

A.B. Simpson:

“I pray God your whole spirit, and soul, and body be preserved blameless until the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

“Faithful is he that calleth you who also will do it” (I Thess. 5:23, 24)

It is one thing for the ship to weigh her anchor and spread her spotless canvas to the breeze, and sail away with pennons flying and hearts and hopes beating high with expectation; it is another thing to meet the howling tempest and the angry sea and to enter the distant port. The first experience many—perhaps most of us—have begun, but what shall the issues be? And what promises have we for the voyage and the haven? How will all this seem tomorrow, and tomorrow, and six months hence, when the practical tests of life shall have proved our theories and measured the real living power of our principles of life and action? We have been sanctified wholly: how shall we be preserved blameless? Thank God, there is the same provision for both, and to both the closing promise applies: “Faithful is he that calleth you who also will do it.” Let us look at God’s provision for His consecrated people and the conditions on which these promises depend.

I. THE PROMISE OF OUR PRESERVATION.

We find it in the Old Testament benediction: “The Lord bless thee and keep thee”; we find it again and again in the psalms and prophets: “The Lord is thy keeper, the Lord shall preserve thy soul, he shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in from this time forth and even for evermore.” Even to poor, vacillating Jacob He swears, “I am with thee and will keep thee in all places whithersoever thou goest, for I will not leave thee until I have done unto thee all that I have spoken to thee of.” Of His vineyard He declares: “I, the Lord, do keep it. I will water it every moment; lest any hurt it I will keep it night and day.” “He will keep the feet of his saints,” Hannah sings in her song of triumph. And even in our halting, David declares that “the righteous, though he fall, shall not be utterly cast down, for the Lord upholdeth him with his hand.” For those who abide in closer fellowship, Isaiah declares, “Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on thee because he trusteth in thee.” This was also the Saviour’s prayer before He left the disciples: “Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me. I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil.” And so Peter declares that we are “kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation.” Paul tells us of the “peace of God that passeth all understanding that will keep our hearts and minds (as with a garrison) through Jesus Christ.” And Jude dedicates his epistle to those “who are sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Christ Jesus,” and closes with a doxology to Him who is “able to keep us from stumbling and to present us faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy.” The great Apostle opens his last epistle with the triumphant confession, “I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him against that day,” and closes with the yet bolder declaration, “The Lord shall deliver me from every evil work and shall preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom.” Such, then, are some of the promises of God’s preserving grace.

II. THE PROVISION MADE FOR OUR PRESERVATION.

It is made in the atonement of Christ, “for by one offering,” we are told, “he has perfected forever all them that are sanctified.” The death of Christ has purchased our complete and final salvation if we are wholly yielded to Him and do not wilfully take ourselves out of His hands and renounce His grace and faithfulness.

The intercession of Christ. “Wherefore,” it is said, “he is able to save to the uttermost” or, as it is in the margin, “for evermore all them that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.” It is because He ever liveth to make intercession that they are kept; because He lives we shall live also. This is the Apostle’s meaning when he declares that “if, when we were enemies we were reconciled to God by his death, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.” And so, in the 8th of Romans, he declares: “It is Christ who died, yea, rather that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God who also maketh intercession for us.” And then comes the shout, “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?”

The blood of Christ secures our preservation. For John declares, “if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with the other and the blood of Jesus Christ, God’s Son, cleanseth us from all sin.” The old ordinance of the red heifer, in the 19th of Numbers, is a beautiful type of Christ’s cleansing power. The ashes were preserved and mixed with water, and used as a water of separation, sprinkled upon the unclean, and separating from defilement which had been contracted after the cleansing. It did not refer to the original cleansing, but to the taint which came from the touch of the dead. And so we, though wholly separated from

evil, and dedicated to God, are constantly coming into contact with evil, and incurring defilement from the elements which surround us on every hand, and need constantly, like the washing of the disciples' feet, or the bathing every morning of the flower-cup in the crystal dewdrop, a fresh application of His blood. If you ask what this blood means, the answer, perhaps, is a double one. First, it is the fresh application of His atoning sacrifice by faith. But more, it is an appropriation of His life to our being, for "the blood is the life." So the blood of Jesus is His risen and divine life imparted to us by the inbreathing of the Holy Spirit and the absorbing power of a living faith. His pure life filling us expels all evil, and continually renews and refreshes our entire being, keeping us ever clean and pure, even as the fresh oil in the lamp maintains the flame, or as the running stream washes and keeps the pebble pure which lies at the sandy bottom.

