

Providence and Trials - #1

Rom 8:16-32 Linking Providence to Perseverance

Introduction – Psalm 25:10 says “*All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth, to such as keep His covenant and His testimonies*”. But verses like that just do not seem to make sense in light of hard providences in our lives. Either the ‘tough luck’ of life is evidence that God is wrong, or we need to learn to interpret our experiences in the light of God’s Word, disappointments included. A good place to root our understanding of the Providence of God in the midst of trials is in the doctrine of perseverance.

Reviewing the Doctrine of Perseverance – What is typically called the ‘perseverance of the saints’ might better be considered the ‘preservation of the elect’. They are both appropriate terms, but the second emphasizes the direct work of God.

Chosen Before Time (Eph 1:3-6) – Before you could ever choose anything, the Lord chose you in His love. “Once saved, always saved” must be understood in light of “once elect, always elect”. It was and will always remain completely the work of God ‘according to the good pleasure of His will’. He reasons for His particular redemption are hidden in His infinite wisdom and not in us (Rom 11:33-36).

His Work Begun Will Be Finished (Phil 1:6) – While we are commanded to work out our salvation with fear and trembling, we do so on the basis of faith in God’s promises, not in our abilities to sustain and complete our salvation.

Not Our Work to Lose (John 10:28-29) – Consider several of these phrases –

“**Eternal life**” – Either what you have received is temporal or eternal. If it is temporal, it could (and will) come to an end. Jesus is as clear as day – it is eternal.

“**And they shall never perish**” – If one could lose his salvation, he could perish.

“**No one can snatch them out of My hand**” – We ask the wrong questions. Rather than asking if I could lose my salvation, we should ask if God can lose us. We cannot lose our salvation because it is not our salvation to lose. You were bought with a price (1 Cor 6:20).

“**My Father...is greater than all...**” – God is omnipotent. He is greater than all external temptations and all inward corruptions which war against our souls. His power alone keeps you in His hands (1 Pet 1:5).

A View of Romans 8:28 in Context (Rom 8:16-32) – Understanding God’s providence is as simple as quoting this verse, some would say. But this verse comes in the context of a great argument which connects our understanding of God’s perfect providence to His perfect preservation of the elect, culminating at the end of the chapter, where Paul exclaims that nothing “*...shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*”

Heirs to Glory (vv 16-18) – The Holy Spirit bears witness that we are God’s children, and heirs of God. We get to share in His glory. And we get there with Christ by the same path – a path of suffering.

Things Should Be Better – Things Will Be Better (vv 19-25) – Sufferings are assumed, but so is the earnest expectation of something better. The creation is all subjected to the futility that comes from the fall, but there is hope that this bondage of corruption will be finally broken, which produces both hope and groaning. And here is a hint at the biblical balance for how you are to handle your trials. We often cannot see what good or glory is coming of our trials, but ‘*we eagerly wait for it with perseverance.*’

Sanctified Groaning (vv 26-27) – There is a groaning that we can have, that even the Holy Spirit can have in us, that is a holy groaning, a holy dissatisfaction with the state of affairs. It is a groaning that is awaiting the redemption of our bodies and the redemption of all creation. We are instructed to pray for wisdom (James 1:5-7) in the midst of our trials, but we are instructed here that we will not exhaustively know ‘the whys’ for our trials in our finite minds.

The Path to Glory (vv 28-30) – We do not always know ‘the whys’, but we know that everything going on in our lives is connected to that final purpose of God – to conform us to the image of His Son.

Don’t You See? (vv 31-32) – These are rhetorical questions giving us application to v 18, 28 and 30.

Perseverance in Salvation and Suffering – The work of persevering in your salvation is by grace through faith just as your justification itself was. Connected to that, though, is your perseverance in suffering. This must change the way you think and live.

Believe More - It is not enough to simply believe that you will get through these hard times and God will then bring you to heaven. These sufferings and trials, big and little, are from the very hand of God and are instruments in your sanctification. In other words, and this is very hard to swallow at times, your sufferings and trials are due to *God’s good pleasure*.

Stand Secure More - Security in your sufferings is the security in your salvation. These two are inseparably joined. No trial will ever be in vain.

Groan with Awe, not Bitterness - We are often not told ‘how’ these trials are good and not futile, but that is what hope and faith are for – the things yet unseen. And learn to earnestly long for those things, for this is part of your worship.