

Perseverance - Part 3

by Richard Owen Roberts

The sermon emphasizes the importance of perseverance in the faith, warning against the dangers of apostasy and willful sin, and encouraging believers to live a life of commitment and faithfulness to Jesus Christ.

Duration: 49:07

Scripture: Hebrews 10:23-24, Hebrews 10:26, Hebrews 10:32-35, Hebrews 12:1-2

Topics: "Perseverance"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker encourages the listeners to strengthen themselves in the face of difficulties and persecution. He shares a personal story of climbing a tower as a child and how he no longer has the same ease and confidence to do so. The speaker then recounts a situation where he made a hurtful comment to his wife, but was convicted by God to apologize and change his behavior. He relates this to the warning in Hebrews 10:32, reminding the audience of the sufferings and persecution they endured for their faith. The speaker emphasizes the importance of standing firm in their belief in Christ, even in the face of opposition and the seizure of their property.

Transcript

The third warning is dealing with apostasy. The first warning, you remember, is dealing with neglect. How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation? We remind ourselves again, the neglect under the old covenant was as nothing in comparison with the neglect of Christ.

And if under the old covenant the punishment was so severe for neglect, whatever hope would there be for someone under the new covenant? The second warning dealt, as you recall, with the issue of hardening the heart. And we have the powerful illustration of those in the wilderness who hardened their hearts, not once, not twice, but not less than ten times. And there was this amazing loving kindness on God's part, this tender mercy permitting hardening after hardening after hardening, but finally God had had enough.

But now take the case of my acquaintance, I couldn't call him a friend, we haven't seen him for years, he left his wife, he lived in a variety of relationships for a while, he married somebody else finally, it's only the broken-hearted girl and her children that we see. But what about him? Well, let me read again Maggie's statement, saved is saved, once saved always saved, we believe that with all our hearts, don't we? It's just that I'm urging you not to use language like that because it fortifies the wrong people. People think that salvation is a momentary experience and they say, well having had the experience I'm okay, I'm saying to

you, I'm not questioning the truth, I love the truth, but you don't understand salvation when you use the term that way, so I'm saying speak carefully, speak about the perseverance of the saints, but nonetheless the truth is there, saved is saved, once saved always saved, lost is lost, but not necessarily, once lost always lost.

Now, it's easy when you think about the passage and take into consideration everything that's said, how can a person be saved? By repenting of their sin and embracing Jesus Christ. How can a person be saved who rejects Christ? And what the third warning is talking about is a person who seemed to have been coming along in the things of Christ, but apostatizes, denies the only Savior, there's no chance of his being saved ever if he denies the only hope of salvation that God offers, but suppose he comes in a broken hearted spirit of repentance to embrace the Lord Jesus Christ and does so willfully and finally and perseveres in the faith of Christ, can he be saved despite the years of apostasy? Gloriously, yes, don't ever fear, insofar as we know the door of salvation is always open, but, but, but, but, some of you heard me preach here at Cedars some years ago on a passage from first Thessalonians and the sermon was published in a booklet entitled the legal limit on sin, if you haven't read that I would urge you to do so. We don't know what the legal limit is, we are taught in scripture that there does come a time when God says that's it, your measure of sin is full, but if you have someone in your family, someone you're burdened for, who seemed to be coming along, who seemed to fit the descriptions here in the third warning and then they fell away, should you just regard them as hopeless and say I'm not going to waste any prayers on that person, oh dear friends, I beseech you, I urge you, I implore you, love them and seek to pray them into the kingdom of God.

This passage is not meant to discourage us from seeking the reclamation of the wavered and the apostate, this passage is here to teach us that one cannot live as an apostate and be a Christian. I hope you've gotten the picture here of these warnings, but now let's move to the fourth warning. I shall be glad to answer any questions I possibly can privately after the meeting, I know that some of you may find some of what I say a kind of novel, even shocking, but I assure you I am not presenting anything to you but what was standard doctrine in the church for centuries.

But the third warning, 10-19, sense therefore brethren, we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which he inaugurated for us through the veil, that is his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith. May I pause there and urge all of you to do exactly what this invitation bids you to do, draw near with a full assurance of faith and a sincere heart. If you are lacking assurance, you are engaged in an activity that is unnecessary, unwise, debilitating, and that you should cease immediately.

The faith that saves, as I said yesterday, is the faith of Jesus Christ that he gives, and it is more than ample for every single person in this room. We are not going to be barely saved, we are going to be gloriously saved. Some take a passage out of 1 Peter to lead their thinking to suppose that some will just make it into the kingdom.

