

Sermon for Morning Prayer
The Thirteenth Sunday After Trinity

I. Lessons:¹

A. The First Lesson: Here beginneth the twelfth
Verse of the first Chapter of Habakkuk.²

“Art thou not from everlasting, O LORD my God,
mine Holy One? we shall not die. O LORD, thou hast or-
dained them for judgment; and, O mighty God, thou hast es-
tablished them for correction. Thou art of purer eyes than to
behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity: wherefore look-
est thou upon them that deal treacherously, and holdest thy
tongue when the wicked devoureth the man that is more
righteous than he? And makest men as the fishes of the sea,
as the creeping things, that have no ruler over them? They
take up all of them with the angle, they catch them in their
net, and gather them in their drag: therefore they rejoice and
are glad. Therefore they sacrifice unto their net, and burn
incense unto their drag; because by them their portion is fat,
and their meat plenteous. Shall they therefore empty their
net, and not spare continually to slay the nations?

“I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the
tower, and will watch to see what he will say unto me, and
what I shall answer when I am reproved. And the LORD
answered me, and said, Write the vision, and make it plain
upon tables, that he may run that readeth it. For the vision is
yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and
not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely
come, it will not tarry. Behold, his soul which is lifted up is
not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith.

“...

“For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of
the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

B. The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the thirty-fifth Verse of the tenth Chapter of the Epistle of Blessed Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews.³

“... Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward. For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise. For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry. Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him. But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

II. Text:

From the Second Lesson: “[I]f any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him. But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul.”⁴ In the Name of the Father, and of the ✕ Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

III. Introduction, Theme, and Developement:

In the Sixteenth Century, a French lawyer⁵ committed to the Reformation devised his own system of theology, a system which came to dominate an entire wing of the Protestant movement. In English, we call that lawyer “John Calvin” and his theological system was published in a famous text entitled “The Institutes of the Christian Religion”.

In 1619, more than eighty years after “The Institutes” was first published, representatives of Calvinist churches from several European countries met in the Netherlands to formulate and formalize their movement’s opposition to the ideas of certain other Protestant groups on the technical details of our salvation. That meeting in the city of Dordrecht

[DOOR-dreckt] is commonly called “the Synod of Dort”⁶ and its conclusions were summarized in five points. These five points are commonly remembered with the aid of an acronym based on that characteristic Dutch flower, the tulip.

These canons of “five-point” or TULIP Calvinism have come to be the characteristic beliefs of the Presbyterians and their European counterparts, the Huguenots **[HEW-geh-knows]**, of the entire segment of European Protestantism movement that is characterized there as “Reformed” (as opposed to “Evangelical”, which to Europeans means “Lutheran”), and even of bodies we do not usually think of as Calvinist, such as the Baptists.

We will not take time this morning to run through all five of the characteristic points of classic “Five Point Calvinism”. We will, however, consider the last, which is signified by the “P” in the “TULIP” acronym.

This stands for the principle of “the Persistence of the Elect”, which is sometimes stated as “once saved, always saved”. This may or may not be an accurate reflection of John Calvin’s own personal ideas but, as his intellectual descendants, the TULIP Calvinists, understand our salvation, once a person has “been saved” – leaving aside for the moment the question of just what “being saved” means – then he or she will necessarily be saved when our Lord comes for the last time in Judgement.

As a practical matter, this notion has a number of disadvantages. For one, it leads very easily to pride and self-satisfaction on the part of those who believe in it. Just think of the Pharisee in the Temple, who compared himself to the tax collector who stood behind him and was convinced that his particular understanding of religion made him fundamentally better than other men and so more worthy of salvation. Our Lord’s own comment on the tax collector: “‘I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the

other, for every one who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted.”⁷

In extreme cases, the *hubris* [**HEW-briss**] expressed by this “Persistence of the Elect” or “once saved, always saved” can lead to Manicæism [**man-ih-KEY-ism**], an early Gnostic [**NOSS-tick**] belief that what this physical realm is unimportant because only the intangible realm of the spirits is “real”. As adopted by Christian heretics, this means that, no matter what one does here on earth, one’s salvation may be assured, so one may as well “eat, drink, and be merry” for in the end it does not count.⁸

However, the most serious objection to this “P” of “Persistence” is that it runs counter to the plain teaching of Scripture. Thus St. Paul wrote that “the Gospel of Christ ... is the power of God unto salvation to *every one* that believeth”⁹ and that “all” are “Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus”.¹⁰

IV. Conclusion:

If it were not possible for us to lose the benefit Christ won for us “by his one oblation of himself once offered”¹¹ then St. Paul would have had no reason to abjure the Philippians to “Work out your own salvation in fear and trembling.”¹² So it is in this vein that the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews quotes our Lord in a way that implies that some do, indeed, draw back from Him and so are lost:

“[I]f any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him. But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul.”¹³

Clearly, we are given that warning so that we who hear it shall not fall into the trap of the pride that assume that, having accepted Christianity and been baptized into

Christ, and so having once been saved, we cannot lose that salvation through our own inattentiveness and disobedience. The Christian vocation is a life-long task, to be pursued, and reviewed, and renewed every day of our lives until their end.

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¹ *Psalms and Lessons for the Christian Year* (1943), THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxxii (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

² Habakkuk 1: 12—2: 4, 14 (KJV).

³ Hebrews 10: 35-39 (KJV).

⁴ Hebrews 10: 38b-39 (KJV).

⁵ Jean Cauvin, commonly called John Calvin (1509-1564).

⁶ The island city’s inhabitants commonly refer to it as “Dordt”, the old name of one of its surrounding rivers. “Dordrecht” itself comes from the Middle Dutch for “the Dordt crossing”.

⁷ St. Luke 18: 14 (RSV).

⁸ In his youth, St. Augustine of Hippo was a Manicaean. He described the spiritual consequences of that belief in his CONFESIONS, Book V, Section 10 and, after his conversion, wrote vigorously against it.

⁹ Romans 1: 16 (KJV) (emphasis supplied).

¹⁰ Romans 3: 23b-24 (KJV).

¹¹ *The Order for the Administration of the Lord’s Supper or Holy Communion*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER 80 (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

¹² Philippians 2: 12 (KJV).

¹³ Hebrews 10: 38b-39 (KJV).

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