

Salvation's Company

a sermon in the series
Hebrews: An Epistle of Encouragement

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Hebrews 6:9-15

But, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak. For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister. And we desire that every one of you do shew the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end: That ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises. For when God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he swore by himself, Saying, Surely blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee. And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise.

I want to ask the question, must one wait until the very end of life before knowing for sure that they have been forgiven of their sins and that they are in Christ?

Because of my constant emphasis on perseverance, which means continuing in faith in God and obedience to the same, one may get the impression that the answer to my question is yes. I often am reminding you that grace has been given to us to not only forgive us of our sins but to cause us to persevere. I can see how some may come to an inaccurate conclusion that you really can't be sure of salvation until you finally die.

The New Testament is also constant in its warning against falling short, and so I ask, can you really be sure that you are saved before you die? Well, the answer is, yes! You can be very sure. In fact, let me make this very clear. Never having any assurance of salvation so that one would say, "I hope that in the end it will go well with me," is an answer that not only shames the Lord, but also should be considered an evidence of life devoid of grace.

God intends His children to be certain that they belong to Him and eternal life is theirs. God doesn't want you to wander aimlessly, wondering, hoping, and unsure. Assurance is not for the spiritual elite. It is the privilege of every believer in Christ Jesus.

Now some would say that having assurance of salvation is a bold presumption that leads to pride and apathy. If you are so sure that you are saved and convinced that salvation is secure, then you are at a greater risk of apathy and perhaps even disobedience. But, dear friend, the Bible teaches that if we have ever experienced faith in Christ, we should also experience a growing confidence

in our salvation. It teaches us that there are things that accompany salvation, and if these things are in your life, then you can be absolutely sure that you're saved. Salvation has a company of friends that always attend wherever it goes. They are the fruits and evidences of one's salvation.

Now after last week's message, I am not surprised that some of you probably are saying to yourselves that no one can be absolutely sure about their salvation until they finally make it to the end. Let's go back and read verses four through six quickly because it does set the stage for what I've got to say today.

For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, And have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame (Hebrews 6:4-6).

God's Warnings Bring Encouragement Through Fear.

If you are not currently in full glorious fellowship with Christ then you should have left last Sunday with a little bit of fear and trepidation. You ought to read that passage and begin to tremble because that's what it was designed to do. Therefore, if you left last Sunday morning thinking, "I don't know if I am even saved," or, "I don't know how you can be sure of your salvation," then the text worked its wonder in your heart. That's exactly what the writer wanted you to think and feel for just a few moments.

God purposely penned these words to bring encouragement to the hearts of those who were really saved, and when they heard this, they saw that they had experienced the enlightening of the Holy Spirit, that they had tasted of the good word of God and the world to come. They had been partakers of Jesus Christ. Yet even they who heard this also understood and could say along with the writer, "No perseverance, no hope!"

The believer that is sluggish is alarmed through such a warning. That was God's purpose. He uses the word "slothful" there in the twelfth verse. It means to be sluggish. If you are sluggish, you're not running the race as hard as you used to run. You're not enduring as faithfully as you used to endure. And so he says, "To those of you who are sluggish, I want to remind you that only those who keep running and keep growing are the ones who have truly been saved."

You are not as faithful as you once were. You may be in a lapse of obedience. You have fallen. What happens when you read these verses, or you hear them read and preached?

If you are truly saved, what does that word of warning do to your heart? It should produce a fear. Where does the fear come from? It comes by the working of the Holy Spirit, "The beginning of wisdom is the fear of the Lord."

One of the things that's missing in modern preaching and Christianity is an emphasis on the fear of God. Most preachers today don't want to preach about the wrath, and the anger, and the awesome power of God. They refuse to present Him as One to be feared. Most modern preaching today, presents God as some affable, loving, gentle, grandfatherly type who never is angry with sin; who in the end always wins by love and not by judgment. And therefore, year after year, and generation after generation, there is no fear of God in the eyes of today's church. And so sin is now rampant. Faithlessness is now widespread. Disobedience is the norm instead of the abnormal in most churches.

