

# It's That You Finish

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[ 0 : 00 ] at some point in your life, someone, maybe a teacher or a coach, I don't know, somebody who wanted to encourage you in a particular season has probably made this statement to you.

They probably said, you know, it's not how you start. It's how you finish, right? It's a helpful proverb, isn't it? It's helpful for us in times of success so that we don't get a fat head, right?

Just a reminder that things may be good right now. You may be doing pretty well right now, but you may not always be doing that well, right? So persevere, keep going. Don't get a big head. It's particularly helpful in those seasons of defeat or at least in the seasons of potential defeat, right? And it certainly applies to the Christian life as long as we just tweak the wording just a little bit so that instead of applying this phrase to the Christian life, it's not how you start, it's how you finish. We might change it more appropriately to the Christian life and say, it's not how you start. It's that you finish. It's that you finish.

Because only those who finish win. And it is this doctrine of perseverance and endurance that is the main idea with which we need to wrestle in this text, okay? Now all of Paul's actions and emotions, and this is quite emotive, isn't it? All of his actions and emotions here in this text are really flowing out of two realities. The first being his immense love for the Thessalonian church, for these new Christians in Thessalonica. The second being his desire to present them faithful to Christ at his coming when the Lord returns. Now we know that all of these actions and emotions are flowing out of those two realities because that's exactly what the preceding verses told us that we studied in detail last Sunday. So that with an eye fixed on Jesus's return, at which time Paul understands he will come to judge the earth. So in his first coming, he comes to save the lost. In his second coming, he comes to judge the unbelieving, right? Paul understands that and he's got an eye fixed on that coming.

He knew Jesus is coming to judge the earth so that his ministry was aimed at the goal of seeing the Thessalonian Christians and everyone else he ministered to. His goal was to see them endure to the very end. And the reason is because Jesus himself said that only those who endure to the very end will be saved. That's what's motivating his ministry. Yes, it's love. Yes, it's truth. But he wants to see these people finish. Not just that he cares that they finish weak or strong. No, he just wants to see them finish. The trouble is that after having just begun his work in Thessalonica, he was forced to leave.

[ 3 : 25 ] And in that time, he had no way of knowing just how things were going. He had no way of knowing. He had heard no reports yet of whether or not this young church was persevering. He kept trying. That's what we read last week. He and his team, they endeavored more eagerly with great desire. We just read that a moment ago. They were trying to get back.

They were trying to return. Satan was continually hindering those efforts. He couldn't make it. Paul knew that if Satan was working so hard against him returning, then there was no question that Satan would also be working to cause the Thessalonians to fall away from the faith and prevent further gospel influence in the city there. So you can imagine Paul's pastoral anxiety. Isn't that the emotion that really comes to the surface here? It's anxiety, worry, concern.

Were they standing firm in the affliction? Had Satan successfully turned them away from Christ? Had his ministry there been fruitless, vain?

These are the questions that Paul needed to have answered. And we need to remember that at the time that he writes the letter to the church, Timothy has already returned. That's why I wanted to read the whole unit to you. Because immediately after verse five, we find out, oh, Timothy came back and Timothy came back with a report. And it was a good report that they were standing firm in the faith. But Paul's reflecting here on the time before he understands that, before he knows it, right? And he's speaking about this anxiety that he feels. So these verses show him explaining the

fact that he was so concerned and why he was so concerned, so concerned even to be willing to be left alone so that Timothy could go and minister to them and investigate the nature of their faith. And here's what the text does for us.

Paul's reflections put the issues of perseverance of faith and endurance in faith front and center. Because the reality is that not everyone who seems to start the Christian race finishes it.

[ 5 : 58 ] A truth that is made abundantly clear through the scriptures. It's not a mystery. The warning of falling away from the faith is implied here. And we do not need to quickly dismiss that warning lest we become an example of it and of the damning results of it.

