

We come today to the last of the tulip points, and next week I think we're looking together at the sovereignty of God and evangelism. If God is going to save all of his elect, why bother evangelizing? We'll look at that next week as the Lord spares us. But today we come to the last of the five points of Calvinism, the five responses, you remember, of the Calvinistic church. to the Arminian controversy that began in the early 17th century, the 1600s in the Netherlands, the five responses against the teaching of Iacobus Arminius, and they've been summarized, you remember, under the headings tulip, tea is total depravity, that the gospel finds men dead in their sins, that sin has affected every part of our faculties, our mind, our affections, our emotions, our conscience, our will, and therefore we are left dead, unable to come to Christ because we are unwilling to come to Christ. And unless God changes that by the decisive inbreaking of his Holy Spirit, regeneration, that stiff, hard-hearted posture will never change. Then we saw unconditional election that before the foundation of the world, God chose certain people to be his very own and he gave them into the hands of Christ to be redeemed and to be kept through all eternity. And that choice was not made on any foreseen good in us. It wasn't made on the basis of foreseen faith. It was made simply because of the goodness of God. He chose us despite our sins, despite our unwillingness to come, our enmity. He chose us from all eternity past and brought us into his saving grace. Then we saw limited atonement or particular redemption. That when Christ died on the cross, not one drop of his blood was shed in vain. He died not to make salvation possible, not to open the door for God to offer salvation. He died to make the salvation of his people unstoppable. And he accomplished what he set out to do. Then we saw last week irresistible grace that when God effectually calls a sinner to Christ, they come. It doesn't mean they might not try to resist. It means they cannot successfully resist. Paul kicked against the goads for a while, and Jesus told him so in the Damascus road. It's hard for you to kick against the goads, Saul. But in that decisive moment, Saul was brought from darkness to light, from spiritual death to spiritual life, and from unbelief to faith. Well, this morning or this afternoon now, we are looking at the perseverance or the preservation of the saints, the final P. And when you're talking about the perseverance of the saints or the preservation of the saints, you're talking about two sides of the same coin. What we're gonna be looking at today is that all those who have true faith True faith. Who are really and spiritually united to Jesus Christ by that faith are saved now and they will be saved forever. They've been loved with an everlasting love. They've been saved by an invincible salvation, and they've been brought into an unbreakable relationship with Jesus Christ. And while they may wander for a season even after they believe they can backslide, while they can and do fall into serious sins, God will never leave them in a backslidden state. God will never abandon them to their sins, but God will draw them back to Christ. and they will persevere to the end, and they will be saved at last. And of course, the key words there are true faith. Many may say they believe, Many may think they believe, many may feel they believe, but whatever faith they have, it falls short of saving faith. It can be an emotional faith, it can be a faith joined to the intellect, an intellectual faith, but ultimately it falls short of the kind of faith that unites them to Jesus Christ and saves them. Their faith is no better than that of the demons who believe and tremble. Let's turn in our Bibles then today to 1 Peter 1. And before we read there, sorry, yes, 1 Peter 1, let me pray. Our God and our Father in heaven, We come before you this morning to look to your son, the Lord Jesus Christ. He alone

has the words of everlasting life. In him is life, and that life is the light of man. We thank you, Lord, that he's called Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins. No ifs, ands, or buts. We pray for your people gathered here, O Lord, that you would strengthen our faith this afternoon. If there are some here who do not yet have true faith, we pray, O Lord, you will grant them that this afternoon. You'll open their hearts as you opened Lydia's and cause them to cast themselves on Christ alone for salvation. We pray for those who do have true faith, O Lord, that you'd be pleased to strengthen that faith, and oh Lord, keep us kept. Watch over our going out and our coming in, for if you do not keep us, oh Lord, we shall not be kept at all. We offer these prayers in Jesus' name, amen. I'm gonna read here from the New King James Version, because it's the version, I memorized this when I was a young Christian, and it's hard to get past it. It's very similar to the ESV, I'll just keep misquoting it if I quote the wrong version. First Peter one, verse three. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to his abundant mercy, has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you. You are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, whom, having not seen you love, though now you do not see him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith, the salvation of your souls. This passage teaches the preservation of the saints, Peter here says that God, by his abundant mercy, has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. That's a beautiful passage. It's describing the energy source behind the new birth, and it's the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. The power of Easter morning breaks into the deadness of a man or a woman who's dead in sin and in their trespasses, and the power of Christ's Easter morning. If you remember back in Ephesians 1, Paul describes that in a different way. He's speaking, remember, of those dead in sin, dominated by the devil, driven by lust, deserving of wrath, living according to the course of this world. And he says, but God, being rich in mercy because of his great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ. that the first thing that happens when a person is saved is God makes us alive together with Christ. As Christ is risen, raised from the dead on Easter morning like an atomic bomb of grace going off way back then, the shockwaves of that go through time and space and history and touch a person with effectual life-giving power and brings us from spiritual death to spiritual life. And it happens according to God's abundant mercy. And it brings us to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. To an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled. that when you become born again by the resurrection power of Christ, you are brought then and there to an inheritance that's incorruptible and undefiled. That inheritance cannot rust away and vanish like the Titanic beneath the Atlantic Ocean. And it cannot be defiled. You cannot disqualify yourself from it by your own sins. It's there, Paul says, reserved in heaven for you. Reserved. Jesus says as much in John 3, 36, whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, right now. That eternal life is your present possession now, the moment you believe in Jesus Christ. That's what Jesus says in John 3, 36. And

Peter's saying exactly the same things here. We're born again to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled that does not fade away. It cannot be taken away from you and you cannot be taken away from it. It is there reserved in heaven for you. You are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time. Now notice there's two things Peter says. We're kept by the power of God. And that power of God keeps us through faith. Now the Arminian will say, well if you stop believing. But the only way that could happen is if God lacks sufficient power. Because how does the power of God manifest itself? We are kept by the power of God through faith. That it's the power of God working in us to keep us in faith that is the clinching and deciding factor in our preservation. It's what Jude says in Jude 24. Now to him who is able, able to keep you from stumbling. and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy. It all hangs on God's ability. Is God able to keep you from stumbling? And Jude answers unequivocally, yes. In 1 Corinthians 1 verse 4 and following, Paul gave thanks. He says, I give thanks to my God always for you, because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus, that in every way you were enriched in him, in all speech and all knowledge, even as the testimony about Christ was confirmed among you, so that you are not lacking in any gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will sustain you to the end. who will sustain you to the end. He doesn't say he might sustain you to the end. He'll help you to be sustained to the end if you help him by keeping going to the end. No, Paul says Jesus Christ will sustain you to the end. That's a promise. you can take to the bank. He will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful by whom you were called into the fellowship of his son, Jesus Christ. Wilhelmus Abrakel, who's a wonderful Dutch theologian, has written three volumes, The Christian's Reasonable Service, and it's a beautiful systematic theology and very readable and warm. He says, believers, when left to themselves, do not have sufficient strength to preserve themselves, their faith, or their spiritual life. They would succumb to the assault of the enemy. Nevertheless, they are preserved, but by a strength which comes from without. And so Christian, this afternoon, I want you to hear this. The only risk of you not making it home to heaven is if God, almighty God, lacks sufficient strength to keep you and sufficient faithfulness to keep his promise to you. It is impossible for a true Christian to be saved and then lost. Peter says, in this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you've been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, which is much more precious than gold that perishes, though be tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ. The whole purpose of the testing, the refining fire, the struggle against temptations, trials, difficulties, The whole purpose of that is to prove the genuineness of your faith. Now there are some people who don't have genuine faith. And they fall away. But the whole purpose of the trials is to prove the genuineness of your faith. at this revelation of Jesus Christ, whom having not seen you love, though now you do not see him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith, the salvation of your souls." The end of your faith. Notice the genuineness of your faith and the end of your faith. Genuine faith is always refined and purified and kept. so that you will receive the end of that faith, which is the salvation of your souls. And that's just not one teaching. That teaching of 1 Peter 1 is found throughout the whole Bible. John 6, we've read it again and again and again. All that the Father gives me may come to me if they choose to. No, all that the Father