The passage that says, if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear? Now, I don't want to hurt anybody's feelings, but sometimes the King James Bible does us grievous injustice, and that is one case where this is absolutely true. That passage does not suggest scarcely in the sense of by the skin of your teeth. Nobody whom Christ saves will be saved by the skin of their teeth.

When Christ does a job, he does a glorious job, he does a full job, he adds plenitude to it. There is the measure that's running over in the grace of God. That passage in Peter is talking about difficulty.

If the righteous are saved with great difficulty, they are. Now, that's a passage that will help you to get the right use of the word saved. That passage is talking about those who have already been made righteous, the justified.

And it says, if those who have been made righteous, the justified, are saved with great difficulty, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear? Now, what is the great difficulty? Well, if you take the context of the chapter, the great difficulty are the trials and the tribulations that God brings into the life of the believer. When we become Christians, we don't mount a glory cloud and drift gaily into heaven. We are faced with immense difficulties.

I don't know about you, but the more fervent Maggie and I become about the work of God and the revival of the nation, the greater the difficulties seem to be. We're being saved with great difficulty. But we were not made righteous with great difficulty, not us.

Our righteousness was secured with great difficulty, but not by us, but by Christ. He's our righteousness. It cost him a huge price to secure our righteousness in taking our sins on his own shoulders on the tree and dying in our place.

And all that that involved in the life of Jesus Christ was immensely costly for us. But for us to receive his righteousness, we had only to exercise the gift of faith that was given to us. And so with complete ease, we reached out and embraced the Lord Jesus Christ and became justified, our sins forever gone and ourselves forever placed by adoption into the family of God.

But still, salvation, as I've tried to teach you, is the big term that includes sanctification and includes glorification. It's the sanctification that's accomplished with great difficulty. And the passage before us is a passage dealing with this theme.

Let me read on. Let us hold fast the confession of our faith or our hope without wavering for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another and all the more as you see the day approaching.

For if we go on sinning willfully, after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain terrifying expectation of judgment and a fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries. Now, dear friends, you see how those last two verses tie in so immediately with the third warning. When a person apostatizes, they go on sinning willfully.

Someone asked me how, dear Raylate, 1 John 1, 9, if we confess our sins, he's faithful and just to forgive us our sins with these Hebrew passages. Well, obviously, in my mind, they relate beautifully. As long as we are in the vine, remaining in the vine, we are confessing our sin.

We're not going on sinning willfully. Let me ask you now, your own heart, when you sin, what happens? Why, if you've got a Christian heart, you're filled with indignation. Oh, how could I have done that? How could I have grieved my Savior? How could I have offended the Holy Spirit? Oh, God, forgive me, what an awful thing I've done.

But there are people who sin and shrug their shoulder. They sin willfully. There are people who do say to the Lord, I will go thus far, but no farther.

Don't you plan on any full commitment from me? I don't want it. I don't need it. I've got enough grace to save me.

That's all I'm interested in. I just want to escape the fire of hell, and that I've done, and from now on, life is mine to do as I please. Well, now, how can a Christian heart speak selfishly? It's not the first and the greatest commandment.

Love God with all of your heart, all of your soul, all of your strength, all of your mind. How can you love yourself more than Christ and still be a Christian? How can you say thus far and no farther? How can you willfully sin? It's inconceivable. It's beyond possibility.

A Christian does sin. All of us have sinned. I've hardly understood it.

Indeed, there was a time in my life when following a sin, I would say, I don't think I'm even a Christian. No Christian could do what I've done. But that's when I needed to learn that distinction I mentioned to you between faith and performance.

And when I got that straight, I was still heartbroken over my sin, but I wasn't defeated. That's the step I know some of you need to make. Yes, you'll still sin from time to time.

But if you've got a Christian heart, you rise up in indignation. But here, he says, if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there's no longer remaining a sacrifice for sins, but a certain terrifying expectation of judgment and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries. Isn't that exactly what we had in the third warning? There's no hope for the person that apostatizes and pushes Christ aside.

Christ, as I've already told you, is the Savior, the only Savior, and no one can push him aside. And we do push him aside when we willfully sin. I spoke of one of my college mates who told me not long ago that there had never been a time in his life, and he's speaking of his life as a Christian, when he did not have at least two and often three and four women he was sleeping with.

But this man told me something else. I won't give you the details of the story. It's a horrible one, one of the worst cases that I've ever known.

But he came to hear me last year when I was preaching in one of the Virginia cities, four days of services. And the first night he said to me, I realized I never did repent, never, because my real sin was not sex. My real sin was pride, and I never repented of being proud.

