

# Perseverance of the Righteous

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## Introduction

Brakel cites four texts as supposed proof of the perseverance of the saints (Ps 37:24; Mt 24:4; Rom 8:38-39; 1Jn 3:9). Supposedly, these texts prove that all genuine believers will preserve in the faith. In the present discussion, we will consider his leadoff proof-text, Ps 37:4, and cite his argument pertaining to that text in full.<sup>1</sup>

### *Proof #1: The Saints' Perseverance Proven from Scripture*

We derive this proof from specific texts.

A. "Though he (the righteous or godly man) fall, he shall not be utterly cast down: for the LORD upholdeth him with His hand" (Ps. 37:24). A godly man is here referred to as falling and sinning, as he still offends daily in many things. If he were to be cast away, it would have to be for the sake of his sins. The text says, however, that he will not be cast away for that reason. The reason is then added: It is not that he will restore himself and arise, but because the Lord sustains him and keeps him from falling. He will thus most certainly remain standing.

*Evasive Argument:* The text speaks of a falling due to temporal trials, and not of a falling into sin. Not to be cast down refers to a not perishing in these afflictions.

*Answer:* (1) The godly generally have more afflictions than the ungodly, and they do indeed perish in them. "The righteous perisheth," (Isa. 57:1). Thus, the promise, in the **absolute sense** of the word, cannot primarily be applicable to the temporal.

(2) If it were so that the godly would always be, and remain, blessed in a **temporal sense**, they would certainly also persevere in godliness. That, which brings forth a positive effect thereby becomes more positive itself.

(3) And if the reference here is to a falling into wretched circumstances [i.e., a **moral sense**], then this is a powerful proof for perseverance [**in the soteriological sense and eschatological sense**], for the psalmist confirms what Paul writes: "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation...? For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life ... shall be able to separate us from, the love of God," (Rom. 8:35, 38-39).

(4) The psalmist speaks in this psalm of the exercise of godliness and that the Lord will bring forth their righteousness as the light (vv. 3-6) [**in the soteriological sense and eschatological sense**], while declaring in verse 24 that they are yet imperfect and do stumble and fall [**in the moral sense**]. Nevertheless, they will not be cast away [**in the soteriological sense and eschatological sense**], because the Lord upholds them [**in the moral sense**].<sup>2</sup>

## Observation

The backbone of Brakel's argument pits a temporal sense against a moral sense for falling and claims that the temporal sense cannot be the primary sense because the righteous often fall and perish in temporal afflictions. Therefore, since the Lord's sustaining the righteous in Ps 37:24 cannot be understood in the absolute sense as applying to temporal falling and sustaining, Brakel assumes that the verse must apply in the absolute sense to moral falling and sustaining, so that God will not allow the righteous to fall morally, at least not fully and finally, resulting in their salvation in the

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<sup>1</sup> For my discussion of these other texts in my books, see *Master Scripture Index*. Available at <http://mishthology.org/pdf/index/>.

<sup>2</sup> *Wilhelmus À Brakel, "The Perseverance of the Saints."* Available at <https://www.monergism.com/perseverance-saints-3>. Accessed 11/9/2019.

soteriological sense and eschatological sense.

Obviously, if Brakel's argument misconstrues these senses, his argument is nonsense. Brakel has assumed that since the fall in Ps 37:24 does not apply absolutely in the temporal sense, it must apply exclusively in the moral sense. Does this make sense? Brakel has adequately failed to address the possibility that the verse might be used in a relative sense. His oversight is even more suspicious in that he argues for relative righteousness.

He correctly notes that the verse is not talking about absolute righteousness. The godly/righteous saint is not being thought of in this verse as being righteous in the absolute sense of being soteriological sinless. Relative righteousness is in view. Moreover, relative righteousness, rather than absolute righteousness, is a common OT theme. On the one hand, righteousness is denied: "For in Thy sight no man living is righteous" (Ps 143:2).<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, a multitude of verses, like Ps 37:4, affirms our righteousness. We may deduce, then, that while our righteousness in the absolute experiential sense is denied, our relative experiential righteousness may be affirmed. David's son, Solomon, likewise asserts: "There is not a righteous man on earth who continually does good and who never sins" (Ecc 7:20). Yet Solomon has much to say about those who are relatively righteous. Similarly, the Lord's sustaining of the relative righteous in Ps 37:4 could be a holding them in the relative sense rather than absolute sense.<sup>4</sup>

