

Perseverance Assured

Proverbs 24:16; Mark 4:35

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There are many foes from without and foes from within that would bury you if they could. But God (who cannot lie) has promised to those who have been justified by faith that their faith cannot utterly fail when attacked by even the devil and all his demonic forces. Your foes may heat the furnace 10 times hotter than normal, but the Lord Jesus Christ comes to uphold you so that your faith in Him may not be consumed in that fiery trial. Just as Christ told His disciples as they set out to cross the Sea of Galilee, "Let us pass over unto the other side" (Mark 4:35), so he says to you who have been justified by faith alone in the Lord Jesus Christ: "Let us pass over the sea of life and death into that heavenly kingdom." And though the winds of persecution, the waves of besetting sins, and the fears within your own heart may all conspire to drown you in the raging sea of destruction, the sure Word of our Savior sounds forth into our ears and into our hearts, "Peace, be still." Dear ones, He who brought peace to His disciples of old, still brings peace of mind and conscience to His disciples today, for His promises are ever true and He is ever faithful. The Lord and His promises to you are immutable—they cannot change or fail to be realized.

And thus, when you hear the promise found in our text this Lord's Day, let your faith be united with the power and faithfulness of God, "For a just man falleth seven times, and riseth up again." All the enemies which the devil may enlist to cast you into a pit of despair and hopelessness cannot (yea, it is impossible) to keep those who are justified down in a grave that utterly devours their faith in Jesus Christ. They will arise to do battle another day against the enemies of their soul as certainly as the Lord Jesus Christ Himself arose victoriously from the grave.

Perhaps you have been brought ever so low recently by an affliction, by an attack from others for your faith in Christ, by a besetting sin, by a fear, by the death of a loved one, and the enemy of your soul has tormented your conscience to such a degree that you ask, "Where is the Lord in such pain and sorrow?" or "Have I sinned away all possibility of grace?" The God (who cannot lie) today encourages you with a promise that will torment not you, but rather will torment your enemies and a promise that will renew your faith to soar with the eagles: "For a just man falleth seven times, and riseth up again."

Let us consider together the following two points in Proverbs 24:16: (1) The Promise Is Made to the Just; (2) The Promise Is That of Perseverance.

I. The Promise Is Made to the Just.

A. Who are the just to which this proverb refers? It is to the just and to the just alone to whom this promise is made.

1. First, let me tell you who the just before God are not.

a. The just before God are not those who have reached a state of perfection in this life and no longer sin. God is not speaking of sinless individuals here when he speaks of the just. Short of Jesus Christ and those glorified saints in heaven there are none who are without sin—not even infant children. "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me" Psalm 51:5. "For there is not a just man upon earth that doeth good and sinneth not" Ecclesiastes 7:20.

b. The just before God are not those whose good works outweigh their bad works in this life. The popular mindset of most people today operates upon this false premise. However, God does not grade on a curve (as if 51% good works is a passing grade and anything less is a failing grade). The only passing grade before an infinitely holy God is 100% good works (without exception). "For whosoever shall

keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all” James 2:10 (he is liable to the same punishment of eternal condemnation in breaking one of God’s commandments as if he had broken the whole law).

c. The just before God are not those who consider themselves to be clean before God because they are sincere in what they believe or do. Mere sincerity is not sufficient to make one just before a holy God, for many will spend eternity in hell that are sincerely wrong. The broad way to hell is paved with many sincere intentions (Proverbs 14:12).

d. The just before God are not those in whom righteousness has been infused at justification. The Church of Rome falsely teaches that God makes the sinner just (by infusing him with love, repentance, new obedience and such graces). But the heresy of Rome’s position is that one is considered righteous by God not on the basis of Christ’s righteousness, but on the basis of man’s righteousness which has been worked within him. “But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith [i.e. the object of his faith, namely Christ and His righteousness] is counted for righteousness” Romans 4:5.

e. Dear ones, all of these false ways to be just before God are doomed to failure and destruction for one reason: they all teach that man may be just before God because of something within him or something done by him which is a false gospel.

2. Let us now consider who the just before God are as mentioned here in Proverbs 24:16.

a. They are ungodly sinners who acknowledge and confess the justness of God’s sentence of eternal condemnation against them for their sin, and look in faith outside of themselves to Christ and His perfect righteousness alone as their only hope of being just before a holy God. Those who are just before God look entirely outside of themselves for righteousness—outside of their graces, outside of their righteousness, outside of their obedience, outside of their good intentions, outside of their baptism, and any works which they have done and rather embrace Christ and His holy nature, Christ and his holy desires, Christ and His holy words, Christ and His holy actions as their very own.

b. Ungodly sinners (like you and me) are once and for all forgiven all trespasses in the judicial court of heaven by God and imputed the absolutely perfect righteousness of Christ. And it is on the basis of that and that alone that God removes all condemnation (not simply suspends condemnation to a later time when one falls into sin), but removes it forever from you. That is the just man, woman, or child that is here mentioned in Proverbs 24:16.