The point of the text is that perseverance of faith is necessary for salvation. That it is routinely challenged by suffering, but that it is also divinely supplied through the means of gospel exhortation. Those are the three movements, okay? Those are the three big things we want to see. Salvation comes through perseverance.

Our perseverance is constantly challenged by suffering. But the way to persevere is through grace and through the means that God uses, which is gospel proclamation, okay? Let's think about those three things. First thing I'd like for you to see is the means of perseverance. The means of perseverance. How persevering faith is established.

How does it actually come about in our lives? That's what we learn in the first three verses. Let's read it again. Therefore, when we could bear it no longer, we were willing to be left behind at Athens alone, and we sent Timothy, our brother and God's co-worker in the gospel of Christ, to establish and exhort you in your faith that no one be moved by these afflictions, right?

Now again, Paul was so concerned about the Thessalonian church that he was actually willing to be left alone. There is a sacrifice at work here, we would say. Maybe this isn't a huge sacrifice.

[ 7 : 58 ] We don't know exactly what the nature of his condition was at the moment, or the nature of Timothy's service to him. We do know from Acts record that Paul was ultimately left alone in Athens.

So on some level, this comes as a sacrifice. He's concerned, and he's so concerned that he's willing to actually break up the ministry team, which probably posed a threat to their safety, all of them, even the ones that he was sending away. And he sends Timothy. But notice that the focus of his concern was the potential that suffering affliction would cause some, or maybe even all, of the Thessalonians to, quote, be moved. Does it mean to be moved? To be moved away from faith in Christ.

So the stakes here couldn't be higher. What's at stake? Their very salvation is at stake. However, in these verses, these first three, it's Paul's understanding of the means of persevering faith that is so important. How did he actually expect that perseverance to happen? How did he expect them to persevere? And the answer is that it would come by God's grace at work in the ongoing ministry of the gospel. Persevering faith comes by God's grace in his work through the ongoing ministry of the gospel. Now let's just pick it apart. Pick the verse apart here. Notice how Timothy is described. He's not only a brother in Christ, but he is said to be God's co-worker in the gospel of Christ. Now that's significant for us, isn't it? Because it shows us that this wasn't Paul's idea.

This wasn't Timothy's idea. This is God's work and it's God's idea and it's God's desire. Timothy is laboring as a servant of God in this work. And what is the primary focus of that work? Gospel. Gospel. Teaching and preaching the Bible. That's what God would use Timothy to do in order to establish and exhort their faith. Paul understood this to be how the Thessalonians would persevere and not be moved by their afflictions. So their faith is Paul's concern in God's work through gospel ministry was the path to their persevering faith. Now what are we supposed to take away from that? It's very simple actually. Our perseverance of faith is a divine work carried out through the ordinary means of gospel biblical exhortation. Biblical exhortation. Let me try to break it down. Just three things if you like to keep things in order and take detailed notes. Maybe three things you can write down. The first would be this. Our perseverance is a work of God's grace. Our perseverance is a work of God's grace. We don't persevere to the end merely because we have the right grit and determination to do so. Ultimately, it is God who sustains us. Just flip one page over to chapter 5 at the very end of the book.

[ 11 : 32 ] Paul prays a blessing on the church before he closes the letter. Notice what he says in verses 23 and 24 of chapter 5. He says, Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely. Sanctify completely. What does he mean by that? That he will finish this work that he has begun. That God will be the one to do it.

He says, Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely. May your whole spirit and soul and body be kept. How? That it may be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. And now notice what he says in verse 24. He who calls you is faithful. He will surely do it. Our perseverance of faith, fundamentally, ultimately, is a divine work of grace. And we see it multiple times. Romans 8 30.

Those whom he predestined, he also called. Those whom he called, he justified. Those whom he justified, he glorified. Salvation is a work of God from beginning to end. If we persevere to the end, it will be as a result of his grace at work in our lives. And it should come as tremendous comfort to us that when God saves us, he keeps us. He keeps us. Our assurance of salvation rests on his faithfulness, not on our grittiness.

