

Perseverance, a matter of life and death.

The perseverance of the believers is also called the preservation of the believers. *God's grace of preserving the believers becomes visible in and through the perseverance of the faithful. We cannot persevere and remain children of God in our own strength!*

A member, elder or minister of the church commits adultery. "How can such a thing happen?" We ask.

A leader of the church is charged with theft of church money. "How could she have done this?"

A member of the Christian church commits suicide. "How can such a thing happen?" We ask. "He was a pillar of the community, an elder of the church, someone respected for his faith. So how could he do this?"

A member of the church, a professor of theology, is caught with child pornography on his computer. "How could he have done that?"

A member, elder or minister of the church is charged with sexual abuse. "How could this have happened?"

All of the above happen in South Africa all the time. How do we explain it that Christians have actually done horrible things? This is not the first time nor will it be the last time that God's people ask questions such as these. It happened since the time of the Apostles.

No, since the very beginning of God's revelation of himself and our fall in the Holy Scriptures!

Bible hero's did stupid, sinful things too.

Take a look at Abraham, the man of faith. Out of fear he lied to Pharaoh and said Sarah was his sister. It was Pharaoh, the pagan, who asked, "What have you done to me? Why didn't you tell me she was your wife?" (Gen 12:18). In other words, "How is it possible that you, a child of God, can do this?"

What about David, the anointed king in God's service. He was an adulterer and a murderer.

Remember Peter. He was praised for his confession of Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God. Jesus called his confession that Christ Jesus is the Son of God the rock he would build the church on. And then this confessing Christian denied Jesus three times. How is this possible? How could he have done something so dreadful?

The only way to understand this is in terms of what the church fathers called the "perseverance of the believers". Christians are called to persevere in faith and salvation. In other words, God preserves his children, so that, although they fall, they are not lost.

Who are those that God preserves?

What is a true Christian? Who are those that God preserves in faith and salvation?

Are they those who achieved perfection?? No!

They are those who were called by God, have a relationship with Christ, are renewed by the Spirit, and are set free from the reign of sin.

But why does a true Christian then needs preservation? Here is a profound truth that you should not miss: *In this life* we are not perfect yet. We sometimes / often - still do soiled, stupid things!!

Paul speaks about this in Romans 7. (Read the whole chapter!) Paul tells us from the heart about his own difficulties with sin - as a Christian. You have heard his words before:

(Rom 7:15,19) I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. (19) For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do-- this I keep on doing. Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God - through Jesus Christ our Lord!"

It was the custom of ancient conquerors to prevent the escape of their prisoners by tying a dead body to their backs. With such horrible burdens, these poor persons could not run away. Imagine that: carrying around a dead body, a **body of death**.

Paul compares his struggle with sin as a Christian with carrying around a body of death: "*Who will rescue me from this body of death?*" Paul knows the answer: "*Thanks be to God - through Jesus Christ our Lord!*" (Rom 7:25).

A shocking feature of the Christian life

This tells me of a shocking feature of the Christian life. *Believers can be deeply divided spiritually*. Faith and wickedness can live alongside each other in us. It certainly explains the behaviour of Abraham, David, and Peter. And it certainly explains why prominent church members sometimes embarrass themselves, the church and most of all, their Lord!

Christians need the preserving grace of God in their hearts and lives, otherwise they will in their own strength fall away. The body of death we carry will certainly become too much for us to bear!

God preserves his children and set them free.

But *God preserves his children*. They are called by God, have fellowship with Christ and are renewed by the Spirit. They are set free from the reign of sin.

They are not perfect yet. *This is why God needs to preserve them in the faith and in salvation*, or all will be lost and none would be saved. But, by the grace of God we are preserved, therefore we can persevere, in spite of shameful things that happened!

Have you done something you cannot bear to carry anymore? Are you sick with shame, with guilt, with fear? Can you not carry the body of death anymore? Having faith is good. It helps. But it's not enough.

You need God's mercy and grace. Someone must help you! And there is help available, thanks be to God - through Jesus Christ our Lord! (Rom 7:25).

Jesus can help! Only Jesus can!

You do not have to do something stupid and become soiled again!

Call on the Name of Jesus! Ask him to help you carry the body of death!

You need God! You need God to take the guilt, the shame and the fear away!

Let any Christian friend, pray with you, battle with you!

God preserves you for his kingdom. That is why you will be able to persevere!

Jesus can help you with the body of death.

Jesus helps with everything.

Thanks be to God!