

The Five Points of Calvinism

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Introduction

Area of Study

Charles Haddon Spurgeon, the famous Baptist preacher of nineteenth century London, said

I have my own opinion that there is no such thing as preaching Christ and Him crucified unless we preach what is nowadays called Calvinism. It is a nickname to call it Calvinism. Calvinism is the gospel, and nothing else. I do not believe we can preach the gospel . . . unless we preach the sovereignty of God in His dispensation of grace; not unless we exalt the electing, unchangeable, eternal, immutable conquering love of Jehovah; nor do I think we can preach the gospel unless we base it on the special, particular redemption of His elect and chosen people which Christ wrought out upon the cross; nor can I comprehend a gospel which lets saints fall away after they are called, and allows the children of God to be burned in the fires of damnation after having once believed in Jesus. Such a gospel I abhor.

What Spurgeon is saying, very simply, is that the Christian gospel offers salvation freely in Jesus Christ. It is a work of God from beginning to end. God is the active giver: He chooses, He draws, He saves, and He keeps. It is all His doing. Anything less, he says, is not the gospel.

This idea lies just on the face of Scripture. The apostle Paul said that God saves in such a way that it leaves no room at all for men to congratulate themselves (1Cor.1:29-31; Eph.2:9). In fact, this is God's very *purpose* in human salvation — to display His own glorious grace (1Cor.1:31; Eph.2:7). Salvation is a work of God, designed to bring glory to Himself.

And this is precisely why the gospel is “good news.” It would not be very good news to hear that God would save us if . . . anything. We shudder to think of any condition laid upon us as a prerequisite for salvation. If God does not save freely, we know that we will not be saved at all. But hearing that He has promised to save us without condition, that He will take us just as we are, is precisely what gives us hope and confidence. God the Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, has done for us everything that God has required of us; and trusting in Him Who has accomplished in our place a perfect righteousness and Who has paid the penalty of our sin by His substitutional sacrifice on the cross, we have peace with God (Rom.5:1). This is the wonderful offer of the gospel. Salvation is free, in Jesus Christ.

Sadly, however, this simplicity of the gospel has often been complicated even by well-intentioned men. And this confusing of the terms of salvation has caused considerable debate within the Christian community. Many have taught that it is man, not God, who is the determining party in salvation. His condition is one of sin; but his sinfulness, they teach, is not such that renders him incapable of choosing God. This, they affirm, is what determines a man's salvation: man must make the move. If he will but turn to God, then God will choose to save him, but not unless. Moreover, whatever previous “drawing” that God may do, He does equally for all men, leaving the final choice to the individual man himself. Further, the atonement of Christ, this theory teaches, was intended to do the very same thing for all men everywhere and without exception. Christ on the cross did “His part” to save everyone; again, it is man who makes the final decision. Finally, once that a man has chosen God and becomes a Christian, he may again choose not to be a Christian and may eventually fall away into condemnation.

In all of this there is one central tenet: man is the controlling party in salvation. His will is free to make the choice, and this is what determines the outcome. God leaves the matter with us.

What Spurgeon was emphasizing in the quote above, however, is that this is not at all the case.

God has not left the matter with us. It is God and not man who makes the difference. God makes the choice, not man; indeed, man is so ruined by sin that he is unable to choose God. Further, God does the drawing; He goes before and Himself brings the sinner to Christ. In fact, this is the very purpose of Christ's death — to save these whom the Father has chosen. And having saved them, God keeps them and will never allow them to stray so far as to fall into condemnation. Salvation, from beginning to end, is of God (Jonah 2:9; 1Cor.1:30).

Historical Overview

Debate over these issues traces back even to the early centuries. Augustine's attack of Pelagius for his denial of human depravity is well known; and, gladly, Augustine won the day. Martin Luther's response to Erasmus' *The Freedom of the Will* is well known also, resulting as it did in Luther's famous *The Bondage of the Will*. The Reformers were all united on these truths: God and not man is the determining cause of salvation.