And we flip that so often, don't we? We think that we must continue to do our best and try our hardest. And if we do our best and try our hardest, we'll make it. No, we don't persevere because of grittiness. We persevere because of his faithfulness to us, his faithfulness to his promise, his faithfulness in the gospel.

That doesn't mean that we're passive in it, as if continuing faith and obedience is irrelevant. They're not. The call to persevere is real, as are the warnings to those who do not persevere.

[ 13 : 50 ] But in the end, those who endure do so because of the gracious work of God in them. So if you're keeping order here, what are the means of perseverance? Well, first we would have to say, well, fundamentally, our perseverance is a work of God's grace. Secondly, our perseverance is a community project. Our perseverance is a community project. This is where Timothy comes in.

Though it is a work of God's grace, God uses other believers to execute that work, right? The notion of being a co-laborer with God is an important one. It's echoed in other places.

Consider 1 Corinthians 3. Paul says, neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything. In other words, he and Apollos is the example he's using there. Ultimately, they're insignificant. They're just a part of the process that God is doing. Notice what he says, only God who gives the growth.

And then he says, for we are God's fellow workers, co-laborers, co-workers. And then he says, you are God's field. You are God's building. Your salvation is his work. He's just using us to do it.

We are co-laboring with him in his work. It's a community project. No book in the New Testament has as many warnings about perseverance as the book of Hebrews. But notice what it says in a couple of places. Hebrews chapter 3, verses 12 through 14. The writer says, take care, brothers, lest there be any of you with an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. So what's the solution, he says?

[ 15 : 46 ] To keep that from happening, he says, exhort one another every day, every day. Exhort one another as long as it is called today, so that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

And then he finishes, for we have come to share in Christ if we hold our original confidence firm to the end. So what's at stake here? Our salvation by faith. It's a work of God, but it's a work that God uses the church to accomplish. Exhort one another every day so that you will not fall away.

And then again, in Hebrews chapter 10, the writer says, let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering our faith in the gospel. For he who promised is faithful. There's no reason to doubt him. In any season of life, he's faithful. And then what does he say the solution is? What is the safeguarding the fence? He says, but let us consider how to stir one another to love and to good works.

In what context? Not neglecting to meet together as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another. In what? In the gospel. In persevering faith.

And do it all the more, he says, as you see the day. You'll notice that day is capitalized in your Bibles. It's a reference, a proper noun. As you see the day drawing near. What day? The day of judgment.

[ 17 : 37 ] The day of Christ's return. Think about that. The writer, like Paul, acknowledges Jesus is going to return. And when he returns, he's going to return in judgment. So hold fast to the end so that you will be saved. Well, how can we do that? Oh, consider how to help one another. How to stir one another up in love. Just to love our spouses and our friends? No, to love God. To love the gospel. All of it flows from that into good works. What's the nature and foundation of good works? Our faith in the gospel of Christ.

How are we to do it? By not neglecting to meet together. We may think of a passage like that. We know it well because pastors like me like to use it a lot to hang over our heads and say, you should

have been at church last Sunday, right?

Is that really what the author is getting at there? Well, of course, maybe that's an implication, but it's far more than that. We cannot look at this command to not neglect the meeting together with other Christians. We don't look at that as like a minimum requirement for faithful Christianity.

No, we look at it as a necessity that will get us to the end. This is the thing that God uses to make it, to persevere. It's a community project.

Persevering faith is God's work, but it's carried out through Christian discipling. I cannot echo enough. I tried to do this all the time. We'll think about it again in our members meeting this afternoon, but I cannot echo enough the scripture's emphasis that we desperately need each other. [ 19 : 22 ] We desperately need the church. Why? Because it is the church. It is other believers. It is discipling relationships with other believers that God uses to help us persevere.

Why should you care to be faithful to gather? Not just for worship, but fellowship, for mutual discipling. Why should our time around the dinner table when we go to one another's house at some point have some kind of focus on the gospel? Because we desperately need one another to do it.