The abiding presence of Christ and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit are God's chief sources of preservation for His trusting people. It is He who keeps and He keeps from within. "I will put my Spirit within you, and will cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my statutes and do them." "He that abideth in me and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit." "He that abideth in him sinneth not." "The Lord is thy keeper; he shall preserve thee from all evil." There is a fine translation of the familiar passage in the 3rd chapter of I John: "He that is born of God sinneth not, for he that was begotten of God keepeth him, and that wicked one toucheth him not." The presence of Jesus comes between us and every temptation, and meets the adversary with vigilant discernment, rejection and victory.

III. CONDITIONS ON WHICH GOD'S KEEPING DEPENDS.

There are conditions. All God's promises are linked with certain attitudes on our part. It is the willing mind and the surrendered heart that are assured of God's protection and grace. "God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble." "He that abideth in him sinneth not." That which is "committed" to Him He is able to keep. The principle of spiritual perseverance has never been better stated than in Samuel's language to Saul three thousand years ago: "If you will fear the Lord and serve him and obey his voice, and not rebel against the commandment of the Lord; then shall both ye and also the king that reigneth over you continue following the Lord your God."

More particularly if we would be preserved blameless,

Let us expect to be preserved. If we go out anticipating failure we shall have it; or, at least, we shall never know certainly but that the next temptation we meet is the one in which we are to fall; and as the chain is never stronger than its weakest link, we shall be sure to fall. It is the prestige of an army that secures its victory; it is the quickening assurance that it has never been defeated that carries it irresistibly against the foe.

Let us also expect to be tempted. Most persons, after a step of faith, are looking for sunny skies and unruffled seas, and when they meet a storm and tempest they are filled with astonishment and perplexity. But this is just what we must expect to meet if we have received anything of the Lord. The best token of His presence is the adversary's defiance, and the more real our blessing, the more certainly will it be challenged. It is a good thing to go out looking for the worst, and if it comes we are not surprised; while if our path be smooth and our way be unopposed, it is all the more delightful, because it comes as a glad surprise. But let us quite understand what we mean by temptation. You, especially, who have stepped out with the assurance that you have died to self and sin, may be greatly amazed to find yourself assailed with a tempest of thoughts and feelings that seem to come wholly from within, and you will be impelled to say, "Why, I thought I was dead, but I seem to be alive." This, beloved, is the time to remember that temptation has power to penetrate our inmost being with thoughts and feelings that seem to be our own, but are really the instigations of the evil one. "We wrestle with principalities and powers"; that is to say, they twine themselves around us as wrestlers do about the limbs of their opponents, until they seem to be a part of ourselves. This is the essence of temptation, and we are almost constrained to conclude that the evil is within ourselves, and that we are not cleansed and sanctified as we had believed. Do not wonder if you are assailed with temptation that comes to you in the most subtle forms, the most insinuating feelings, the most plausible insinuations, and apparently through your inmost being and nature.

Remember that temptation is not sin unless it be accompanied with the consent of your will. There may seem to be even the inclination, and yet the real choice of your spirit is fixed immovably against it; and God regards it simply as a solicitation, and credits you with an obedience all the more pleasing to Him, because the temptation was so strong. We little know how evil can find access to a pure nature, and seem to incorporate itself with our thoughts and feelings, while at the same time we resist and overcome it, and remain as pure as the sea-fowl that emerges from the water without a single drop remaining upon its burnished wing, or as the harp string, which may be struck by a rude and clumsy hand and gives forth a discordant sound, not from any defect of the

harp, but because of the hand that touches it. Let but the master's hand play upon it and it is a fountain of melody and a chord of exquisite delight. Now, the truth is that these inner thoughts and suggestions of evil do not spring from our own spirit at all if truly sanctified, but are the voices of the tempter, and we must learn to discriminate between his suggestions and our choices, and declare: "I do not accept; I do not consent; I am not responsible; I will not sin; I reckon myself still dead indeed unto sin and alive unto God through Jesus Christ."