Brakel also fails to consider that the eschatological salvation for the righteous, even if in the absolute sense, might be misthological rather than soteriological. Yet the reward of the righteous is affirmed by both David and Solomon in Psalms and Proverbs, respectively, and confirmed by Jesus:

- And men will say, "Surely there is a **reward for the righteous**; surely there is a God who judges on earth!" (Ps 58:11)
- If **the righteous will be rewarded in the earth**, how much more the wicked and the sinner! (Prov 11:31)
- Adversity pursues sinners, but the **righteous will be rewarded** with prosperity. (Prov 13:21)
- "He who receives a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a **prophet's reward**; and he who receives a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a **righteous man's reward**. (Mt 10:41)

Such affirmations of a positive reward for the relatively experiential righteous are clear indicators that what is at stake for the righteous are rewards (thus misthology), not gifts (thus not soteriology). Righteousness pays. The gift of soteriologically imputed righteousness is not the issue. Rather, the reward of being considered righteous is at stake. Put in NT terms, those believers who are experientially righteous will be rewarded with the crown of righteousness (2Tim 4:8). This crown is not promised to all believers, only to those believers who finish the race well. Neither the OT nor the NT assume that all believers who are in the race will finish well. Contrary, to Brakel, both testaments testify that some believers will finish poorly. Consequently, those believers will be poor in terms of heavenly rewards.

### *Evaluation*

*Assumptive Argument:* Brakel assumes that falling of the righteous in Ps 37:4 must be moral and that the Lord's preservation of the righteous in this verse must therefore be soteriological.

### **Answer (1): Soteriological Assumption**

Brakel's own citation from the context refutes his soteriological assumption.

<sup>3</sup> Trust in the Lord, and do good; dwell in the land and cultivate faithfulness. <sup>4</sup> Delight yourself in the Lord; and He will give you the desires of your heart. <sup>5</sup> Commit your way to the Lord, trust also in Him, and He will do it. <sup>6</sup> And **He will bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your judgment as the noonday**. <sup>7</sup> Rest in the Lord and wait patiently for Him; do not fret because of him who prospers in his way, because of the man who carries out wicked schemes. <sup>8</sup> Cease from anger, and forsake wrath; do not fret, it leads only to evildoing. <sup>9</sup> For evildoers will be cut off, but those who wait for the Lord, they will **inherit the land**. <sup>10</sup> Yet a little while and the wicked man will be no more; and you will look carefully for his place,

<sup>3</sup> Isaiah (64:6) is a classic text denying absolute righteousness: "For all of us have become like one who is unclean, And all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment; And all of us wither like a leaf, And our iniquities, like the wind, take us away." Yet, elsewhere, Isaiah affirms relative righteousness (e.g., Is 3:10).

<sup>4</sup> One person or group of people being more righteous than another is a common OT theme and explicitly affirmed (Gen 38:26; 1Sam 24:17; 1Kgs 2:32; Jer 3:11; Hab 1:13). All such texts are affirming relative experiential righteousness.

and he will not be there. <sup>11</sup> But **the humble will inherit the land**, and will delight themselves in abundant prosperity. (Ps 37:3-11)

This context is making misthological promises to the righteous. Indeed, such texts provide a great backdrop for understanding Jesus' misthological affirmations in the Sermon on the Mount:

<sup>3</sup> "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. <sup>4</sup> "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. <sup>5</sup> "Blessed are the gentle, for they shall **inherit the earth**. <sup>6</sup> "Blessed are those who hunger and **thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied**. <sup>7</sup> "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. <sup>8</sup> "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. <sup>9</sup> "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. <sup>10</sup> "Blessed are those who have been **persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven**. <sup>11</sup> "Blessed are you when men cast insults at you, and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely, on account of Me. <sup>12</sup> "Rejoice, and be glad, for **your reward in heaven is great**, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. (Mt 5:3-12)

David poses the possibility of the personal righteousness of those who serve the Lord shining forth like a light (Ps 37:6). The misthological nature of the righteous shining like a light is known in the OT: "And those who have insight will shine brightly like the brightness of the expanse of heaven, and those who lead the many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever" (Dan 12:3). The NT likewise affirms that those believers who live righteously will be clothed in radiant garments because they are worthy (Rev 3:4).