Our salvation hinges on it. If we neglect it, we risk putting ourselves on the path of falling away. Third, our perseverance is accomplished through Bible instruction. It's accomplished. Now, all these three things, they have to fit together. You can't take one without the other. Fundamentally, our perseverance is a work of grace. God does this work in us. He uses ordinary means to do it. It's a community project, right? He gives us the church. He gives us other Christians that help us in that. And what is it that he uses those other Christians to do? Teach us the Bible. Remind us of the gospel. Isn't that what Timothy's doing? I'm sending Timothy to you. He's our brother, but he's God's co-worker.

He's going to carry out God's work, God's gospel work. And what he's going to do is he's going to establish, and he's going to strengthen, and he's going to exhort you in the gospel, in your faith.

[ 20 : 58 ] Why do we need this, Paul? He's going to do this so that you won't be moved by the affliction, so that you won't turn away. But notice what it is that Timothy is tasked to do.

It would not be enough for Timothy to go to Thessalonica and pat them on the back and say, there, there, everything's going to be okay. That will not do it.

The last thing you need in the midst of devastating suffering is for somebody to sit down and give you some type of shallow, simple, ah, it'll be okay. That's not what you need.

That is not what will cause you to persevere. What will lead you to perseverance? Exhortation. The teaching of the gospel. In the old translations, if you have a King James Version with you, you'll see this, this word for establish, it is translated as comfort. But that comes from a Latin phrase, which means to fit for battle. So imagine that you're sent out onto the battlefield, but you have no weapons or armor. That's pretty scary. But if someone comes along and they give you armor and a weapon, okay, that's a form of comfort, isn't it? That's what Timothy is to do. He's to take his Bible with a focus on the gospel, and he's to go to Thessalonica, and he's to fit them for battle.

And fitting for battle comes through exhortation, through teaching. Yes, gentleness, love. Yes, but firm exhortation, because the stakes are high. Endurance comes through biblical instruction.

[ 22 : 47 ] All right, that's the means of persevering faith. Secondly, I want you to see the challenge to persevering faith, the challenge to persevering faith. Look again at the end of verse three.

For you yourselves know that we are destined for this, for this affliction. For when we were with you, we kept telling you. When Paul was there at the first, he was doing that establishing and exhorting work. He's trying to fit them for battle. He's trying to prepare them beforehand.

We kept telling you beforehand that we were to suffer affliction, just as it has come to pass, and just as you know. This is the challenge in the text, isn't it? Why is it that perseverance is even an issue?

Because there are challenges at work against us, pulling us away from faithfulness to the gospel. Now again, Timothy's task was to establish and exhort the Thessalonians to persevere in faith against the threat of a specific challenge, suffering affliction, suffering affliction.

Now persecution isn't the only challenge to our faith, is it? There may be all kinds of reasons that we would be tempted away from faith in Christ. We may be moved by general suffering. Maybe it's not persecution for our faith, but it's just the fact that life is hard, and God allows us to go through hard stuff. That may move us away from Him. It could be the allure of sin. Anyone who understands Christianity knows that Christianity is a turning away from sinfulness. Well, the allure of sin may cause us to turn away from Christ. If you must turn from sin to turn to Christ, then a turn back to sin

is necessarily a turn away from Christ. That could be a means of pulling us away. It could just be the appeal of some other belief system. It could be secularism. It could be some other religion. All of these things work as challenges, don't they? But when we come to this text, there's a specific one. Now in each case, no matter what the challenge is, the means of perseverance is the same. Verses 1 through 3, that holds true no matter what the challenge is. The only way we will persevere is by God's grace through gospel exhortation, right? But the threat in Thessalonica had to do with suffering because of the faith. Persecution because they were Christians, because of what they believed.

[ 25 : 32 ] And it's in this brief digression that Paul reminds his readers that this kind of affliction was actually to be expected. They were to anticipate it.