There is a most beautiful incident related in the annals of the early Church, by Mrs. Jamieson, of a holy and exceedingly beautiful maiden in Antioch who became the object of the sinful passion of a heathen nobleman. Unable to win her affection, he employed a magician to throw over her a fatal spell and win her in the toils of his snare. The magician himself became enamored of the fair girl, and sold himself to the devil on condition that he should be given power to captivate her with unholy passion. And so he began to apply all his arts, and throw over her mind the fascinating spell of his own imaginations. Suddenly the poor girl found herself, like a charmed bird, possessed by feelings and apparently by passions to which she had always been a stranger. Her pure heart was horrified by constant visions from which her whole being recoiled, and yet it seemed to her that she must herself be polluted and degraded; and she began to lose all hope and to stand on the verge of a despair which was impelling her to throw herself away in hopeless abandonment to the power which possessed her. In this condition of mind she went to see her bishop, and it is recorded that the good man, with quick discernment, immediately pointed out to her that these influences and feelings were not from her own heart at all, but spells from the will of another, and that their only power consisted in her fears and her recognition of them as her own; and if she would stand firm in her will, refusing in the name of the Lord to acknowledge them as her thoughts, and disdaining either to fear them or for a moment to consent to them, their power would be wholly broken. Unutterably comforted by this wise counsel, she returned to her home and set her face, in the strength of Christ, against these allurements of evil, and immediately she found them broken; and soon after the magician himself became conscious that his power was ended, came to her in deep contrition, confessing his sin, and asking her forgiveness and her prayers, and, it is said, afterwards yielded himself to the Lord, convicted by the triumph of the grace of Christ through a pure and trusting will. This little incident tells the whole story. Let us never reckon any temptation to be our own sin, but stand steadfast in our purpose, and God will give us the victory.

Let us therefore continually reckon ourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, detach our spirit from every evil thing that touches it, tell the devil that these are his children, not ours, that he lays at our doors, refuse to acknowledge any relationship with them, keep the hatches down when the billows sweep the deck, and sail on not fearing the worst as long as they do not get into the hold of our little vessel; and as we reckon, Christ will reckon, and make the reckoning true for us.

But above all our reckonings respecting ourselves let us reckon Christ to be in us and recognize Him as the indwelling Life and Keeper of our spirit, soul and body. It is a great principle that where we recognize God, there God will meet us. Recognize Him in the heavens, He will meet us in the heavens; recognize Him by our side and He will speak to us from beside us; recognize Him in our inmost heart and He will meet us there. Let us meet Him as an abiding presence, trust Him as a faithful Keeper. Let us set the Lord always before us, and say with the Psalmist: "Because he is at my right hand, therefore I shall not be moved."

If we would be preserved blameless let us abide in the love of Christ. Let us persuade ourselves that He loves us infinitely and perfectly, and that He delights in us continually, and is wholly committed to us to carry us through and fulfil in us all the good pleasure of His will. Let us not think that we must wring from Him, by hard constraint and persuasion, the blessings which our faith compels, but that He has set His heart on our highest good, and that He is working out for us, in His loving purpose, all that we can receive of blessing. Lying like John, in His bosom, let us each reckon ourselves to be the disciple whom Jesus loved, and, like Enoch, let us claim by faith the testimony that we please God, and looking up with confidence we shall find His responsive smile and benediction. The true secret of pleasing God is to trust Him, to believe in His love to us, to be artless children, and to count ourselves beloved of God.

