:6-7).

Paul then spoke of Christian women who had suddenly been widowed. There was danger in their circumstances. Hear him: *“But refuse the younger widows; for when they have begun to grow wanton against Christ, they desire to marry, having condemnation because they have* ***cast off their first faith****”* (I Tim. 5:11-12).

I could multiply these examples a hundred-fold (Heb. 6:4-6; Jam. 5:12,19-20; I Pet. 1:10; 3:17; 2 Pet. 2:20-22; Rev. 2-3 read Christ’s condemnation to saints in 5 churches).

But I do not want to end this discussion without saying this about God’s grace:

***I BELIEVE IN THE ETERNAL SECURITY OF THE CHRISTIAN!***

The epistle of First John was written just for this purpose. Over and over again he tells us we can “***know***” we are saved! Study I John 2:3-5,11,18,20,21,29; 3:1,2,5,14,15,16,19, 24; 4:2,6,8,13; 5:2,13,15,18,19,20. *Know* is found 29 times in chapters 2-5. *GINOSKO* (*know*) reveals a deep understanding and certainty of my confidence in God’s saving grace. I can be sure I’m going to heaven. That guarantee is best explained in John’s words (3:20-22):
 **“For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things. Beloved, if our
 heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God. And whatever we ask we receive
 from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight”**

Saints that persevere are homeward bound. As long as I walk in the light of Christ I have eternal security (I Jn. 1:5-2:2). It’s a great feeling. My friends, that’s grace.

I love you. – Rick