gives me will come to me. And whoever comes to me, I will never cast out. For I have come down from heaven not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing, nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. So the only way you can be lost is if God lacks sufficient power, lacks sufficient faithfulness, or Christ lacks sufficient victory to keep what God has given to him. And that's impossible. You're locked in a grip of salvation, of tender omnipotence. Jesus says in John 10, my sheep hear my voice and I know them. Now he just said to the Pharisees, you do not believe because you're not my sheep. But my sheep hear my voice and I know them and I give them eternal life. And they follow me and they shall never perish. None shall snatch them out of my hand, for my Father who has given them to me is greater than all, and none can snatch them out of the Father's hand. You're held, we said before, in the vice-like grip of double-handed tender omnipotence. God the Son, God the Father, holding you, keeping you. Romans 8, who shall separate us from the love of Christ? I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing can separate you from the love of God in Christ. Jesus, Philippians 1 verse 6, and I'm sure of this, confident, Paul says, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Jesus Christ. God began the work. He planned the work from eternity. He began the work in time, and he will continue the work till it's all said and done. It all hangs on God, the preservation of the saints. But turn the coin over And in the back, you have written, the saints always persevere to the end. The preservation of the saints by God, and the perseverance of the saints through time. The perseverance of the saints. Jesus says again and again, that's Matthew 10, 22 this time, you'll be hated by all for my name's sake, but he who endures to the end shall be saved. John 8, 31. Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed him, if you abide in my word, you are my disciples indeed. First Corinthians 15, one and two. Now I remind you brothers of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. Hebrews 10, 36, for you have need of endurance so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what is promised. For yet a little while, and the coming one will come and not delay, but my righteous one shall live by faith. And if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him. But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls. So Paul here is acknowledging there are some people in the church who seem to have faith, but they shrink back and are destroyed. But he looks at this church with the judgment of charity, and he says, but we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed. But we are those who have faith and preserve their souls. So you have these two teachings in scripture, the preservation of the saints by God and the perseverance of the saints through time. He that endures to the end shall be saved. There are false sons within the pale of the church. The scriptures teach that. That's why Peter says in 2 Peter 1, make your calling and election sure. We had a whole sermon on that in our doctrine, in our teachings on assurance, you remember. Make your calling and election sure. It's not in doubt in heaven, but it can be to some extent on earth in moot point. Who are the real Christians? And so we press on to make our calling and election sure. Paul says in 2 Peter 2, 19, is that the firm foundation stands, the Lord knows those who are his. He knows who they are. But let those who name the name of Christ depart from iniquity. So you've got the preservation of the saints, the

perseverance of the saints. And that should warn us, brothers, against two dangers. There's a couple of errors here in Christian history. The one is the idea of cheap grace. What sometimes has been called the carnal Christian. That a person can be saved, truly saved, and yet There'd be no difference in the way they lived their life. But because that person wrote in their Bible, you know, on the 7th of August, 1985, they came to Jesus. And then they never read their Bible again, they never went to church again, they never sought to bear forth fruit, meet unto repentance. Now because they wrote in their Bible, because they had this religious experience way back when, we should never doubt their assurance of salvation. And the proof text of that is 1 Corinthians chapter 3. But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it, and