

CD V: 3 and 8; Phil. 1:6; I Thes. 5:23-24; The Preservation of the Saints I. The Work Began II. The Work Completed III. The Truth Defended

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, can a mother forget her child? This stirring question from Isaiah 49 get to the heart of our issue today. Is it possible for a mother to forget and neglect a child she has just given birth to? Yes, unfortunately it is possible! But it should never be! Mothers have a maternal instinct to protect and provide for their little ones. But our God uses this illustration to prove His abiding love for us. Even if a mother might forget the child in her arms, I will never forget you! God's love is greater than any mother has for her child! And this love is an abiding and steadfast love! As Isaiah 49 continues, I have engraved you on the palms for my hand- you are continually before me! Such is the love of our God- it is a constant and abiding love! He will never leave us- never forsake us- never forget us! And it is for that reason that we can have a firm confidence in the preservation of the saints! This morning we come to the last point of doctrine in the Canons of Dort- called the perseverance or the preservation of the saints. So we consider this theme: Jesus Christ fully and finally saves those who belong to Him. The point of this doctrine is to both magnify the great steadfastness of our God who saves to the uttermost- but also to comfort the saints in this truth- your salvation is secure! God is fully committed to saving His people to the uttermost- and since He who promised is faithful, He will do it!

I. The Work Began

As we turn to our text from Phil. 1:6 we read, I am sure of this, that He who began a good work in you. Paul states his confidence in this fact- that God has begun His work. When it comes to the work of salvation, as we found out last week, it is He- our God -who saves. Paul was- and we can be confident in this fact! The truth of the matter is this- since salvation is a work of our God from beginning to end- we can be confident that God will do what He says! It is God's work- not mans! None can alter His plans- none can resist His work- none and hinder His sovereign plan and purpose. We should be confident in this truth as we look around us in this world- with all the chaos and confusion- we can have peace in this fact! I am confident

that God is at work! This truth calms our fears- I know that this is true! God will do as He says- He will act according to His work! I am confident in this- He is at work! Who is at work? My God- your God! Or as 2: 13 says- it is God who is at work in you- both to will and to work for His good pleasure. So the work being performed is work done by God in His people! The Sovereign One who reigns and rules over all! Just as Paul was confident in God's commitment to work in the hearts and lives of the believers in Philippi, so we can be confident in God's work in us! The same God who began this work- as we will see- is the same God who completes it. But what is this work that God began? Well, the work that God began in us- in Paul, in the saints- and in His people today- is the work that is good! It is the good work- work that includes the Father's choosing us, the Son dying for us, and the Spirit residing with us! This is the good work that God began- but specifically- the good work God does within us is the work of His Spirit! The work began when these Christians first believed. The work of new life now followed by a life of holiness and obedience. So the good work is the work of salvation- having been justified and adopted as sons. Or as John 10 would say- these having been placed into the hands of the good shepherd. Any discussion about the preservation of the saints must begin with election. Did God choose some- is there a specific number of people that are foreknown? Did Jesus lay down his life for His sheep? God's love for His own- His work that begins already in election is the foundation for preservation. So did God simply choose some- save them to a point- and then leave them on their own? Did God simply begin the work- does God temporarily save us and then expect us to keep ourselves saved? Is God like a mother that gives birth to a child only to forsake that child- hoping the child will be able to take care of itself? Or does He continue His work until His people are brought safely to the end and goal of their faith?

II. The Work Completed

This work not only was begun by God- it is and will be completed by God. As v. 6 continues- He will be faithful to complete it- to bring His work to completion! He will continue to carry out His good work until that work is complete. The word- completion- in Phil. 1: 6 is the word Telos in the Greek. It means to

perfect- to complete like a quarterback completes a pass. The two dots are connected- the goal attained.

And what is God's goal- what is His desire? The full and complete salvation of all His chosen people! He will carry on His work in the hearts and lives of His people until this work reaches the consummation! God does not just start- beginning the work- and then step back to see how we do on our own. There is a direct parallel here between God's work in salvation and His work in creation. Did God create this world and then step back- leaving the world to fend for its own. Did God simply wind up the clock of this world and then put the world on the shelf to see how it would run? Or does God continue to act in this world- does God's providence mean that He continues to hold all things together- continuing His work of providing and caring for His creation? In a similar way, God not only elects us and justifies us- He continues His work to ensure and even guarantee that those who are chosen are brought safely to the end- to the destination! Giving us new birth, He continues to care for our every spiritual need! This work being performed is rooted- grounded in the faithfulness of God! Or as we read in I Thes. 5:24, The God of peace will sanctify you completely and keep you blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful; He will surely do it! The faithful one who called you- who began His work- will continue His good work until He is finished- until you arrive! God's faithfulness is the root- the grounds for our conviction concerning the preservation of His people. Echoed again in II Thes. 3:3-The Lord is faithful, He will establish you and guard you against the evil one. And we have confidence in the Lord about you. God has promised- and He keeps His word! He is faithful- and we can be confident in this truth! And specifically, the work He will do is to sanctify completely and keep blameless His people! Protecting them from evil. As God's people, we can have a settled conviction- He will complete the work in us that He began! Our perfect God will perfectly save His people! To be clear, the perseverance of the saint is only due to the preserving work of our faithful God! Heb. 6:17 says that God works according to the unchanging character of His purpose! God does not change His mind- He does not forget- He is faithful to complete His work. But this work that God is doing- the good work of saving, sanctifying and perfecting His people- will not be complete until God brings it to completion. When