As to the inheritance, David indicates the misthological inheritance of the relative righteous: "The Lord knows the days of the blameless; and *their inheritance will be forever*" (Ps 37:18). David's use of the word *forever* shows the eschatological sense and misthological sense in which he is thinking. Paul shares this outlook: "Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men; knowing that from the Lord you will receive the **reward of the inheritance**. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve" (Col 3:23-24). Is there really any reason to think that David does not mean something similar when he says, "For the Lord loves justice, and does not forsake His godly ones; they are *preserved forever*; but the descendants of the wicked will be cut off" (Ps 37:28)? Temporally, the Lord does not forsake the godly, and they are preserved forever misthologically. Misthological preservation rather than soteriological perseverance is contextually indicated.

### Answer (2): Counter Evidence

Brakel's conclusion that Ps 37:4 proves that the Lord will not allow the righteous to stumble into relative full and final unrighteousness is refuted by significant counter texts.

- And he went out to meet Asa and said to him, "Listen to me, Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin: the Lord is with you when you are with Him. And if you seek Him, He will let you find Him; but **if you forsake Him, He will forsake you**. (2Chron 15:2)
- <sup>20</sup> "Again, **when a righteous man turns away from his righteousness and commits iniquity, and I place an obstacle before him, he shall die; since you have not warned him, he shall die in his sin, and his righteous deeds which he has done shall not be remembered**; but his blood I will require at your hand. <sup>21</sup> "However, if you have warned the righteous man that the righteous should not sin, and he does not sin, he shall surely live because he took warning; and you have delivered yourself." (Eze 3:20-21)
- <sup>24</sup> But **when a righteous man turns away from his righteousness, commits iniquity, and does according to all the abominations that a wicked man does, will he live? All his righteous deeds which he has done will not be remembered for his treachery which he has committed and his sin which he has committed; for them he will die**. <sup>25</sup> "Yet you say, 'The way of the Lord is not right.' Hear now, O house of Israel! Is My way not right? Is it not your ways that are not right? <sup>26</sup> "**When a righteous man turns away from his righteousness, commits iniquity, and dies because of it, for his iniquity which he has committed he will die**. (Eze 18:24-26)
- <sup>11</sup> "Say to them, 'As I live!' declares the Lord God, 'I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the

wicked turn from his way and live. Turn back, turn back from your evil ways! Why then will you die, O house of Israel?' <sup>12</sup> "And you, son of man, say to your fellow citizens, 'The righteousness of a righteous man will not deliver him in the day of his transgression, and as for the wickedness of the wicked, he will not stumble because of it in the day when he turns from his wickedness; whereas a righteous man will not be able to live by his righteousness on the day when he commits sin.' <sup>13</sup> **"When I say to the righteous he will surely live, and he so trusts in his righteousness that he commits iniquity, none of his righteous deeds will be remembered; but in that same iniquity of his which he has committed he will die.** <sup>14</sup> "But when I say to the wicked, 'You will surely die,' and he turns from his sin and practices justice and righteousness, <sup>15</sup> if a wicked man restores a pledge, pays back what he has taken by robbery, walks by the statutes which ensure life without committing iniquity, he will surely live; he shall not die. <sup>16</sup> "None of his sins that he has committed will be remembered against him. He has practiced justice and righteousness; he will surely live. <sup>17</sup> "Yet your fellow citizens say, 'The way of the Lord is not right,' when it is their own way that is not right. <sup>18</sup> **"When the righteous turns from his righteousness and commits iniquity, then he shall die in it.** (Eze 33:11-18)

### Answer (3): Principles in Tension

Brakel's assumption that Ps 37:24 could not be principally temporal appears to overlook texts that affirm the temporal deliverance of the righteous. In fact, some of the texts listed below are not only from Psalms but from Psalm 24 itself:

- <sup>15</sup> The eyes of the Lord are toward the righteous, and His ears are open to their cry. <sup>16</sup> The face of the Lord is against evildoers, to cut off the memory of them from the earth. <sup>17</sup> The righteous cry and the Lord hears, and delivers them out of all their troubles. <sup>18</sup> The Lord is near to the brokenhearted, and saves those who are crushed in spirit. <sup>19</sup> Many are the afflictions of the righteous; but the Lord delivers him out of them all. (Ps 34:15-19)
- The righteous cry and the Lord hears, and delivers them out of all their troubles. (Ps 34:17)
- I have been young, and now I am old; yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, or his descendants begging bread. (Ps 37:25)
- <sup>39</sup> But the salvation of the righteous is from the Lord; He is their strength in time of trouble. <sup>40</sup> And the Lord helps them, and delivers them; He delivers them from the wicked, and saves them, because they take refuge in Him. (Ps 37:39-40)
- Many are the afflictions of the righteous; but the Lord delivers him out of them all. (Ps 34:19)
- Cast your burden upon the Lord, and He will sustain you; He will never allow the righteous to be shaken. (Ps 55:22)
- Hate evil, you who love the Lord, who preserves the souls of His godly ones; He delivers them from the hand of the wicked. (Ps 97:10)
- <sup>7</sup> He stores up sound wisdom for the upright; He is a shield to those who walk in integrity, <sup>8</sup> Guarding the paths of justice, and He preserves the way of His godly ones. (Prov 2:7-8)
- The Lord will not allow the righteous to hunger, but He will thrust aside the craving of the wicked. (Pro 10:3)
- The righteous will never be shaken, but the wicked will not dwell in the land. (Prov 10:30)
- <sup>8</sup> The righteous is delivered from trouble, but the wicked takes his place. <sup>9</sup> With his mouth the godless man destroys his neighbor, but through knowledge the righteous will be delivered. (Prov 11:8-9)
- <sup>13</sup> An evil man is ensnared by the transgression of his lips, but the righteous will escape from trouble. (Prov 12:13)
- Adversity pursues sinners, but the righteous will be rewarded with prosperity. (Prov 13:21)

- The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous runs into it and is safe. (Prov 18:10)
- For a **righteous man falls seven times, and rises again**, but the wicked stumble in time of calamity. (Prov 24:16)

The last text sounds very much like Solomon's exposition on his father's statement in Ps 37:23-24, where David said, "The steps of a man are established by the Lord; and He delights in his way. When he falls, he shall not be hurled headlong; because the Lord is the One who holds his hand." Both texts are dealing with a godly/righteous man who falls. Solomon says he will rise all seven times. David says that he the Lord holds his hand. Surely, Solomon is speaking temporally. David seems to be speaking similarly. Yet Brakel says that David cannot be speaking primarily temporally. To the contrary, like Solomon, David certainly seems to be speaking temporally. One might be justified in perceiving a misthological dimension, given David's context. But Brakel is not justified (1) to read conditional soteriological security into the text, (2) to ignore the misthological dimension of the context, and (3) to discount the contingent nature of being sustained temporally and rewarded eschatologically in other texts.

#### **Answer (4): Moral and Temporal Fall**

The wedge that Brakel tries to drive between falling morally and temporally, so that he can extrapolate an absolute, is counterintuitive. The temporal trials and moral failings of the righteous are issues with which David is altogether familiar. Commentators frequently acknowledge that the both can be entailed: "The good man may be afflicted; he may even fall into some fault (Gal 6:1) or grievous sin (2Sa 11:4); but so long as 'the root of the matter is in him' (Job 19:28), God will not suffer him to be prostrated" (PC). "Supposing he should fall, whether it be a fall arising from misfortune or from error, or both together, he is not prostrated" (K&D). Even though Henry may share Brakel's Calvinistic belief in the perseverance of the saints, Henry comments on this verse: "That God will keep us from being ruined by our falls either into sin or into trouble" (MH). "The Lord delights in how a good person lives, and He blesses his or her activities. Even though such a person may stumble as he goes through life, he will not experience a fatal fall from which he cannot rise" (CN).<sup>5</sup> David fell into grievous sin, but when God confronted him about his sin, David repented, and God preserved him from utter moral and temporal ruin. If, however, David had refused to repent, the outcome would have been entirely different, as stressed by Ezekiel. David would not have been considered a good man in the end.