By the early seventeenth century, however, one Jacobus Arminius, a Dutch scholar, began to question it all; and his followers, called "Remonstrants" ("protesters") or "Arminians," challenged the church with their new beliefs: 1) The freedom of the human will; 2) Conditional election by God, based upon His foreseen faith in men; 3) Christ's death was designed to save every man, and whatever it accomplished it accomplished for all men equally; 4) Saving grace is resistible; it is generally given to all men equally and so may be refused; 5) Those who do exercise their will to be saved may later lose that faith and be lost.

In response, the Synod of Dort reaffirmed that: 1) Man is totally depraved; everything about him, including his will, is negatively affected by the fall of Adam. 2) God elects whom He will save unconditionally; He places no conditions upon those whom He chooses but acts sovereignly. 3) The death of Christ, while completely sufficient to save all men, was designed specifically to save the elect. 4) When God moves in a sinner's heart to bring him savingly to Christ, He succeeds infallibly; His saving grace proves irresistible. 5) All those who are saved will persevere in faith forever.

This response of Dort has been fashioned into an acronym after the state flower of Holland, the tulip.

Total Depravity
Unconditional Election
Limited Atonement
Irresistible Grace
Perseverance of the Saints

Oddly enough, although this matter of salvation as a work of God alone is a rather minority opinion today, it is a point of repeated emphasis in the Scriptures. We will work it out here in the form that it has been given to us for years: TULIP.

Total Depravity

When the apostle John notes for us that when the Lord Jesus "came to His own, His own did not receive Him" (Jn.1:12), his observation is more than an historical one. The history of man's refusal of Christ is a matter of theological significance: man rejects God.

Man's natural aversion to God is a fact of history, theology, and everyday experience. "There is none that seek after God" (Rom.3:11). Owing to God his very existence and receiving from Him daily his life and health and joys, man still has not found it in his heart to seek God; he rebels. Religion he has and even wants, but God he would rather do without (Rom.1:21; cf. Jn.5:42).

The apostle Paul describes man in his natural condition as "a child of wrath" who lives only for himself and Satan (Eph.2:2-3; cf. 4:17-18). That is to say, he has no time for God; he is a rebel. His

desires run contrary to God's, but still it his own desires he follows. God's will is but an obstacle to his freedom.

So the problem is not with God's willingness. Indeed, God stands, as it were, with outstretched arms in willingness to receive the sinner (Rom.10:21). He stoops even to begging sinners to come, as a street vender hawking his goods (Isa.55:1-2). The invitation is both free and universal: He will take all who come (Mat.11:28).

No, the problem is not that God is unwilling; the problem is that *man* is unwilling. "I would, but you would not," Jesus said (Mat.23:37). "You are not willing to come to me that you may have life" (Jn.5:40). Loving their sin more than God, men refuse Him (Jn.3:19-20). Foolish as it is, man will not have God.

What's worse: this problem is universal. "The Lord looks down from heaven upon the children of men to see if there are any who understand, who seek God. They have all turned aside, they have together become corrupt" (Psa.14:2-3). And even a quick glance over our society will provide the evidence for this. Mankind has rejected God.

Now this might seem unnatural. If God created man in His own image, we might expect man to have more favorable opinions of God! But something has happened, and that something is sin. Through our father Adam sin has entered into all of humanity, and this in such a way that all men are inherently sinful (Rom.5:12). "By nature children of wrath," the apostle Paul describes them (Eph.2:3). Worse yet, Jesus describes them as children of the devil who both will and act like their father (Jn.8:44). Put another way, natural man lives in a state of spiritual death (Eph.2:1); when it comes to truly spiritual things, he is lifeless.

All this universal disobedience, then, is not an odd coincidence. All men have not somehow become sinners simply because they have all sinned. *They all sin because they are sinners*. It is a matter of natural tendency and disposition. Senses, intellect, affections, and will all share in man's spiritual deadness.

As a result, the things of God are "foolishness" to him and altogether beyond his grasp (1Cor.2:9, 14). He "gropes in the noonday sun" (Job 5:14), recognizing neither his blindness nor his tragic fate. Satan has "blinded their minds," effectively preventing the light of the "glorious gospel from shining in" (2Cor.4:4). Spiritual death brings an insensitivity to the things of God. It is a spiritual slavery, the prisoners of which are helpless.

