

V 1,6,8,9; Rom. 8:28-38; Phil. 2:12-13; Preservation of the Saints I. The Proof for Preservation II. The Means of Preservation III. The Benefits of Preservation

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, this morning we bring to a conclusion our recent evening series- the 5 heads of doctrine as found in the Canons of Dort. We end with the "P" of TULIP- called the perseverance of the saints. As we have seen over the last weeks, the elect are chosen by the Father, died for and saved by the Son- and worked within and regenerated by the effective Spirit. Salvation is from beginning to end a work of our Sovereign God! We started our series by asking- why do some people believe while others do not. Now we conclude our series by asking -can those who really and truly believe lose that salvation? Is it true that once you are saved, you are always saved? The RCC teaches that you can lose your salvation. That you can lose saving grace because of a mortal sin, and thus you will need to be re-justified. The Arminians teach that you can be born again- again and again. Well- today we see that Jesus Christ finally and fully preserves His people.

I. The Proof for Preservation

We start by considering the proof for this doctrine called preservation. Now in speaking about the 5th head of doctrine, some call it perseverance. The Word, perseverance speaks to this work from our perspective. There is a persistence- a staying power when it comes to our true faith and being united to Christ. A steadfastness despite difficulty. We see the saints persevere to the end! That those who are joined to Christ in faith endure to the end. Others prefer the term- preservation. This term focussed on the work of God from His perspective. God preserves His people- they are under the constant care and protection of God until the end. God promises to bring His people safely home. God preserves them and keeps them until they arrive in glory with Him. Throughout this head of doctrine, both terms are used to describe this work of God. And to whom does this work apply to? The elect- those who are called saints- the members of Christ's body. This concept teaches that those who are in Christ will not go down to defeat, but that they at the work of God will have the complete victory! Our art. 1 says it

this way- Those whom God calls into communion with His Son are regenerated by His Spirit and also delivered from slavery to sin and from the body of sin. It is God's work from beginning to end. Our text from Rom. 8:29ff reveals the golden chain of our salvation. Each link is established by God- He begins and ends His work. Those whom God foreknew He predestined. He called, justified and will glorify the same! The same group enjoys each benefit! And since this golden chain is forged by God- it remains strong, steadfast and true. To say this another way, it is impossible for any link in this chain to be broken. As we read in Art. 8- it is utterly impossible for those chosen by God to fall from grace and perish! Impossible because God does not lie- His promises cannot be broken- His council cannot be changed and His purposes cannot be revoked! To say this another way- the alternative to preservation is impossible! Would it be that God would set His love on one- that the Son would die for this one- and the Spirit dwell within this one- and for that one not to be ultimately saved? Far be it from God for His work to be in vain! As our reading from Rom. 8:35 continues- nothing can separate us from the love of God that is ours in Christ! Nothing- not height or depth- no Satan or man- not sin or even death! Nothing- no power can remove us from the strong arms of our loving God! It is a secured work- nothing can undo what He has done! Nothing can erase what He writes! As we read a few weeks ago from John 10- no one can snatch from the hands of Jesus! He will not lose one that was given to Him! Our triune God preserves those whom He has delighted to save! He who began a good work in us will be faithful to complete it- Phil 1. Not one whose name is written in the Lamb's book of life will be lost!

II. The Means of Perseverance

Children, have you ever held your father's hand when you crossed the road? When you were little- your dad would take your hand to keep you safe- to guide you and keep you from danger. Now imagine that you were being ornery one day- and you tried to wiggle your hand out of your dad's. If your dad is really strong- the only thing that happened was that his grip increased and your hand was squeezed harder- but you could not get your hand out. In a similar way, God keeps us in His hands. Now it is the strength