#### **Answer (5) Proverbial Maximums are Not Absolute**

The dichotomy that Brakel poses between moral and temporal falling, on the one hand, and soteriological and temporal preservation, on the other hand, is based in part on his failure to recognize that such dimensions can be held in tension. As explained more fully in my book, *Fallen From Grace*, we can have principles in tension. Consider these contrasting Biblical proverbs: "Do not answer a fool according to his folly... Answer a fool according to his folly" (Prov 26:3-4). Is this a contradiction? No. This contrast is proverbial not irrational. Sometimes one course of action is best; sometimes the other is better. These proverbs are guidelines, not laws. They are pragmatic observations and principles about the way life normally works. As principles they reflect general truth rather than absolute truth. Moral absolutes exists, but not everything is morally absolute. These proverbs are not ironclad contracts. They are not unconditional guarantees or rules. For this reason, it is often said that *proverbs are principles not promises*. Yet this rejoinder possibly goes too far the opposite direction. It would probably be better to say that we have *principles in tension*. Forlines calls "this principle of interpretation: the *principle of tension and counterbalance*" (emphasis his).<sup>6</sup>

One verse tells you not to answer a fool. The other verse tells you to answer a fool. Obviously you cannot do both of these in every situation....What you have to do is consider what the greatest risk is. If the greatest risk is that you will be like him, you do not answer him. If the greatest risk is that he will be wise in his own eyes, you do answer him. It will not always be easy to decide which to do, but you must do one of them. It is a serious mistake to choose one of these and adopt it as your approach to every situation.

....There are some truths that cannot be set forth in one principle alone, but must be set forth in two or more principles which counterbalance each other... This principle of interpretation guides us in areas where we are dealing with what we might call *general truth* instead of *absolute truth*.... This principle is similar to the principle, 'There are many facets of truth.'...

<sup>5</sup> Commentaries: *Pulpit Commentary* (PC). *Matthew Henry* (MH); Keil & Delitzsch (K&D); *Constables Notes* (CN).

<sup>6</sup> F. Leroy Forlines, *The Quest for Truth: Answering Life's Inescapable Questions* (Nashville: Randall House, 2001), 235.

...there are absolute truths such as the moral teachings of the Ten Commandments. These we must obey. But there are some areas of life for which we have general principles rather than absolute truths to guide us. (Emphasis his.)<sup>7</sup>

Giving due recognition to *principles in tension or tension and counterbalance*, as parents we should realize that even if we raise our children correctly, they could still turn out bad. We must be ever mindful of another proverbial statement made by Paul: “Bad company corrupts good morals” (1Cor 15:33). Bad influences can corrupt good children. Parents need to be diligent and ever aware of this real danger. Certainly, part of our responsibility as parents is to point out the realities of these dangers to our children and teach them that, despite our godly discipline, they put themselves in real danger of departing from the way they should go if they hang out with the wrong crowd.

On more than one occasion, my wife and I have had our own children want to do certain things with a group of friends, and we have not permitted them. Our children assured us that as our children they had been reared properly and could be trusted. My wife wisely has responded that it is not that we do not trust them (our children) but that we do not necessarily trust their friends in certain circumstances. So we were unwilling to allow them to participate in some group activity. Their godly training did not make them immune to ungodly corruption.

Likewise, we must point our children to these passages in Hebrews and show them that they will fail to inherit these blessings if they do not respond properly to God’s discipline. Discipline is vital to their well-being. Nevertheless, godly discipline does not necessarily or automatically assure godly performance.

Even so, children eventually reach the point where they are the ones responsible for their behavior, not the parent. The parent is no longer the one responsible. God is not at fault for our faults. So what is to be concluded about the parents of prodigal children?

If you are the parent of a prodigal child and if you have done your part in raising him or her properly, then recognize two things: (1) There is still hope, and (2) even God Himself has prodigal children. Do not beat yourself to death with a club of guilt if you have done everything possible to raise your children in a godly fashion. Still, at the same time, do everything you can to make sure you are raising them in a godly fashion with positive expectations.