And he surely meant this as an encouragement. But how could that possibly be an encouragement? He comes to Thessalonica. He preaches the gospel. They profess faith in Christ. And then he sits down as he disciplines them. He says, listen, I just need to warn you. People are going to hate you because of this. You're going to suffer at the hands of others because of this. And I mean that to encourage you. What? How is that an encouragement? The answer is that suffering, in this case, is a sign of the kingdom. And our participation in it, according to the Bible, our participation in it is a sharing in Christ's suffering. Now, don't let me lose you on this. Kingdom, this idea of kingdom, it's a critical theme in the Bible from the very beginning all the way to the end. In creation, God puts Adam and Eve there and he gives them a kingdom. He's to rule his kingdom.

And he falls. It becomes a fallen kingdom, doesn't it? This idea of kingdom, it flows, this theme. It flows all the way to the end. What's happening in the end in the new heavens and the new earth? It is the reestablishment, the recreation, the restoration of the kingdom, right? The way it's meant to be. It's important. The Old Testament foretold the establishment of an eternal kingdom.

And that eternal kingdom was inaugurated with Jesus's incarnation. With the incarnation of the Messiah, his death and resurrection and ascension, all of that together, it introduces the kingdom.

[ 27 : 31 ] Remember what Jesus was preaching as he went from town to town. He said, repent, the kingdom of heaven is at hand. It's here. How is it here? It is there in the sense that he is the representative of it. He has come to inaugurate this new covenant spiritual eternal kingdom. Now, one day, Jesus is going to return. He's coming back. And when he comes back, he's coming to establish the physical peace of the kingdom. Right now, it continues on as a spiritual kingdom, doesn't it?

But Jesus, when he returns, he's coming back for the purpose of establishing the physical dimension of his eternal kingdom. And as God's people are saved and restored to the king during this intermediate time, the ruler of the kingdom of this world, rages against us, rages against the kingdom of God, rages against those who would desire the kingdom of heaven.

And Jesus said that this period would be marked by tribulation. We think of tribulation as this apocalyptic event that comes at the end. That is not how Jesus taught it.

Tribulation is now. It only reaches its climax at the end. But he says we are to expect it now. Why should we expect it now? Because the kingdom has come.

It's a sign of the kingdom. Surely, this is why the apostles spoke the way they did about suffering with Christ. Suffering is a sign of the kingdom. How can Paul go to Thessalonica and actually encourage these people with the prospect and the potential of certain suffering? Because it means the kingdom has come.

[ 29 : 35 ] It is meant to build up their faith, not to turn away from it. So the apostles tell us, along with Jesus, to expect it, even to welcome it, as if it identifies us with Christ.

Let me give you just a couple of passages about this. Hang with me here. This is important. Hang with me. Acts 14, 22. Paul is going back to some of the churches that he planted, and here's what he's doing as he goes back and revisits them. He was strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith because the prospect of falling away is always there, and saying to them that through many tribulations, we must enter the kingdom of God.

When Paul said that, he didn't expect them to think, oh, tribulation at the end. No, he means tribulation now. Through many of them, you will enter the kingdom, he says.

So continue. Romans chapter 8, verses 16 and 17. Paul, writing to the church there, he says, We are children of God, and if children, then we are heirs, and heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided that we suffer with him in order that we may be glorified with him.

Why bring up this suffering? Because suffering was to be expected. And if we endure the suffering in faith, we will be glorified with him.

[ 31 : 11 ] There would be no reason for us to doubt his faithfulness to his promise. Now, I want you to turn to the last one because I want us to read it slowly. Turn to 1 Peter chapter 4. 1 Peter chapter 4.

I want to read verses 12 through 19. 1 Peter chapter 4, verse 12.

Beloved, Peter writes, Do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you.

Don't be surprised as if something strange was happening to you.

What does he mean? Expect it. It's coming. Why would you think different, he says. Don't let that surprise you. Instead, he says, rejoice.