even now you are not yet ready." If you read the rest of that passage, no time for a long exegesis there. Paul is not describing a... a carnal Christian, as if somebody is in the flesh but not yet full of the Spirit. That's what these people teach, that you start off in the flesh, and then later you have a second blessing where you full surrender to Christ, the Holy Spirit fills you, and then you become a spiritual Christian. No, Paul knows only two categories of people, those who are in Christ and in the Spirit, and those who are in the flesh and in their sins. But he's saying to the Corinthians here that you're very immature, you're acting like unbelievers. The flesh seems to have the upper hand in your life. You remember in a sermon, the 8.30 crowd, I think on Sunday, John Owen speaks of those who are gripped by reigning sin. And those who've been saved who battle remaining sin. And John Owen says with great pastoral wisdom, sometimes it can be very difficult to tell which one you are. There can be times even in a Christian's life when sin seems to have the upper hand and we can wonder, am I dealing with reigning sin? Was I ever saved at all? Or am I dealing with an upstart of remaining sin in my heart? But Paul is very clear. If you live according to the flesh, you will die. But if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. And the great John Orr makes this point, here is inevitable and an invariable sequence, a sequence which God himself does not and cannot violate. To make life the issue of life after the flesh would be an inherent contradiction. God saves us from the flesh, but not in it. God is speaking here to believers and to them, he says, if you live according to the flesh, you shall die. The death referred to must be understood in its broadest scope and does not stop short of death in its ultimate manifestation, eternal separation from God. And so Paul hears warning. If you're a Christian, you've got to be about the great business of killing sin, for as John Owen said, be killing sin or sin will be killing you. He says, yes. And we make our calling and election sure by looking to Christ, pulling the power of the Holy Spirit down, and thereby mortifying sin. Because there are great warning passages in the Bible of those who profess to know God, but by their deeds they deny him, being abominable, disobedient, and disqualified from every good deed. People in the church who say they know God, but walk in the darkness. And John says, you lie. But if you walk in the light as he is in the light, truly the blood of Jesus Christ himself cleanses us from all sin. Now, I planned to go to Hebrews 6 and Hebrews 10, but we don't have time to do that this morning, unfortunately, and talk about those warning passages. Those warning passages are real. They underscore how much spiritual experience a person can have and yet not be saved. They can be enlightened by the word of God. They can taste of the spirit. Saul, who was never born again, was full of the spirit, and it became a parable in the Old Testament,

or a proverb in the Old Testament, is Saul among the prophets. He seemed to be for a while, but he died much worse than he began. You can have a sense of the power of God at work in the church, and yet ultimately fall away. And those passages deserve a careful reading. So what's all this mean for you? Because it might sound to you as if I've just given with one hand assurance and then taken it away with the other. What I said about Jesus is true. He really does save his people, those who trust him. And so the way we live our lives is we don't trust ourselves, not for a second. We don't trust our religious experience. We don't trust our current level of spiritual maturity and spiritual growth. We never think, I can do it myself. One of my male children, when he was a toddler, we'd hold him by his hands, and he's like, you know, he walked very early. He was about, you know, a year old, and he was walking very easily. But when he was learning to walk, he'd hold, and he'd say, I do it myself. And I'd say, okay, let's see how that works out for you. And he'd just go, and his face planted on the ground, right? The true Christian does not trust himself for a second. He's always trusting Jesus. He's always looking to Jesus saying, Lord, if I'm to be kept, it's got to be by you. He keeps short accounts of his sins. He's very concerned not to wander away from Jesus. There's a saying, there was a friend of mine in another part of the world who was backslidden, and he would always end his emails with the token quote, all who wander are not lost. And I would reply, and all who want, many who wander never return. So we stick close to Jesus. We looked to him, it's a little bit like this. If I was younger and thinner, and I received a promise from the angel Gabriel, Neil Stewart is going to win the New York Marathon. But I never trained. I never entered the New York Marathon, or if I did, I sat down in the curb and said, well, I've been promised. However, I can just sit back and I'm going to win whatever happens. I think everybody else must die and then they'll give me the race because I'm the last one standing. But, you know, that's not a way someone would train