The final night of the meetings, he looked at me, tears streaming down his face. He said, you are the only man I know who has remained faithful and whom I could open my heart to this way and ask this question. Do you think that there's any way I can find the way of repentance? And then he said to me, this week in these services, it dawned on me when my life turned astray.

He said, as you know, I was in the Air Force at the time of my marriage. We did not have opportunity for a honeymoon because I had no leave. So we were on the base immediately after marriage.

Two or three days after the wedding, I came to our little apartment and came in and my wife was there and greeted me warmly. And I said to her in fun, where's my supper? When I get home, I want my supper on the table. But he said it was all in good fun.

But she started to cry. I want my supper. Woman, get busy and get my supper.

Didn't sound like fun, but he insisted it was all in good fun. And she rushed into the bedroom and shut the door. And the Lord spoke to his conscience and said, go in there immediately.

Take her in your arms. Ask her for forgiveness and promise you'll never behave this way again. But as he heard one voice, he also heard another voice that said, you now know how to control this woman.

Raise your voice and she becomes like a timid rabbit. And he chose evil instead of good. He willfully chose to sin.

And more than 50 years later, he's telling me about this and for the first time acknowledging it to anybody, that he willfully chose to sin and asking me the question, for someone like me, is there any way of repentance? I didn't answer. I didn't try to answer. I still don't know whether he even wants to find the way of repentance.

I've no reason to think he's ever been back and apologized to this woman. I don't even have any evidence that he's given up illicit sex. He's still in the ministry.

As are many others like this. Well, for persons who willfully chose to sin, there awaits this terrifying expectation of judgment. But notice now what follows.

Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much severe punishment do you think he will deserve? Who has trampled underfoot the Son of God and is regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified and has insulted the spirit of grace? When one chooses to willfully sin, they need to recognize that literally what they're doing is trampling underfoot the Son of God. Literally what they're doing is regarding the blood of the covenant as an unclean thing.

Literally what they're doing is insulting the spirit of grace. How can a person insult the spirit of grace and be eternally saved? It is inconceivable. So, one can appear to have become a Christian and willfully apostatized and remain in apostasy throughout life, or one can appear to have become a Christian and willfully sin and remain in willful sin throughout life.

And in both cases, the effect is the same. There is only one Savior, Jesus Christ, and you can't kick him and trample the blood of his covenant under your feet and despise and insult the Holy Spirit and be saved. It's just beyond possibility.

And if you know the way of righteousness and won't walk in it, it is an insult to the Holy Spirit. So, friends, the practical issue is these relatives of yours, these friends of yours, these multitudes of people in the church who have been led falsely to believe they're Christians and who do willfully sin. How can we go on insisting that they're safe and secure? You know, the feeling of many is, well, I know they're not quite right now, but God is bound to bring them back.

No, I'll tell you what God is bound to do. A person whom he has chosen and is saving, he is bound to give the spirit of perseverance. And when a person does not have the spirit of perseverance, there's no reason why we should insist on something God gives us no grounds to insist concerning.

That, I believe, is where some of us need to make a major adjustment. When we are in the vine, as Brother Henry has been teaching us, we don't go on willfully sinning. We do not apostatize.

If we apostatize and remain, if we willfully sin and remain, what awaits us is the terrifying judgment of God. Verse 30, We know him who said, Vengeance is mine, I will repay, and again the Lord will judge his people. It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

Suppose that you are one of these who has been falsely fortifying a person who supposes they're a Christian and has either apostatized or living in willful sin. If you love them, what ought you to do? You ought to hold before them the terrifying aspects of God. It's a fearful thing to fall into the hands of a holy God.

He does say, Vengeance is mine. He does repay. But over and throughout my experience, I have seen someone defend a wayward person and insist that they were a Christian despite willful sin in their life.

Now don't try to convince me that you love someone when you insist they're a Christian despite their willful sin. If you love them, you'll hang the terrifying aspects of God over their heads. You'll make them face the fact that they are demonstrating a lawlessness that indeed is of an eternal nature.

But in verse 32, there's a bit of a turn now in the warning. Remember the former days when after being enlightened, you endured a great conflict of sufferings partly by being made a public spectacle through reproaches and tribulations and partly by becoming sharers with those who were so treated. For you showed sympathy to the prisoners and accepted joyfully the seizure of your property knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and an abiding one.

Now I referred to two of those verses yesterday in describing the situation that existed when these people were being urged by their family to give up this irrational new religion and to return to Judaism. I told you about Nero's garden parties. I read this passage to you and said people had their goods seized.

People were being persecuted severely for their stand for Christ. In fact, some had animal garments or, excuse me, animal skins placed over them and they were then put in the arena with lions. And of course, in many instances, they were devoured by the lions.