Although proverbs are not absolute promises, they are general maximums which give expected rather than guaranteed results. They are not absolute rules, but they are rules of thumb. For this reason, when we raise our children according to Prov 22:6, we are justified in having high expectations concerning their behavior. The writer of Hebrews, Paul, and John also tend to have optimistic outlooks concerning their spiritual children (1Cor 1:8; Gal 5:10; Phil 1:6; 2Thess 3:4; Heb 6:9; 10:39; 1Jn 2:27—MT). These proverbial expectations are not prophetic declarations. These biblical writers expected their readers to respond positively to their warnings. However, at the same time, these writers were realists and acknowledged that failure was a real possibility. Pastoral and parental optimism must not be devoid of realism. A balanced proverbial tension gives due consideration to both the positive and negative dimensions. Optimistic expectancy should not be confused with infallible certainty.

Likewise, as explained much more fully in my book, *Misthological Models Part 3* concerning various examples of duality, there is a sense in which the Lord may forsake us and a sense in which He will not. A few classic examples will suffice to illustrate the legitimacy of this approach. On the one hand, we are told that nothing can separate us from God’s love (Rom 8:38-39). On the other hand, we must keep ourselves in God’s love (Jn 15:10; Jude 1:21). We are forgiven (Col 2:13-14), yet we still need forgiveness (1Jn 1:9). We are promised that we will not come into judgment (Jn 5:24), yet we are assured that we will be judged (2Cor 5:10). We are told that God may forsake us (2Chron 15:2), yet we are told that He will never forsake us (Heb 13:5). Such tensions can be resolved by postulating that we are unconditionally loved, forgiven, spared from judgment, and unforsaken at one level but not at another level.<sup>8</sup>



<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 234-235.

<sup>8</sup> For more in-depth discussion of being forsaken versus not being forsaken, see my book, *The Outer Darkness*.

**Answer (6) Proverbial Parallelism is Entailed**

The parallelism between David's statement and that of his son Solomon is apparent:

- When [the righteous] falls, he will not be hurled headlong, for the Lord is the One who holds his hand. (Ps 37:24)
- For a righteous man falls seven times, and rises again, but the wicked stumble in time of calamity. (Prov 24:16)

Solomon is writing proverbially. He is providing a general principle in Proverbs, not an ironclad guarantee. Those who try to make proverbs into absolutes are prone to serious distortion as to the intention of the text. By the same token, David's statement should not be taken as an absolute. Furthermore, to limit either text to the moral arena is forcing the text into a limitation not intended by the biblical writer. For that matter, Brakel's distinction between falling morally and temporally fails pragmatically. A temporal fall can result in a moral fall. Lazar presents a vivid case in point:

This past Sunday, our minivan wouldn't start, so the kids and I walked to a local church, about a mile away. They protested, feeling it was an exceedingly far distance to travel—"Why is this taking so long? Is this Canada?"

Once we got settled in, I found the preacher was teaching through Job. Unfortunately, having recently taught through Job myself, I started to disagree very quickly! I don't like doing that. Being a preacher is hard work. We often make mistakes. And I want to give everyone the benefit of the doubt and try to focus on the things I agree with, rather than what I disagree with. But this preacher was going out of his way to show that Job teaches Calvinism (without using the term "Calvinism"), which, I think, is not true at all! Still, I was willing to give him a break.

Until...

He started talking about believers going through calamity. How should we react? He told the story of talking to two sisters who recognized him at a local Christian bookstore. The sisters asked for advice about their mother who was dying in hospice. They said that caring for their mother was becoming more troubling, not only because she was dying, but because she would say disturbing things. The preacher didn't give any specific examples of what the dying mother said, but the impression was she was saying *unchristian* things, and that made it harder on the sisters. The sisters asked what to think of that?

The preacher's answer was generic—that God is with us during times of calamity, working all things for our good (another misapplication), etc.

But then he went off on a tangent. He started talking about "genuine" faith and "genuine" believers going through calamity. He brought us to Proverbs 24:16:

*For a righteous man falls seven times, and rises again, But the wicked stumble in time of calamity.*

"Genuine faith always gets back up," he said. "Genuine believers might fall down and fall again, but they don't stay down. They get back up—always."

There seemed to be mumbles of agreement from the congregation—but not from me. Not only was that a misapplication of that verse, I kept thinking about the dying mother. "What about her? She's falling...but she's not getting back up!"