B. Are you who are gathered today the just of whom God here speaks? The Lord calls and invites all of the ungodly (not all of the self-righteous) to come to Him and to receive His righteousness. Oh dear ones, do not your hearts rejoice to hear the Lord declare today, “I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance” (Matthew 9:13) and even the chief of sinners (1 Timothy 1:15)? Are you a sinner? If so, you and you alone have a divine warrant to come to Christ that you might be justified through faith in Him and receive everlasting life. Are you even the chief of sinners? You will not be turned away. For you, too, have the same divine warrant to come to Christ that you might be clothed with the garment of His perfect righteousness. You need not wait until you have shed enough tears or prayed enough or beat yourself enough for your sins—all of which have no power to save you. If you hunger and thirst for Christ and His righteousness, then come to the feast that is prepared by God. Eat and drink by faith of Christ and His righteousness and live forevermore. You who do so or have done so are the just here mentioned in Proverbs 24:16.

II. The Promise Is That of Perseverance.

A. In what ways does a just man fall and rise again?

1. A just man falls when attacked and laid low by enemies who hate him. Note that Proverbs 24:16 begins with “for” (i.e. “because”). Proverbs 24:16 states the reason why the wicked man (in

the previous verse) should not seek to overthrow the just man, woman, or child. “Because a just man falleth seven times, and riseth up again.” Thus, we see that the very context tells you that enemies to your faith in Christ or to your practice of the truth in your family, church, country, neighborhood, workplace, or on the internet will seek to devour the testimony and witness of faithful Covenanters. But although such attacks may discourage or even dishearten the just, they will not bury them. God will use even such attacks to raise the just up to persevere in standing for the truth. So often it is the case that you learn to stand and persevere in the faith committed to us by Christ because of the very persecution brought against you.

a. David had no doubt thoroughly instructed his son, Solomon, the human author of this Proverb, concerning his own experience in being persecuted by Saul, Absalom, and many others for his faith in the Lord and his practice of the truth. When trapped in caves or surrounded by the enemy on various occasions, just when David appeared to have fallen into their hands and his testimony for the truth of God to have been silenced, he arose (as it were) out of the jaws and clutches of his enemies to proclaim again the faithfulness of God in delivering him from their evil schemes. God raised David up seven times to persevere in trusting Him for deliverance.

b. Remember the attempt of Joseph’s brothers to bury him in a pit and then to sell him into slavery, thinking that his testimony for the truth would be forever out of their sight. God raised Joseph out of the pit, out of slavery, out of prison and placed him upon the throne of Pharaoh, king of Egypt. God did not allow the enemies within Joseph’s own family to quench that divine grace of perseverance.

c. Or what about that justified woman, Hannah, who was persecuted day in and day out by the evil words of her rival who ridiculed her because she had no children. The Lord did not leave her to the evil designs of her rival and persecutor, but raised her from that pit and gave her a heart of persevering prayer. The Lord Himself graciously rewarded Hannah with three sons and two daughters (one among whom was Samuel).

d. Or consider the wicked scheme of Haman who sought to bury Mordecai and his testimony for the truth by having Mordecai hung and all of the Jews in all of the Provinces of Persia massacred. But God raised Mordecai from the plot of Haman and gave Mordecai the grace of perseverance so that he did not forsake the Lord, even if it appeared that he and all his people might be destroyed. God rather brought the same mischief which Haman had planned against Mordecai and the Jews upon Haman’s own head (or should I say around Haman’s own neck).

e. We can never forget the plot of the Jews to crucify and to bury Jesus and His words of life in that tomb. But with resurrection power and glory, He arose signifying He was the Son of the living God, signifying His payment for sin was sufficient for all of God’s elect, signifying that no punishment for sin could ever touch the just man, woman, or child, and finally signifying that the sting of death itself had been removed for all those who are justified.

f. The disciples fled persecution when Jesus was betrayed by Judas it is true, but that is not the end of the story. They fell seven times as it were, but arose again to boldly testify of the Lord and to courageously lay down their lives for Him thereafter.

g. And dear ones, even if you should be actually slain for your testimony for Jesus Christ (as has been true of faithful witnesses in the past), your testimony for the truth cannot be buried even if you are buried, for it will live and come to life (by the Spirit of God) in the lives of other faithful witnesses (Revelation 11:7-13). Therefore, let the wicked hear and listen to almighty God: “You can try to bury the just man, but you will fail. For even if he should fall seven times (i.e. many times) due to your persecution, you cannot win—you cannot be victorious over the just man. For the Lord will raise up the just and his testimony for the truth. God will cause the just man to persevere in the truth. The Lord will preserve the testimony of the just man in succeeding generations, whereas the testimony of the wicked will perish in the dust. In fact, you, O wicked man, will fall into the same pit which you have dug for the just man.” Herein is promised the victory of the justified man, woman, or child and the doom of the wicked man who would seek to silence them.