When God saved you, He deposited in seed form the fear of God within your soul. When you read the warnings like you read in Hebrews chapter six, verses four through six in a slothful condition that fear that's instilled in your heart is awakened. If you are sluggish and could have heard last week's message and had no fear, my dear friend, I say with all of the candor and compassion that I can put together, you're in a very dangerous position.

But if a child of God should read this text or hear a sermon such as last week's while in a sluggish condition surely something is worked within the heart. The fear of God within them is aroused and produces in them a stimulus to say, "Oh God, I don't want to ever be away from you! I have drifted, and that is not where I want to be." As a result, encouragement comes as the saint is drawn back to God through this warning. Assurance of salvation is purposely shaken. God purposely attacks false assurance of salvation in those who are not really saved, and He startles the assurance of those who are really saved but have been led to sluggishness by their disobedience and lack of faith in God.

I have illustrated this, this way before. I grew up in a city with a great deal of traffic on our street. My mother and father trained into my head, "You cannot play in the street." "Don't get near the street." "If your ball runs out into the street, don't go running out after it." There was instilled in my mind a fear of the street so that I would not get into the street and be struck by an automobile. Where do you think in playing I found my greatest joy? In the back yard away from the street. When I was playing in the backyard, I wasn't under the fear of the street. I wasn't conscious of that fear, yet that fear was in me working to keep me away from the street. Thus I could play in safety and freedom from fear.

The fear of God and His warnings work exactly the same. God wants you to enjoy Him so much that He wants you to run as far away from the danger as possible. When you are away from the danger, fear does not captivate your mind. It's not in your conscious awareness, yet it is working in you to produce godliness.

There is an objection to this type of preaching and doctrine. Some would ask us, "If you believe a Christian cannot lose their salvation, then the Christian will not really care if he or she perseveres in holiness."

Ladies and gentlemen, the question is really an attack upon the grace that preserves the child of God. The question is really a statement that says our view of grace destroys human responsibility. In other words, all of these warnings are there because a Christian must obey God, and if he or she does not obey God, they can lose their salvation. They believe to teach that Christians cannot lose their salvation is to destroy the impact of the warnings. They simply believe that this passage is there to incite a fear of losing your salvation which should lead the Christian to produce holiness. If you remove this possibility then this warning has no merit.

Pay close attention because my answer is not the typical modern Baptist answer. Our view of grace does not destroy human responsibility. In fact, I think it reinforces it. God created the laws of cause and effect. Nothing happens without a cause. Everything works by the law of cause and effect. God is the only thing that has ever happened without a cause.

God has ordained means or methods of grace. Means of grace are those things that God ordains to use to impart grace to us. God's keeping the Christian from apostasy does not destroy the means of grace or a Christian's responsibility to obey God. God's promise to preserve the saint does not remove the believer's responsibility to keep his faith in God. To say that God's provision of grace called perseverance removes the saint's responsibility to persevere is like saying you can stop breathing because God gives us breath. You are not going to stop breathing because God gives you breath. You must still breathe, even though God gives breath. God gives faith and repentance as a grace to those whom He saves, but they still must exercise that faith. God gives a grace to His children that keeps them from falling away, but that doesn't mean they don't have to obey Him. The grace that He gives motivates and empowers them to continue in a state of belief and remain in Christ.

For example, God told Hezekiah that He was going to let Hezekiah live another fifteen years. Could Hezekiah have stopped eating and expected to live? No, he still had to continue to eat even though God had guaranteed him fifteen more years; and neither can one stop believing and obeying God just because God has promised to preserve us and to keep us from falling away. It is God's grace that provides the impetus, the motivation, and the power of faith and perseverance. Therefore, these warnings are the very methods of grace that spur us on to keep running, trusting and obeying.