Helpless slavery? "No man *can* come to me," Jesus said, "except the Father draw him (Jn.6:44; emphasis added). "The carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, *nor indeed can it be*" (Rom.8:7). "No man *can* say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit" (1Cor.12:3). Once more, man "*cannot* cease from sin" (2Pet.2:14).

This is the doctrine of total depravity. It does not mean, as many have misunderstood, that man is as bad as he can possibly be. It means that man is as *bad off* as he can possibly be. He is a sinner. He has sinned. He is guilty and deserving of divine wrath. And for this he can provide no remedy himself — he is the sinner! And the one remedy which is offered in Christ he will not take. Indeed, he cannot understand it. Simply put, man is without ability to remedy his condition, and he is unwilling to be otherwise. He is as bad off as he could possibly be.

The bottom line is this: our hope does not lie in our own will. It is our will that has got us lost! We are all sure for condemnation *unless God would somehow incline our wills in the opposite direction*. We must have a savior who is mighty enough to rescue us from ourselves. Clearly, God must do something.

We've made our choice; our will has spoken. We are hopelessly lost — unless God will choose otherwise.

Unconditional Election

So by the very nature of the case, our salvation depends upon God's choice of us. Our choice is naturally against Him; we are "sons of *disobedience*" (Eph.2:2) who refuse to seek God (Rom.3:11). It naturally follows, then, that if we are to be saved *God* must choose to do it.

This is precisely what the Scriptures tell us. Salvation comes to us because God has graciously chosen us. Believers in Christ are people who were "chosen in Him [Christ] before the foundation of the world" (Eph.1:4). Jesus said this to His disciples: "You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you" (Jn.15:16). Now Jesus is not denying here that His disciples had, in fact, decided themselves to follow the Lord; very obviously, they had heartily agreed to do so. But what was it that made them so agreeable? Were they not "sons of disobedience" also? Of course, and this is what Jesus addresses. It was not their choice of Him that determined His choice of them; that could never be. Rather it was His choice of them which preceded and determined their choice of Him. "You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you." Their election involved a call to service and holiness ("to bear fruit"), yes, but it did not rise from it. It was His choice that made the difference.

And well it should. Men fallen and enslaved in sin "cannot" make their way to Christ (Jn.6:44, 65). But God's mercy is such that he did not leave us in that condition. He sovereignly and graciously and freely chose men and women from all over the globe — men and women from every tribe under heaven, "a great multitude which no man could number" (Rev.7:9) — and for these people He sent His Son on a mission of rescue. Our refusal of Him was no deterrent to His grace.

Jesus refers to this again in John 6:37 — "All that the Father gives me shall come to me." Who are these whom the Father "gave" to the Son? In the following verses Jesus identifies them as the objects of His saving mission. The Father gave them to Him, and He came to save them.

This is how Jesus explains it all in His prayer to the Father: "I have manifested Your name to those whom You have given Me out of the world. They were Yours, You gave them to Me" (Jn.17:6). God's gracious choice of those whom He would save defined Jesus' mission. God in grace chose a people to be saved and sent His Son to accomplish that salvation for them. Indeed, the universal authority given to the Son is for this purpose exactly: "that He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him" (v.2).

In John 10 Jesus refers to these people as His "sheep" whom He will bring into the sheepfold (v.16). Note that they are not "sheep" because they are brought into the fold; they are brought into the fold because they are sheep. Jesus further clarifies this later on in the same chapter. It is only His sheep who come to believe in Him; the others refuse Him (vv.26-27). It is to His sheep that He gives eternal life (v.28). These are special objects of the Father's electing love and the Son's saving mission.

In other words, God did not leave us to our own will. He saved us despite our contrary will. Nor did He save us by accident; He did it on purpose. If we are saved, we owe it to His electing grace.