and run if they believed that promise. If God promised you, you're gonna win the New York Marathon, you'd go out and you'd train, you'd run. You'd enter the race, and when the race came, you'd run with the hope of that promise. At the 16, 17 mile mark, when you came to the wall and you felt, I can't go any further, you'd think, ah, but God has promised me, I'm gonna win. And so you'd dig deep and you'd run on the strength of that promise. And that's the way true Christians live with Jesus. They don't trust themselves. They don't trust their wisdom, their mind, their heart, their experience. They're constantly trusting Jesus. And when we wander away from him, even for a second, we think, oh, no, no, I want to be back with Jesus. And we're looking to him and trusting him. And it's those who make it to heaven are those who believe the promise. And so we're feeding our faith with the promise. Those who persevere to the end will be saved, but you'll be kept by the power of God through faith for salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time. And you hold that promise. And when Satan comes to tempt you and says, you can sin, it's okay, you can do whatever you want. God will save you because you've always been saved. He'll forgive you. You say, my father's merciful, but he's also told me to repent. He's also promised me I will cause you to keep my statutes and you'll walk in them and do them. I'll work in you to will and to do for my good pleasure. And so we go to God and we say, Lord Jesus, I feel tempted to turn away from Christ. And I know if I turn away from you even for a moment, that is the first step toward apostasy. I don't want to go down that road, Lord Jesus. So please, Lord Jesus, keep me from sin. Give me the grace not to want to sin, because at the moment I think I do. And bring me back to yourself. Grant me repentance. Keep me near. And

we're always going to Jesus. Friend of mine was a paratrooper once and he said, you know, when jumping out of a plane, it's kind of a final thing you do. You can never check too often that you're connected, your ripcord's connected to that bar. If you jump out into the wild blue yonder and that ripcord's not connected to the bar, you're in trouble. And he asked one of his jump instructors, how long do I have to regret my decision if I jump out? And he said, the rest of your life. And so we're not paranoid, but you can never check too often, I'm trusting, I'm leaning on Jesus, looking to him, loving him. And as we said in our doctrine of assurance, It's always there we begin, looking, leaning, clinging to Christ. We never rest our assurance on fruit or on the experience of the Holy Spirit. Those are stabilizing legs of the stool, but the leg that bears all of the weight is leaning upon Jesus. Oh Lord Jesus, do not let me go. John Owen saith, though you take but weak and faint hold of Christ, he takes sure and unconquerable hold on you. Have you not often wondered that this spark of heavenly fire should be kept alive in the midst of the sea? There's so many forces that would extinguish our faith. But Owen's saying, it's not your hold on Christ that saves you, but it's Christ's hold on you. Like a little toddler when you're walking down the road and he's holding your hand and there's big lorries going by in the road and he's frightened and he's holding you. But it's really the fact that you've gripped him and you're holding him. In those moments, you don't give him your finger and say, here, hold onto the finger if you can, son. Because you know he's stupid. You'll see some ball on the far side of the road and run out and get squashed. So you don't just give him your finger. You take a little fist in your hand and you hold it tight. because you're determined not to let him go. And that's the way Jesus is with all of his children. He'll not let you go. The Lord knows those who are his, but let all who name the name of Christ depart from iniquity. And I remind myself that when I'm tempted to sin, big sins and small sins, any sin, I try to remind myself, could this be the first step? in a track that would show I've never saved at all. And sometimes that frightens me back onto the road of obedience. Oh Lord Jesus, keep me because I can't keep myself. And if I'm to be kept, all the keeping must be done by you and by you alone. Let's pray together. Oh Lord, our God and our Father, I thank you for these dear brothers and sisters. We sit week by week and hear your words. These are deep and difficult things, oh God, but they give us great comfort and also great conviction. Comfort that you keep us, and yet conviction that if we're to be kept, we'll be kept on the highway of holiness. And so when we wander off that highway, we're taking an ax, as it were, to the tree of a well-grounded assurance of salvation. Because if we do the kinds of things that God says Christians don't do, sooner or later it calls into question whether we've ever been Christians at all. Search all of our hearts now, oh Lord, where are we living and acting in a way that would betray our faith and grant us repentance, that our assurance would always be built on a lively faith in Christ, that produces fruit in our lives, meat to repentance. In Jesus' name, amen.