But rejoice insofar as in enduring this you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.

[ 32 : 20 ] It identifies us with Christ, Peter says. If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed because the spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.

And then he qualifies. He said, don't suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler.

Don't suffer because you are sinful. No, that is not what he is talking about.

Verse 16. Yet, if anyone suffers as a Christian because they're a Christian, let him not be ashamed.

Now, ashamed almost always in the New Testament does not simply mean, I'm going to hide my face because I feel a little embarrassed by this.

That's not what it means. It means to actually move away. Ashamed in this context means I'm suffering, so I'm abandoning. Right? He says, if you're going to suffer as a Christian, don't be ashamed.

But instead, let him glorify God in that name. In other words, persist. Be faithful. And then he says, for it is time for judgment to begin at the house of God with God's people.

[ 33 : 27 ] What does he mean? God uses the fiery trial to refine his people, to strengthen their faith, and to expose the imposters who only pretend to know and love Jesus.

Verse 19. Therefore, let those who suffer according to God's will in your suffering, entrust your soul to a faithful creator while doing good.

Remember what Luther wrote in Mighty Fortress is Our God that we sang it last Sunday. The body they may kill, God's truth abides still.

What is it that Jesus says? Do not fear those who can kill the body. Fear the one who can kill the soul. What is it that Peter says here? In your suffering, in your suffering, entrust your soul to God.

In other words, persevere. Continue. Be faithful. Of course, the apostles were just teaching what Jesus himself had taught them.

[ 34 : 31 ] This explains why the Thessalonians faced such affliction and why Paul was so concerned about preparing them for it. Suffering for Christ is a miserable and faith-threatening affair when we are not prepared to acknowledge it as the only path to the glory of the kingdom.

That's the point. Now, we might say a word here about perhaps what is one of the greatest, if not the greatest, spiritual threat in our world today.

And it isn't secularism. It is the perversion of the prosperity gospel. Millions of people in our world are turning to Christianity because deceivers are telling them that Christianity is the path to health and to wealth and to achieving all it is that they want out of this life.

That's a lie. And what happens to these people who turn to Christ because they've been told that Christ will give them benefit and nothing else? What happens when the prosperity doesn't come? Who do they blame? God. Jesus. Christianity. The scriptures teach us to expect and endure affliction.

[ 35 : 56 ] And unfortunately, many of us are only really interested in escaping it. And if your desire to escape suffering is greater than your desire to know and follow Jesus, you will fall away from the faith.

You will. Again, this is why we must commit ourselves to being wherever the Bible is faithfully taught so in that moment of suffering we can sit down with others who understand that suffering and understand the gospel in relation to it.

And they can come alongside of us and they can not just say, there, there, it will be okay. No, they can say, no, you stay faithful. Christ is faithful. Don't turn.

Don't turn. Don't turn. Gospel exhortation will prepare us to withstand the challenge of suffering with joy and hope rather than with fear and doubt.

Third, the necessity for perseverance. Now let's keep it all together. We have seen the means of perseverance. It's a work of God's grace.

[ 37 : 09 ] He does that work through ordinary means. He uses other Christians, but he uses specifically gospel preaching, gospel teaching, gospel exhortation, right? Now, why do we even need to be prepared for that?

Because suffering is a sign of the kingdom. If you belong to the kingdom, Jesus says, you're going to suffer. You're going to suffer. And we need to be reminded of the gospel in that. But finally, we need to understand the necessity of it.

Why is this so important? Why is Paul so concerned? Why is he so urgent to get Timothy there to teach this gospel to them again?

Verse 5. For this reason, he says, when I could bear it no longer, I sent to learn about your faith. For fear, that's his anxiety, because I was fearful that somehow in these afflictions, the tempter, the tempter, had tempted you, and that our labor would be in vain.

What labor? His gospel labor. Now, it's here that we find the warning of falling away very clearly implied.