The apostle Paul argues this at length in Romans chapter 9. His whole purpose here is to show that salvation comes by grace and by grace alone, and this he sets out to prove by an exposition of the doctrine of election. But after citing as example the statement from the prophet Malachi, "Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated" (Rom.9:13), he realizes that he has just said something that will not sit well with many; and so he anticipates the objection: "What shall we say then? Is God unfair?" (v.14).^[1] His answer, curiously, was not to back up. He does not play down the idea of divine sovereignty. Instead, he pushes the matter further: "Who are you to question the prerogatives of Deity? Who are you to define for God what is fair? Is He not free to do as He wills with His creation? And after all, was there anyone who *deserved* salvation? And if not, then how can you object to His gracious choice of anyone?" (cf. vv.15-24). To the Biblical way of thinking, it is not "Esau I have hated" that presents the problem. That God should hate Esau is very understandable. The problem is, rather, How could God "love Jacob"? Jacob was not deserving of God's love. Nor was the nation which came after him. But Paul's point is just that: God's choice of whom He will save is not at all determined by anything in the individual himself. It is an

“election of grace” (Rom.11:5).

Does this election sound like a stuffed ballot box? Indeed it does! And this is precisely our hope. Satan had cast his ballot for us. And our vote had been gladly cast with him. But God in grace overruled both.

Many have misunderstood this wonderful truth. They see election as a negative thing. They reason as though there were many people who all want to be saved but can't because God hasn't chosen them. But of course this is all wrong. It is not that some want in but God bars the door. The reality is that the door is wide open for any to enter — but none will! But, happily, God did not leave the matter there. He could have, and if He had He would have been entirely just in doing so. But He didn't. He instead made His own choice, one which overruled our own madness. And in His gracious choice we find the grace that brings salvation.

This is grace at its best. God did not wait for us to come to Him. He chose us in keeping with His own purpose (Eph.1:5, 11; cf. 2Tim.1:9; Rom.8:28). Thankfully, He came to us even while we were running away from Him. All this is to affirm that salvation is of God and to His glory alone.

Limited Atonement

Now of course election is not enough to save us by itself. There is this matter of divine justice — which must be satisfied. That is, God cannot merely take sinners into His fellowship. Their sin must be dealt with first. In fact, they must be punished.

But this is the very heart of the gospel, that Christ came and in the place of sinners offered a sacrifice to God for their sin. In Jesus' words, “I lay down my life for my sheep” (Jn.10:11). Because His death was in their place and for their sin, they will go free. They are punished in Him, their Substitute. This, again, is the whole essence of the gospel, the very hallmark of Christianity. Golgotha was no mere place; it was an event. There Christ died for us. There He saved us.

It is for this reason that we say, further, that Christ died with the intention of saving His elect. He gave His life “for his sheep” (Jn.10:11). To be sure, the value of Christ's person and work is infinite. His death therefore was entirely sufficient to atone for all the sins of all the men who ever lived. But of course, it was not *designed* to do that. We know this, very simply, because not all are saved. His mission, as He defined it, was to save “those whom the Father had given Him” (Jn.6:37-39). On His way to the cross, it was for the elect that Jesus prayed and not the world at large (Jn.17:9). He came on a gracious mission — to save those whom the Father had chosen — and it is with this intention that He offered Himself for sin. Put another way, by His death Jesus “gathered together in one the children of God who were scattered abroad” (Jn.11:52).

The apostle Paul speaks of this in similar language. Christ “bought the church with His own blood” (Acts 20:28). He “loved the church and gave Himself for it” (Eph.5:25). Perhaps more significantly he speaks of the final number of the redeemed as a “purchased possession” (Eph.1:14); *they* have been bought, and so their salvation will come to full number and to fruition. And in Rom.8:32 he explains that those for whom Christ died *necessarily* receive *all* of the attending blessings; there are none for whom Christ died who do not receive salvation in its fullness. In short, every last person for whom Christ died will enjoy its benefits (2Cor.5:14-15). Or, to view it from the standpoint of justice, none for whom Jesus died can ever be condemned (Rom.8:34); because Christ has died in their place, justice demands their acquittal.