It sounded like the mother's body was shutting down. She was probably delusional and slowly losing her mind. The last words she uttered might have been sinful, even blasphemous, but was she culpable? Not if she was not in her right mind. But even if she were culpable, would her words prove she was not a genuine believer? Would they prove she was never saved to begin with? Are we saved by faith *plus* keeping our tongue under control until we die?

My friend, pastor Allen Rea, wrote an article about the inconsistencies of Calvinist pastors who believe one thing and yet say another (*JOTGES* Spring 2018). I doubt the pastor would have said to the sisters: "Oh, your mother is blaspheming? Well, you know the righteous always get back up. So if she

doesn't quit, I guess she's not a genuine believer and will probably end up in hell. So sorry!" But even if he didn't say that, that's what his theology would lead him to believe.

Job once complained about his miserable comforters (Job 16:2), and to me, Lordship Salvation proves no comfort at all.

Regular readers of this blog will no doubt guess what I would have told the sisters—if the mother ever believed in Jesus for eternal salvation, she is eternally saved, no matter what she might say before she dies (especially if she's losing her mind!).

The pastor did say one good thing worth sharing. This is the gist of what he said. "When a friend is suffering and you try to say something, nine times out of ten you'll end up with a foot in your mouth. Rather than offer explanations, it's better to show up, hug them, and say, 'I love you.'"

To me, nothing says "I love you" more than the doctrine of eternal security. When the righteous fall, maybe that's what they need to hear most.<sup>9</sup>

One way the Lord undergirds the righteous and lifts them up is by telling them that Calvinists are wrong. His absolute assurances of our unconditional soteriological security and His relative assurances of our misthological security give us the means to get up after a fall. We know that we are genuinely saved soteriologically. Contrary to Calvinism, we do not have to doubt our relationship with our Father. Even when we stumble and fall morally or temporally (or both, sometimes one as a result of the other), we can be confident of His fatherly love for us and have courage to draw near to the throne of grace (Heb 4:16). We do not have to wonder if our fall proves that we were never His to start with. *I've Never Been Out of His Care* by Dallas Home well summarizes that assurance:

And although there were times  
I've stepped out of His will  
I've never been out of His care.

When a believer falls, we can assure them that God still cares for them and is still pulling for them and is longing to pull them up by the hand so that they can keep running the race. David is a great example of this relative assurance, and he testifies to it in Ps 37:24. We can offer this assurance because we are not Calvinists. As Free Grace believers we can have absolute soteriological assurance and relative temporal, moral, and misthological assurance. We can run the race with confidence.

### *Conclusion*

The Lord will uphold the experiential righteous in both the moral and temporal sense, but this does not mean that He will uphold them unconditionally in either of those senses. Texts that warn about the reality of the righteous turning from their righteousness, dying in their sin, not having their righteousness remembered, and being forsaken by the Lord still apply morally, temporally, and misthologically. The righteous may become unrighteous in the relative sense and therefore no longer qualify for the promises made to those who are experientially righteous, such as inheriting the kingdom or shinning forth in the kingdom. Still, being in the kingdom is not at stake. Brakel errors in putting soteriological security at risk. Ps 37:24 must not be understood soteriologically or it collapses into the false soteriology of Calvinism, conditioning soteriological security on one's moral performance, making it impossible for you to know that you are loved by God as His child. The verse may be understood, however, to encompass the misthological sense instead, when extrapolated to its absolute contextual implications.<sup>10</sup> The verse need not be limited to the temporal arena or conversely to the moral domain. It encompasses both and logically has misthological implications as well.

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<sup>9</sup> Shawn Lazar, "Lordship Salvation Is Poor Comfort for a Dying Relative." Available at <https://faithalone.org/blog/lordship-salvation-is-poor-comfort-for-a-dying-relative/>. Accessed 11/14/2019. For a related practical example, consider the case in which a believer might suffer an amnesia or dementia and even forget being a believer. They are still soteriologically secure. Furthermore, misthological security may not be affected. See my discussion of *The Vow* in my book, *3D Unconditional Security*.

<sup>10</sup> For further discussion of misthological themes in Psalms and in Ps 37, see my book, *Like a Tree Planted by the Water*.