[ 38 : 18 ] And we need to pay close attention to it. Paul's fear, that's his word. Paul's fear was that through affliction, Satan had successfully tempted them to abandon the faith, making his gospel labor in Thessalonica useless and fruitless.

But for his labor to have been in vain necessarily means that those who first professed faith in Christ were no longer believing.

And his fear comes from the fact that if they were no longer believing, there was no hope that they would escape the judgment at Christ's return.

This is where we need to think about it in its context to the verses just before. What has he just said? I'm longing to get to you. I love you. I want to be with you in a particular way, though. I want to encourage you in the faith.

Because my aim, my goal is to see you through until the very end when the Lord comes at his return. And it's only after he said that, he's given us his goal, that he now says what his fear is.

[ 39 : 27 ] Because my fear right now, my fear is that Satan has tempted you successfully, that you've turned away from the faith. And if you've turned away from the faith, you will not be saved when Christ returns.

You'll be judged as an unbeliever. This introduces some important questions, doesn't it?

In chapter 1, Paul said he was confident that they were among God's elect. Does his fear in chapter 3 then suggest that it's possible for the elect to, at some point following their conversion, lose their salvation, no longer be a Christian?

Can the gospel be preached to the elect in vain? And there's two observations from this text that we need to make. First, we need to remember that Paul wrote chapter 1 after the events of chapter 3. After Timothy has returned with his report, where he said, yeah, affliction's been great there, but you'll be glad to know that they're persevering. They love Jesus. They're being faithful in the perseverance.

[ 40 : 50 ] Now as Paul goes back and he begins his letter, he says, oh, I know that you're the elect, because the gospel came in Holy Spirit power and that's seen in the fact of your perseverance, he says.

Now that's important for us. He doesn't make a judgment on that before Timothy's report, only after. In fact, it was their perseverance that was the reason Paul was so confident in their election.

So you have to keep that in mind. It's not like he wrote chapter 1 and sent that as one piece of the letter, and then when Timothy came back, he wrote chapter 2 and 3 and sent that as another piece of the letter.

Okay? You've got to keep that in mind. Second, and perhaps more important, in verse 5, Paul is not making a theological judgment about whether or not a genuine believer can abandon their salvation.

That's not the point that he's making. He's not interacting with that theological judgment in verse 5, okay? We know from many other passages that Paul wrote that he did not believe that someone whom God saved, a genuine believer that has received the new birth, he did not believe that that

person in any way would be lost.

[ 42 : 16 ] We already know that's a part of his theology, but that's not what he's arguing here anyways. He's not even making that point. Paul's point and the warning that we really need to listen to here. Listen to it closely, please.

His point is that no one who turns away from faith in Jesus will be saved. No one. Again, he's not making a statement about whether they were saved at first in the truest sense of that word. He's alluding to the truth. He's alluding to the reality that no one without faith in Jesus will be saved in the judgment at his return.

A point that Jesus made abundantly clear. Matthew chapter 10 and verse 22. You will be hated by all for my name's sake, but only the one who endures to the end will be saved.

Again, we go back to Hebrews chapter 10 here. Verses 35 to 36 and then verse 39. The writer says, Do not throw away your confidence, which has great reward.

[ 43 : 33 ] What confidence in relation to? Faith in Christ. Don't throw away your faith in Christ, because faith in Christ is what brings the reward of heaven. For you have need of endurance, he says.

So that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what is promised. In other words, you do not receive what's promised without endurance.

He says it clearly. But then he says, We are not of those who shrink back, that is they turn away, and then are destroyed.

Destroyed by who? By God at the judgment. That's not what believers do. We don't shrink back. Those people are destroyed by God. No, he says.

We are of those who have faith and preserve their souls. Preserve their souls. Do you see the necessity of this?

[ 44 : 42 ] No one without faith in Christ will be saved. No one. That's his point. That's his fear. Now, among evangelical Christians like this, like us, a popular way to have expressed this idea of perseverance in more recent years has been to say something like this, that once you're saved, you're always saved.