will that happen? When we arrive at home or when the day of Jesus Christ arrives. Now this is perhaps a longer view of perseverance than we tend to have. We think of perseverance to only last during our earthly journey- which is true. But there is a comfort and hope to be found in the longevity of God's preserving work. Not only is it true that death cannot separate us from the love of God- it is also true that God preserves us in our intermediate state- and He preserves us on the day of judgement as well! In other words, the salvation that God gives to His people is so certain and firm that nothing can cancel or undo it- no sin or temptation. Not death- and no judgement will remove those who are adopted from His family! The good work that God is doing covers our election, justification, sanctification, perfection and even our glorification! All aspects are included in this good work that He will be faithful to complete! In other words- our God keeps His own until they arrive at their eternal home! It is impossible for those chosen to be lost because God is preserving them! As our CD art. 3 states, God is faithful and merciful. He strengthens His people in grace and powerfully preserves them in it to the end. Or in art. 8- God's plan cannot be changed and His promises cannot fail. The merit of Christ as well as His interceding and preserving cannot be nullified and the sealing of the Spirit cannot be wiped out. So lets circle back. It is impossible for you to lose your salvation because you did not gain or earn your salvation in the first place! If your deliverance is based on the perfect and infinite works of Jesus Christ- then there is nothing that you can or must do to add to it. And it follows that there is nothing that you can do to cancel it! Unearned and undeserved salvation remains a constant and is not based on man's works or response. So why do we need this doctrine- why is the preservation of the saints such a dear truth? Well, this doctrine guards against fear, doubt and worry. If my status is one that I must keep- if I am responsible for keeping myself in a state of grace- then I will be filled with fear and dread. Did I do enough- what if I am not doing enough- what if my sin is greater than my obedience. For those in Jesus Christ- we know that all our sins are completely forgiven by His sacrifice- once for all! Our confidence and comfort stand unshaken on Christ the solid rock! His works- His sacrifice on the cross- His intercession in the present- is what secures and keeps me in this state of blessing and grace! Jesus

Christ's atonement was sufficient and is sufficient- powerful enough- to save us to the uttermost! Not only to save- but to keep us in that salvation! As our good shepherd- He keeps us in His hand and nothing can snatch us away! So the perseverance of the saints is God's work in preserving His people until the end! He is faithful- He will continue His work until He completes it! So you can be sure of this- this is the source of your comfort and assurance- God is at work! He saved us! Your deliverance is a work of God from beginning to end! To illustrate this point, we need only consider the betrayal by Peter in Luke 22. When Jesus rebuked Peter for his pride, He said these comforting words. Satan desires to shift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have returned, strengthen your brothers. Did you catch that- Peter will fall- he will sin. But Jesus prayed for Peter- and Peter's faith would not fail- Peter would be restored to strengthen his brothers. Peter- when you have turned- not if- but when. The prayer of Jesus meant that Peter would not be given to Satan completely- yes, his faith would be tested. But Peter would not fall away- because Jesus held him! That is our comfort! We may sin, but ultimately, we will be kept safe because Jesus is praying for us!

III. The Truth Defended

In our final point, we will consider a few errors that need to be guarded against. It is often alleged that this doctrine will encourage laziness or even rebellion in God's people. If you tell someone that they cannot lose their salvation, what is stopping them from living a wild and undisciplined life. Why not sin so that grace can abound as it was alleged in Rom. 6. The answer Paul gives in Rom. 6 is clear- those who died to sin can no longer live in it! If we have been joined to Christ by faith- we will not only desire to lead a holy life- by the Spirit we will have both the will and the way. In other words, it is impossible for those to remain unmoved or to be uncaring about their sins. As art. 13 puts it, the doctrine of preservation does not produce immorality or lack of godliness, but rather it produces a greater concern to observe carefully the way of the Lord. It must also be said that this doctrine of preservation is not "let go and let God." The truth does not lead to passivity- or lack luster attitude. Those who are motivated by gratitude are the most dedicated to

holy living! And this truth brings us to a sober warning. If you still love sin- or if you do not care about holiness- it is very possible that you are still outside of Christ! There is a danger of false assurance- some are at peace with themselves as they trust in their own works- assuming that they are fine with God while shunning His Savior! This doctrine is not to encourage those who are sleeping in their sins to remain at rest in their own works. No, the preservation of the saints only applies to those who are true saints- not those who just have a high view of themselves and live without a care in this world. It is true that a saved person cannot be lost- but it is also true that one who thinks he is saved can still be lost! If you find yourself saying- I can sin and God will forgive me- its His job to forgive. Check your heart! If you think you stand, beware lest you fall! God knows if you truly love Christ and depend on His works alone. But this warning is not intended to fill God's people with dread. Rather, as art. 11 says, believers still contend with various doubts and temptations. Believers can fall into sin- even dreadful sin like David and Peter. But for those who belong to God, His Spirit will not be taken away and their salvation cannot be lost. And we can find assurance only as we look to Christ- as we trust in His work on the cross and in the heavens today. As we are filled with the Holy Spirit and trust in God's promises- as art. 10 says- only then will true assurance fill our hearts.

As we close, we remember that Jacob Arminius and his followers believed that salvation could be lost. That you can be justified- and lose your justification. Going from saint back to sinner in need of salvation. That your final salvation depended on the uncertain obedience of man. God make His grace available- but you need to take it and hold it. You are free to choose and able to lose your salvation. But that is not the picture we find in the Bible. Even if a mother would forsake her child- God will never leave and never forsake us! Thankfully, you cannot fall out of God's hands. You cannot undo what Jesus has done for you! As Phil. 1 says, He who began a good work will complete it! God is able and faithful- and that is the grounds for your salvation and comfort! Praise God for the certainty of our salvation secured by Jesus Christ- that He saves us to full and to the end!