It cost in those days to be a believer. And so now you see we have a warning to us that is couched in the language of endurance. The language pertaining to which I've already spoken when I called your mind the words, if the righteous be saved with great difficulty.

What hope is there for the unbelieving, for the faithless? It is going to cost you a great deal to be sanctified. A lazy man who won't even think of God and realize he has a soul doesn't stand a ghost of a chance. But see how he spells this matter of endurance out.

Do not throw away your confidence which has a great reward. For you have need of endurance so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised. For yet in a very little while, he who is coming will come and will not delay, but my righteous one shall live by faith.

And if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him. But we're not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul. And surely at least some of us are acquainted with persons who found walking the narrow way and living in the life of Jesus did on occasion at least offer hardship and great difficulty.

And they chose not to press on. You see, they were supposedly converted in a situation that made it all so simple that it was foolish not to respond. But when they came to the real truth of what it means to be a Christian, if anybody would be my disciple, said Jesus, let him deny himself.

Let him take up his cross and let him follow me. Now, did Jesus walk on easy roads? Was Jesus' pilgrimage a cinch? No! He had immense difficulty. And if I'm going to follow him, it's going to cost me something.

And before ever I lead anybody in a prayer of repentance, I want them to understand that what they're doing is calling upon Jesus Christ to save him and offering themselves up as a living sacrifice, saying, I will take up my cross. I will follow you. I care not what it costs.

I will follow Jesus until the very end. And if someone doesn't understand this issue of endurance, you've done them great disservice in leading them to think they've become a Christian before they've counted the cost. But we've already done it, and we've got multitudes of casualties strewn all about us in the church world.

People who, as long as they thought it was a cinch, and they had heaven at the end of the line, grabbed it. My own children came home one day from a youth meeting, and they said, Dad, what do you think about people who use Christ as a fire escape from hell? I said, would you care to give me more details? Well, yes, we've just come from church. We were in the youth meeting.

It was obvious that a good number of the young people don't care anything about Christ, but they sure don't want to go to hell. And so they've accepted Christ, and it's really just a fire escape from hell, as near as we can see. What do you think? Well, more important, I said, is what do you think? I'm not shying the question.

Well, we think, said my own two children, that that's just foolishness. Yes, I said, that's what your dad thinks. It's just foolishness.

Christ is not an implement to be used, but a Savior to be loved. And if someone hasn't embraced the Savior in love, and is not going to persevere and endure, we have no reason at all to suppose that their faith is anything other than false. But now let me move with you to the fifth warning.

The first, as I've said, involves neglect. The second, the hardening of the heart. The third, apostatizing.

The fourth, willful sin or lack of endurance in the midst of tribulation. The fifth deals with rebellion under discipline. Chapter 12, verse 1. Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.

For consider him who endured such hostility by sinners against himself, so that you may not grow weary and lose heart. Dear friends, if you're languishing, if you are weary, if you've been considering turning back, consider him who endured such contradiction of sinners. Think of what Christ paid already for your salvation and your daily progress in grace.

How do you dare grow weary when the one who purchased your salvation endured on your behalf what he endured? And if ever you're languishing, think of the Lord Jesus Christ and what he endured for you. You think your pain is great, you think your suffering is immense, as one of our dear brothers mentioned somewhere along the line this weekend, there are those people who feel that nobody's suffering equals their suffering. Oh baloney, we already have the foolishness of that pointed out to us.

Look at these words in verse 4, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin. You think you've had it hard? Just look at your hands, they're still there, they haven't been cut off. Look at your feet, oh you may be crippled by arthritis, you might have some other physical pains, but you haven't shed blood in your resistance against evil.

You weren't carried to a cross, you weren't martyred like the early disciples, what are you complaining about? You've scarcely paid anything yet, and the paying is not to earn, the paying is to say thanks. Isn't that why we endure? Because we love the Savior and we're overwhelmed with his love toward us, and our heart says there is no amount of pain, no amount of suffering that I could possibly endure that would be sufficient in saying thank you Lord. And then see how he follows these words about shedding blood and striving against sin.

You have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons. My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor faint when you are reprov'd by him. For those whom the Lord loves, he disciplines, he scourges every son whom he receives.

It is for discipline that you endure, God deals with you as sons, for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? But if you're without discipline of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them. Shall we not rather be subject to the father of spirits and live? Now friends, I am going to make a statement that could offend someone.

We have this silly notion in our day that the devil is responsible for every bad thing that happens to us. I was with Brother Henry, I don't remember how long ago, but I remember it was a meeting in Atlanta. You know, someone somehow had gotten in this notion that the devil is to blame for everything, and I remember so distinctly Henry saying, if you credit everything to the devil, where does God have any opportunity to speak to you? Oh, what a truth that is.