I want to suggest that that's probably not a helpful way to say it. If what we mean by that is that once God saves you, he will never unsave you, then absolutely we're standing in line with the scriptures when we say that.

But I'm convinced that there's many people that that's not what they mean when they say that. What they mean is that so long as you follow this kind of external series of rituals that we call conversion, that it doesn't matter what your life is like thereafter.

After, you're in. So that, yeah, if you go on sinning, fine. If there comes a point in your life later that you doubt and you abandon Christ, fine.

As long as you did this one thing, your bases are covered and you're good. And if that's what we mean, if that's the concept that we have when we make a statement like that, we are utterly wrong and standing not in line with the Bible.

[ 46 : 06 ] We are standing strongly opposed to what the Bible actually teaches us. walking an aisle and praying a prayer, being baptized, joining a church, all of those things are signs that one has been converted.

They are not, any of them, or collectively, the cause of our conversion. Salvation comes by grace through faith alone, not through a subscription of evangelical rituals.

Faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ is the determining factor in one's salvation. And those without genuine faith in Christ, no matter what they have professed at some point in their past, have no grounds whatsoever for believing they will escape God's wrath.

If you are not truly trusting Christ, it doesn't matter how much you've given. It doesn't matter how morally you've kept the law. It doesn't matter how many church services you go to.

It doesn't matter if you've been baptized. It doesn't matter if you have belonging and membership to our church or to any other church. It doesn't matter if you read your Bible. It doesn't matter if you pray.

[ 47 : 36 ] If you are not truly trusting Christ alone for your salvation, you have no biblical grounds whatsoever to expect that when Jesus returns and he is going to return, you have no grounds for expecting that you will escape God's wrath.

In fact, you decidedly will not escape God's wrath. This is the warning implicit in Paul's fear and we don't need to take it lightly.

Now, what did we say at the beginning? It's not how you finish. It's that you finish. That doesn't mean that how you finish isn't relevant.

Of course, we understand we want to grow in Christ, don't we? We want to be faithful. We hope that today we're more obedient and strengthened in our faith than we were yesterday.

That's what we want. We want to finish well, right? But more important than the strength of our faith and the strength of our obedience at the time of our death or at the time of the Lord's return, more important than that is that you actually finish in the faith.

[ 48 : 51 ] Mark will fly a plane probably this week. He flew one a couple of days ago. No doubt on the flight to or back from Syracuse, there were some people that got on the flight that were absolutely terrified to be on the flight.

They're shaking. They're scared because they don't know what's going to happen in that plane and they know there's a big snowstorm coming through and they probably read some things, some kind of conspiracy theory that says that the plane might go down and they're afraid.

But they get on the plane and they find their seed. They don't have a lot of joy in the process but they get on the plane and Mark gets them safely to Syracuse.

There's a different kind of person that gets on that plane. There's a kind of person that doesn't think a thing about that plane crashing. He has total confidence in Mark and Mark's ability to fly the plane appropriately and get them where they need to go.

Gets on the plane, has a lot more joy than the other person but he gets to Syracuse safely, doesn't he? Now what do the two people have in common? The strength of their faith is very different.

[ 50 : 00 ] The reality of their faith is exactly the same. They both get on the plane. They both trust the pilot. They both get where they want to go.

That's the point here. He said, I just wish that if the Lord came back today I'm just so embarrassed at how I've been living my life as a Christian. Okay. Okay.

That's all right. Turn. Confess. Do better. For sure. But that's not what ultimately matters anyways. It's just that you're on the plane. That you're actually trusting him. That your faith is in his gospel.

Only those who endure will be saved and you can count on your endurance being tested.

So what do we do? We trust God to keep his promise in Christ. And then we refuse to neglect to give and receive biblical exhortation.

[ 51 : 04 ] Because that's what God uses to persevere his people. It's a community project. And we want to do that for one another. Amen. Amen.