of our God that keeps us in His hands- but like a loving child we are called to hold God's hand back. In other words, the sovereign work of God does not excuse or negate the need for our responsive work. Although it is true that nothing can remove us from God's hand, we also want to remain in God's hand. We are called to use the God-given means within the framework of His preserving us! Our God not only uses means to produce faith and repentance in us- He also uses means to establish and preserve His people! As we read in Phil 2:12, work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you. So what are the means that God delights to use to preserve His people? Well- there should be no surprise here- once again it is the means of grace. Look at Art. 14. God preserves, continues and perfects His work in us by the preaching of the gospel. As we hear and meditate on His work, He continues to draw us closer to His side! Scripture includes warning and threats for those who are straying- sliding into sin. Sometimes He thunders against us- to stir our sleeping soul and to wake us from our slumber! The hammer that breaks stones also chisels and shapes us. But it also contains promises and exhortations to encourage and challenge us in our spiritual growth. He is pleased to speak to us tenderly- to draw us closer to His breast! The tender, warm and loving words of the perfect husband towards his wife- the kisses of love- His banner of love at his banqueting table as the Song of Solomon says. These are the fragrances of lavender that pull our affections towards the One worthy of all love! Why is this needed? Why does God need to continue His work within us by His Spirit and Word? If it is true that once we are saved- born again- we can never be lost- why not just sin so that grace can abound? Well, our Canon is also clear in reflecting Scriptures' picture of our weakness! The fact is, daily sins and spiritual sicknesses- blemishes and infirmity as art. 2 says- still cleave to us! The fact is, we are not there! We are still not perfect and holy as God is Holy! We still battle indwelt sin, so we daily take up our cross and follow Christ! Our sin and daily struggle cause us to constantly flee to Christ- our present sin causes us to press on towards the goal- by prayer, piety and the presence of the Spirit we put to death the sins that remain and come alive in the image of Christ! In other words, the

preservation of the saints does not cancel the call for the sanctification of the saints! The question is this- if salvation is guaranteed- what about sin? Does sin threaten that which God promised? We can and do fall into sin- and this sin grieves both God and us! So we stand guard- we watch and pray! And if we do sin- even if we grievously sin- we do not despair God's mercy and grace. We cannot lose the seed of regeneration as Art. 7 says- but we can injure our souls and grieve the Holy Spirit. So we still respond to sin by confession and repentance- praying that God would restore to us the joy of His salvation like David did in Psalm 51. David did not need to be re-born again- but God did hide His face for a time- until David was restored! The perseverance of the Saints does not mean that we won't sin, but it does mean that we won't remain in that sin. Complete victory is promised! As James 1 says- those who remain steadfast- who have stood the test- will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love Him! It is also true that every true Christian will hate sin- and love righteousness!

III. The Benefits of Preservation

Finally, we come to the benefits of preservation. Why is the doctrine such a comforting truth? The benefit is that we can receive great assurance! The design of the preservation of the saints is to provide great consolation for pious souls! Not only is the preservation of the saints a truth to be embraced- because it is true! It is also a great blessing- a truth to be celebrated! As art. 9 states, true believers do obtain assurance according to the measure of their faith. Assurance means that we can be certain of this truth- that I am and always will be a living member of Christ and His church. I am convinced- I know for sure that my sins have been forgiven in Christ's blood! This solid comfort is found only as we look to Christ and hold fast to His promises. It is produced- as Art. 10 says- by way of the Word and the Spirit. The Spirit witnesses with my spirit- as Rom. 8:16 says- so that we have a dual witness. There is agreement between what the Spirit is saying- and what I feel and know in my heart- that I am a child of God. But this solid comfort is not for everyone. There is warning necessary as well, there have been and always will be until the end- hypocrites within the church. These weeds sown among the wheat do

not really and truly believe. One day they will be exposed. By their fruit you will know them. Or as I John 2 says, these went out from us because they were never one of us. As Judas illustrates, simply being in the community does not exclude the need for true and living faith. And as we have seen today, a true faith is a steadfast faith! Like the good soil- that receives the word and produces a fruit. Not like the rocky soil- that at first looks good only to wither away when trials come. A True Christian is one that remains steadfast under trials. Words are easy to say- emotions or peer pressure can cause false professions of faith to be made. Only a steadfast and enduring faith- he who endures to the end- that one is the one who will receive the crown. That is the one that is preserved by our loving God!

To conclude, the preservation of the saints is a doctrine of great worth and comfort for us. It is also a reason for great rejoicing in our God! Listen to the conclusion of art. 15- to this one God, Father Son and Holy Spirit, be honor and glory forever! Jesus Christ finally and fully preserves His people. I know whom I have believe, and I am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him until that Day.