And here in the passage, friends, we have got to face the fact that because the Lord loves us, he brings us under his discipline. It's not Satan attacking us every time we have a pain and a heartache and a hardship. Oh, I don't mean to imply Satan is dead.

I do believe in the wiles of the devil, and I acknowledge that Satan even got permission to give a hard time to dear old ancient Job. But I believe with all my heart that whom the Father loves, he chastens. I had a father as you had a father, and my father chastened me.

And when he was gone to glory, I felt among other things, but more strongly than most things, the loss of my father's rebukes. Because not regularly, but even as a full-grown man long in ministry, my dad from time to time would take me aside and say, I heard you say, or I saw you do, and I believe you've made a grievous mistake. I wish I still had his loving discipline.

But having a father who loved me and disciplined me, and respecting and honoring him, and even paying respects to him in front of you, how could I be churlish about the loving treatments at my heavenly father's hand when he knocks me down with his love, when he forces me to realize where I have been wandering, when he brings into my life some great difficulty. And it is, as I said to you our first meeting, it is like a summons to Job, come on up higher, come on up higher. Now, when I was a young boy climbing the steps to the towers, I did with ease.

Last week, Margaret and I were in western Illinois, and every time we went to the place of service, we passed this high tower that just circled up and up. It was a view. And if you climbed the tower, you could see magnificent scenery in a tri-state area.

But never once did I think of climbing that tower. Not once, not once. Hard for me to get up and down off the platform to say nothing of that tower.

As a youth, we sometimes endure with ease our Father's discipline. As we grow older, sometimes His loving discipline is received at greater cost to us. It almost seems to be harsh.

What we welcomed as youth now seems to be the Father's abandonment. Oh, friends, you'll never have abandonment unless you have no discipline. It's the lack of discipline that proves God is not with you.

It's the presence of discipline that demonstrates His tender, loving care ongoing in your life even as you grow aged. And here the warning is when the discipline mounts up and the way seems ever so hard and you're wondering, is there a way through this labyrinth, this wilderness? Remember the love of God. Remember what the Savior already endured.

No matter what it's costing you, it doesn't look like bloodshed yet, does it? Therefore, strengthen the hands that are weak, the knees that are weak. That's what I would have had to have done to climb that tower. I'd have had to have some strengthening in the feeble knees.

Make straight paths for your feet so that the limb which is lame may not be put out of joint but rather healed. Pursue peace with all men and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord. See to it, oh brothers and sisters, see to it that no one comes short of the grace of God, that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled, that there be no immoral or godless person like Esau who sold his own birthright for a single meal.

For you know that even afterwards when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected for he found no place of repentance though he sought it with tears. Did you hear my account of a college chum who lived in multiple adulteries all of his married life and with tears streaming down his face? He says, you are the one true Christian that I know. Is there any hope for me? How could I say yes? I read here about someone who sought a way of repentance with bitter tears, but he never found it.

I would not dare to say yes or no. The most I would dare to say is, oh, I hope with all my heart you will find a way of true and enduring repentance. What a sober warning that is.

And see the progression. You grow careless in the realization of the responsibility of those of us who have Christ instead of merely Moses and the law. You become neglectful.

Over a period of time, you harden your heart and you apostatize. Then you willfully sin. There's no endurance found in you.

Rebellion mounts up in the heart. And lo, you're in danger of being an Esau who sold his birthright for a mess of pottage. But the final warning, verse 25, see to it that you do not refuse him who is speaking.

Now notice that the him is capitalized. It's not me that it's referring to. It's not even the author of Hebrews.

I am speaking to you. I am speaking the word of Hebrews. But it is the word of him who is above all.

For if those did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less shall we escape who turn away from him who warns from heaven. And his voice shook the earth then. But now he has promised, saying yet once more, I will shake not only the earth but also the heaven.

And this expression yet once more denotes the removing of those things which cannot be shaken or rather the removal of those things which can be shaken as of created things in order that those things which cannot be shaken remain. Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and fear for our God is a consuming fire. And there, my dear friends, is the end of my brief series.

Let us show gratitude. Those who are guilty of neglect are guilty of a lack of gratitude. Those who harden their hearts are guilty of a lack of gratitude.

Those who apostatize are guilty of a lack of gratitude. Those who willfully sin are guilty of a lack of gratitude. Those who do not endure are guilty of a lack of gratitude.

Those who rebel at the loving discipline of the Lord are guilty of a lack of gratitude. It is a grateful heart that makes a persevering saint. Amen.

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