h. Even if no violence should follow, men naturally (due to the corruption of their own hearts and their own self-deception) hate the truth and those who faithfully proclaim it. And they try to figure out ways to silence the witnesses of Christ. Some try to do so by misrepresenting what you believe and practice. Some try to silence you by calling you uncharitable or ungodly names. Some try to do so by refusing to talk with you and hoping you and your testimony will die out. Some try to silence you by substituting a lie or an error for the truth. Some (we are told in the prophetic Scriptures) will try to do so increasingly in the future (as has been done in the past) by firing you from a job, fining you, casting you into prison, chasing you, splitting up families, or even taking away your own life. God promises that such persecution will not make the just man a coward, but will make him courageous.

2. A second way in which a just man falls (though not specifically found in the immediate context) is that a just man falls when laid low by various afflictions as we see in the case of Job. Job was buried in the grave of pain, sorrow, and fear over physical afflictions brought into his life through Satan's evil design and by God's holy decree. Satan thought to take away Job's beloved children, Job's immense wealth, and finally Job's good health, and thus bring Job to the point that he would curse God to His face and forever forsake the Lord God. But the Lord raised Job up and granted to him in the midst of his loss of children, wealth, and health a perseverance that would not allow him to curse the Lord and die. In fact, our gracious God blessed Job more abundantly the latter days of his life than He had previously done.

a. Dear ones, although you seem buried with chronic pain, with the loss of a loved one or your job, the Lord will raise you up. He will give you the grace of perseverance even when it seems as though you cannot go another day.

b. Just as Job seemed buried in his affliction but was raised up in perseverance, so will you be. Job was certainly not faultless during his trial and affliction, however, he was granted perseverance. God did not suffer Job to fall away into perdition. God did not allow Job to forsake his faith in Him due to his discouragement, fears, or doubts (which were many). The seed of faith although buried at times was alive and well by God's grace. Thus, the Lord promises to those who are justified by faith alone in the Lord Jesus Christ, "For the just man falleth seven times, and riseth up again."

3. A just man fall when ensnared by besetting sins and a tormenting conscience.

a. What better example of such a fall than the fall of Peter in denying the Lord Jesus Christ—Peter, one of the inner three of Christ's beloved disciples; Peter, who had witnessed the power of Christ in His miracles, who had stood and testified on behalf of all the disciples when asked whether they would also forsake the Lord (as many others were doing), Peter replied, "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God" (John 6:68-69). Peter was a leader among the apostles of Christ, but he fell flat on his face in terribly denying the Lord in whom he believed and whom he loved. Although he proudly proclaimed that he would never forsake the Lord and would even lay down his life for the Lord, fear overwhelmed him and he denied his Lord not just once but three times.

b. This was prophesied to happen by Christ in Luke 22:31-32. Note carefully how Christ promised that Peter's faith would not fail, that although his faith may falter, it would not and could not fail; for God is the one who graciously bestowed upon Peter and all those who are justified the grace of perseverance. The God who upholds the universe would uphold Peter's faltering faith. Peter would rise again in perseverance and go forth from this fall to encourage and strengthen his brethren.

c. Dear ones, Peter is no exception. For it is not only Peter to whom Christ makes this promise, but this promise is made to all who are justified in Christ. "For the just man falleth seven times, and riseth up again." Christ ever lives to make intercession for you who are justified in Christ. It is not the strength of your faith that causes you to persevere, but the object of your faith, Jesus Christ, the lover and Savior of your soul who will never let you go.

B. What is your besetting sin, dear justified child of God? Have you become so discouraged that you have felt that death would be better than the torment of this sin? Have you almost despaired of forgiveness or eternal life due to this sin? You who are justified in Christ Jesus are forever beyond the reach of God's condemning wrath, for that wrath has forever been satisfied in Christ Jesus. The Law of God cannot condemn you. That is why I spend so much time speaking of justification. For there can be no real sanctification in your life, if you do not understand the glories of your justification. You cannot grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ if you continue to think or act as though you must be justified time and time again. Dear beleaguered Christian, you will only overcome those besetting sins in your life as you grow in your knowledge of the perfection of your justification and perseverance in the faith graciously granted to you in Christ Jesus. Confess your sin, grieve and sorrow over your sin, but, dear ones, do not remain in that state. ARISE from that grief and sorrow to praise and thank the Lord who causes you to arise, even when you fall seven times into that sin in the same day. It is no excuse to continue in the sin. But your victory is assured in Christ who has already overcome that sin by His death and resurrection. It is neither the size of your faith nor the strength of your faith that causes you to persevere in trusting Christ alone for your justification and sanctification. It is only and always the object of your faith, even the Lord Jesus Christ alone who causes you to rise every time that you fall.

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