The writer to the Hebrews is just as explicit. Some have mistakenly thought that in dying Christ attempted to save everyone. But that is plainly not the case. Christ did not *attempt* anything; by His death He “*obtained* eternal redemption” (9:12), not in theory but in fact. He died “so that those who are called may receive the promise of eternal inheritance” (v.15). Who are these “who are called”? They are the “many” for whose sin Christ was offered (v.28).

At issue here is not the value but the efficacy of Christ's death. Did He in dying try to save

everyone? Did He in dying merely make salvation possible for everyone equally? Was this His intent? If so, then in the end it was not His death that secured our salvation. And if that is so, then His death was not enough. This is why the Biblical writers emphasize so that in dying, Jesus *secured* and *accomplished* the salvation of His people. He did not die in hopes that someone somewhere might make his way to somehow make His atonement efficacious. Not at all. He died to save. He came to “save *His people* from their sins” (Mt.1:21), and so He did. In His death the work that saves was “finished” (Jn.19:30).

This is precisely why we speak so confidently of our good standing before God in Christ. What God demanded of us in terms of justice, the Lord Jesus did for us. “Jesus Paid It All!” we sing, and for good reason. Even in heaven this will be our song. “You were slain, and by Your blood You have redeemed us to God” (Rev.5:9). Our assurance does not lie in anything less. We do not suppose that He did so much and left something else to us. No, we believe that He did enough all by Himself, and in this we take refuge. Accordingly, our only glory is “in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Gal.6:14).

Spurgeon again puts the matter into right perspective.

“We are often told that we limit the atonement of Christ, because we say that Christ has not made a satisfaction for all men, or all men would be saved. Now, our reply to this is, that, on the other hand, our opponents limit it; we do not. The Arminians say, Christ died for all men. Ask them what they mean by it. Did Christ die so as to secure the salvation of all men? They say, ‘No, certainly not.’ We ask them the next question — Did Christ die so as to secure the salvation of any man in particular? They answer ‘No.’ They are obliged to admit this, if they are consistent. They say ‘No. Christ has died that any man may be saved if . . .’ — and then follow certain conditions of salvation. Now, who is it that limits the death of Christ? Why, you. You say that Christ did not die so as infallibly to secure the salvation of anybody. We beg your pardon, when you say we limit Christ’s death; we say, ‘no, my dear sir, it is you that do it.’ We say Christ so died that he infallibly secured the salvation of a multitude that no man can number, who through Christ’s death not only may be saved, but are saved, must be saved and cannot by any possibility run the hazard of being anything but saved. You are welcome to your atonement, you may keep it. We will never renounce ours for the sake of it.”

In short, our note of praise — now and forever — is for God’s particular, saving love. We find no security, no joy at all, in a vague, general, impersonal love spread out over all men equally. We find our highest joy in this: although we were choosing hell, He chose *us* and rescued *us* by His blood. He loved “the church and gave Himself for it” (Eph.5:25).

Irresistible Grace

So our salvation was accomplished for us at the cross. But how is it applied? And when? Answer: when we are “called.”

The Bible reveals to us that it is just this which distinguishes Christians from the rest of the world: we are people whom God has called (e.g., 1Cor.1:26). He has not left us alone. He has “called us into the fellowship of His Son” (1Cor.1:9). Having chosen us and having sent His Son to secure our redemption, God did not then leave it to us to find our own way to Him. He in grace called us to Christ.

This distinguishing grace, of course, is evident, for example, in gospel meetings. Many refuse the free offer of salvation in Christ, but some do not. And what is it that explains the interest and willingness of these who believe? Is the answer to be found in *them*? Are we to say that, well, they are obviously better people! Or can we say that they are more intelligent? Obviously, we would not say that. We instinctively realize that the difference is one of grace (cf. 1Cor.4:7; 15:10).

In fact, this little scenario is precisely the illustration the Apostle Paul uses in 1Cor.1:18-31. The message of the cross is “foolishness” to the world; both Jews and Gentiles consider the idea of a “crucified savior” to be self contradictory (v.23). But when this same message is preached to “those who

are the called,” it is invariably received in faith, and this by the power and wisdom of God (v.24). In His wisdom, God calls those of His own choosing (vv.26-27), and this to keep from man any room for self-congratulation (v.29).