If we would be preserved blameless, let us remember that God's will for us is not a hard and impossible task but a reasonable; practicable and gentle standard, and that He is not continually frowning upon us because we cannot reach some astonishing height, or imitate some prodigy of martyrdom and service, but He expects of us a simple, faithful life in the quiet sphere which He has assigned to us; and that we are truly blameless in His sight when we are following, moment by moment, His perfect will in life's duties as they meet us. He adapts the standard of duty according to our circumstances and ability. The parent expects less of the lisping child than the teacher does of the older student or the employer does of the full-grown man. God knows our strength and capacity, and His will is adapted to our growth, and His "yoke is easy and his burden light." Therefore,

let us not reprove ourselves because we have not yet reached some ideal that, by and by, we shall have attained to. Are we meeting His will today and saying "yes" to His claims as the moments pass? Then, indeed, we are blameless in His sight. At the same time, let us not allow this comfort to allure us to a false extreme. If, on the other hand, God is pressing us forward by His Spirit to higher reaches, let us not be content with less, for we shall not be blameless unless we press forward, that we may apprehend all for which we are apprehended of Christ Jesus. With many of us, God is not finding fault for actual disobedience, perhaps, but for shortcoming and a too easy content with past attainments. The great question is, Are we obedient to the voice of His Spirit as He calls us onward, step by step?

Implicit obedience to every voice of God and every conviction of duty is essential to a blameless life. One moment's hesitation to obey, one act of wilful disobedience, will plunge us into darkness, and withdraw His conscious presence from the heart, and leave the soul disarmed and exposed to temptation and sin. They that have become wholly sanctified have given up the right of self-will and disobedience forever, and it is not to be thought of even for a moment that we should hesitate to say "yes" to His every voice. True, we may not know His voice at all times, but in such cases He will always give us time. But when we are convicted of His will and convinced of His way for us, there is no alternative but obedience or a fearful fall and a complete loss of the divine communion.

If we would be preserved blameless we must preserve ceaseless communion with God, and abide in the spirit of prayer and fellowship through the Holy Spirit, for thus alone shall we be led out into all the stepplings of His will and kept blameless and fully obedient. The interruption of our communion for an hour might lose a step, and that lost step might lead us from the pathway of His perfect will and the fellowship of His presence for days to come, or, at least, leave us a step behind, and therefore not blameless.

Further, if we would be kept, we must maintain a quiet spirit, free from the turmoil and agitation of anxious care and inward strife, and still enough to always hear His voice. "The peace of God shall garrison your hearts and minds through Jesus Christ." This is the soul's defense if we would be preserved blameless; therefore let the peace of God rule in your hearts, and regard with apprehension and alarm even a moment's interruption of your quietness and inward rest.

If we would be kept we must jealously guard our hearts and thoughts, and not feel ourselves at liberty to drift into the current of all the imaginations that are ever ready to sweep through the brain, and the idle words in which even Christian people are always ready to involve us. If you are walking closely with God, and watching for His voice you will be quickly conscious of a constraint, a weight upon your mind, a repression upon your heart, a deep tender sense of God's anxiety for His child—the mother calling her little birdlings to her soft wing from the place of peril. Truly "He that keepeth his mouth, keepeth his soul." These outward gates are places of danger, and the path of safety is a hidden one.

If we would be preserved blameless we must not live by long intervals, but by the breath and by the moment. Each instant must be dedicated and presented to God, a ceaseless sacrifice, and each breath be poured into His bosom and received back from His being.

If we would be preserved blameless we must learn to recover instantly from failure by frank confession and prompt faith and recommittal. It is possible to catch ourselves before we have really fallen, and God does not count it a fall if we do not yield to it. Unseen hands are ever near to bear us up, even when we dash our foot against a stone; the remedy is found even before the danger has become effectual. There is provision for every failure in the blessed promise, "If we confess our sins he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." There is something higher and better than this, viz., the grace that is able to keep us from stumbling, and check us even before the fall is accomplished. So He is willing to keep us even as the apple of the eye, reminded of the danger before it has become fatal, and instinctively closing the eyelids against its intrusion.

Finally, let us remember that the whole spirit, soul and body must be trained to abide in Christ. The life He gives us is not a self-contained endowment but a link of dependence, and every part of our being must continually draw its replenishment and nurture from our living Head, and thus be preserved blameless unto the Coming of our LORD JESUS CHRIST.