It is for this reason that we say God’s saving grace is “irresistible.” This does not mean that no one rejects the gospel, obviously. Nor does it mean that God’s elect may not for a time resist. It plainly admits all of this. What is meant by the term is that God’s call is *efficacious*. That is to say, when God calls a man into the fellowship of His Son (1Cor.1:9), the call is not refused. And necessarily so: it is the outworking of the eternal plan. We are “called *according to His purpose*” (Rom.8:28; 2Tim.1:9). It is Jesus’ chosen “sheep” whom He calls, and when they hear, they come (Jn.10:3, 27).

This matter of the efficacy of God’s call is both assumed and argued over and again in the Bible. For example, in Acts 2:39 Peter says that the promise of salvation is to “as many as the Lord our God shall call.” In Rom.8:28-30 divine calling is one vital link in the outworking of God’s eternal purpose. Those who are “predestined” are the same ones who are “called”; and it is these, in turn, who are “justified.” In Paul’s illustration of the Potter and the clay, the ones whom God “calls” are identified as the “vessels of mercy, which He before prepared unto glory” (Rom.9:23-24). Calling is viewed as the means by which we are brought to Christ (1Thes.2:12; 1Pet.2:9; 5:10; 2Pet.1:3). God’s “call” is not his general “invitation” to “whoever will.” It is His specific and compelling activity whereby His elect are brought into saving relationship to Christ.

This, by the way, explains why the word becomes a sort of title for all of the redeemed. We are “the called” (Rom.1:6; 8:28; Jude 1; Rev.17:14).

The Bible relates this same idea in other language also. “Thy people shall be willing in the day of Thy power” (Ps.110:3). “All” those whom the Father has “given” to the Son “shall come” to Him (Jn.6:37). Not “some” and not “might” — “all” of them “shall come.” And as a result, “none of them is lost” (v.39). The call is effectual. Indeed, “No man can come to me except the Father which sent me draw him (v.44), but “everyone” whom the Father draws and teaches “comes to me” (v.45). There is no room for mistake here. God works sovereignly and powerfully and without error. Not one of those whom He calls will be lost.

Perhaps the best known illustration of this is from the ministry of the apostle Paul in Philippi. There he preached the gospel to a group of ladies at a prayer meeting. But it was one Lydia who responded in faith. Why? Because “the Lord opened her heart” (Acts 16:14). God’s saving grace proved irresistible simply because He worked in her heart so as to remove her natural disposition to resist! She was “willing in the day of His power” (Ps.110:3). God, as with the apostle Paul himself, had “shined in her heart to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2Cor.4:6). He “worked in her both to will and to do of His good pleasure” (Phil.2:13).

All this is not to say that faith is unnecessary, to be sure! We must believe in order to be saved. We are “justified by faith” (Rom.5:1). What this emphasizes, however, is that this saving faith rises not from something from within us but from the work of God (cf. Mat.16:17). We believe, yes, but only as a direct result of God’s mighty power at work within us (Eph.1:19) and regenerating grace (1Jn.5:1).

Nor is this to say that we should not offer the gospel to “whoever will.” God’s special, effectual call is simply His response to a world who had already said “No!” to this general offer. Our natural disposition is to resist and reject the gospel offer. “None seek after God” (Rom.3:11). There would be no salvation at all if God were to leave us alone. So in mighty, conquering grace He works within us so as to bring us to faith in His Son. And this call we ourselves found irresistible. We suddenly found ourselves desperately in love with Christ and running to Him. The call, we have found, was effective. And for that we are glad..

This is precisely the testimony of the apostle Paul (2Cor.4:6; cf. Acts 9:1-6), and this is the testimony of every true believer. We do not suppose that we are saved because we . . . anything. We all recognize that we are saved because God has been graciously at work.

“Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,”

we sing, because we understand that until God so moved in us there was no fear at all.

“Thou hast made us willing, Thou hast made us free!”

“By thy love constraining, By thy grace divine!”

These are songs we sing in worship to express our grateful praise to God for His distinguishing and compelling grace made effective in our own lives. We have learned that our glorying is only in the Lord (1Cor.1:31).

The Perseverance of the Saints

Now then, if God has done all this for us, could we ever again become lost? Is it possible that God would include us in His eternal, redeeming plan and then allow us to be condemned?

The question answers itself. “He Who calls us is faithful” and He will surely bring us to final glorification (1Thes.5:23-24). Having begun this work in us, He will certainly finish it (Phil.1:6). This is *His* work of redemption, and He will not fail (Jn.6:37-39). To accomplish the final salvation of all of God’s elect is precisely the mission on which the Lord Jesus came (Jn.6:38-39). His death on the cross “perfected them forever” (Heb.10:14). All of Christ’s sheep are safe forever in His hand, and, further, in the Father’s hand (Jn.10:27-29). “They shall never perish” (Jn.10:28). Never.

“But,” someone might object, “isn’t the enemy more powerful than the sheep?” Yes, he is. But he is not more powerful than the Shepherd, and they are safe in His hand. “They shall never perish.” “But might they not sin?” Yes, they very obviously will. But they will not sin so as to bring themselves into condemnation. The Shepherd will bring them back. “They will never perish.” Not ever.

Moreover, God has justified them; and if He has justified them, who can say otherwise (Rom.8:33)? Is there anyone who can overrule Him? Still more, there is precisely nothing which could ever remove God’s elect from the saving love of Christ. Nothing. No one. Not now, not ever (Rom.8:35-39).

Indeed, it would be wrong for them to perish! Christ has satisfied the demands of justice for them. He was condemned in their place so that they would never have to face it themselves (Rom.8:34). “There is no condemnation now in Christ Jesus” (Rom.8:1).

Further, to bring them to hell would be to frustrate the divine purpose (Rom.8:29). All of those who have been justified must experience glorification (Rom.8:29-30).^[2] The eternal safe keeping of the elect of God rests on nothing less than God’s decree. This is something “promised” to them “before the world began”; and this promise God must keep, for He “cannot lie” (Titus 1:2).

This safety is not due to the power or even the faithfulness of the sheep. No. This is *God’s* work of salvation. They remain in the faith, to be sure! But it is here they are “kept by the power of God” (1Pet.1:3-5).

In fact, it is absurd to think otherwise. If God did all that He did for us “while we were enemies,” can we imagine that he would do less for us now that we have been made his friends (Rom.5:10)? The very idea is ludicrous.

The whole focus in all these doctrines is that God has set Himself for us, and “If God is for us, who can be against us” (Rom.8:31)? He has set out to bring us, His chosen ones, to glory. Christ came to secure our “eternal redemption” (Heb.9:12). Our Lord’s prayer for us, that we would all be brought to glory (Jn.17:11, 15, 24), will surely be answered. We are safe, not for what we have done, but for what God has done for us.

The question, then, is not whether we might sin. The question is whether God's grace is sufficient to keep us even though we sin. Happily, "Where sin abounded, grace much more abounded" (Rom.5:20). If it were otherwise, we would all perish.

It is further a question of God's power. Can He keep us in faith? Indeed He can (1Pet.1:3-5). Can He keep us from sin such that would cause us to fall away entirely? Of course. He is well "able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy" (Jude 24).

Yes, all of God's elect will persevere to the end, and we will then stand not as testimonies to our own strength or goodness, but as monuments of God's great grace made effective in us. And realizing this, the rewards He then gives us we will throw back at His feet in glad and insistent affirmation that "He alone is worthy" (Rev.4:10-11).

Soli Deo gloria!

[1] It has been rightly observed from this passage that any doctrine of election which is not liable to the popular criticism of "injustice" is manifestly not Pauline. Paul's doctrine was open to that criticism, and so he anticipates it. Modern doctrines of election which do not have Paul's problem are, then, not Paul's doctrine.

[2] Notice the past tense: "glorified." So certain is our final salvation, that it may be said to be already received.