Friends, if you are really God's child, there is something in you that's not produced by you. It is supernatural. It comes from another world. It's the Spirit of the Living God. Please do not think Him so impotent and so weak that He cannot provide the desire and the power to obey Him. Oh yes, He allows us temporary failings and disobedience, and yes, you can still sin and God allows it for a reason. There are purposes even when we disobey. That's not an excuse for disobedience, but even God in His wisdom allows for such failures. But, dear friend, if you have really been born of the Spirit, God has made a promise to you to preserve you. We'll see that more clearly as we continue in this text.

Assurance of Salvation is a Privilege of Every True Believer

You should be sure if you are really saved. After speaking the way he had spoken in verses four through eight, he says in verse nine,

But, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak. (Hebrews 6:9)

He spoke in this manner knowing many were saved. In other words, the writer says, “Although I have spoken this way, I know, I am persuaded, that you have experienced God’s saving grace.” The word “persuaded” is the same word he uses in Romans chapter eight,

For I am persuaded, 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 creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:38-39).

He’s persuaded that the majority of these people are saved. That he had spoken this way did not deny their salvation. It’s clear that in verses four through six he is warning believers, and these warnings induced fear in those who were saved but disobedient. Because he spoke in this manner does not mean he believed that apostasy was possible for the majority of these people. The writer of Hebrews makes it very clear. He did not believe these people would lose their salvation. There were some though, that he was troubled about.

Look at verse eleven and twelve. He says in verse eleven,

And we desire that every one of you do shew the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end: (Hebrews 6:11)

Evidently, not everybody in that congregation was progressing the same. They were not all being diligent in acquiring a full assurance of their salvation. For these the writer had some concerns. He pleads with them to labor to attain, as others had, a full assurance. He not only wanted them to persevere to the end but be absolutely persuaded that they belonged to God.

In verse twelve he labels the problem of some of them.

That ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises (Hebrews 6:12).

Evidently, there were some in that congregation who were not being faithful to God as they should have. There was a lull in their love and devotion to Christ.

Is it possible for a Christian to regress? You better believe it! And that is what he is warning us against. The author of our epistle of Hebrews is saying to those who are in this condition, “As you are in this condition, there is no way you can have full assurance of salvation.” God’s not going to let you have such assurance.

Sin is one of the biggest threats to your being sure that you're saved. God has designed it to work this way. When you are in actual disobedience, whether by overtly breaking God's laws and doing things forbidden, or neglecting the things you should be doing, your assurance begins to dwindle. Such is God's designed alarm system in the life of the believer. Of the people to whom the author of Hebrews was writing, some were sluggish and not pressing towards the mark as they once were. To them he says show patience, and faith, and diligence to make sure your calling and election. This is what the Apostle Peter said in his second epistle.

Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall (2 Peter 1:10).

I would say of this congregation, as the writer of Hebrews says to the congregation he was writing to, I would have no doubt that the majority of you are saved. When I address this congregation as, "the saints of the Lord," although I would be addressing all of you, that doesn't mean everyone is saved. The same is true in the text. He is writing to a congregation where he believes the majority are true believers, yet he knows not all are saved. But he addresses them all as brethren. Therefore we must keep in mind that when he puts forth the warnings and fearful threatenings, it doesn't mean he is concerned that every one of them is going to lose out in the end. It is no more or no less than when I stand up here and say, "If you are not right with God, and you continue in your disobedience, you're not saved." Do I mean to be understood that everyone is in a state of disobedience? No, of course not. I mean those to whom it would apply.

Let's move now to the reasons why you can have assurance about your salvation as well as someone else's.

The love of God and His glory

The first reason for assurance is in verse ten. They loved God and God's glory.

For God [is] not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister (Hebrews 6:10).

This verse is not saying what many would immediately rush in to interpret. We've got to be careful with this verse. It is not stating that loving people is equal to loving God. It does not mean if one is kind and loving to others he necessarily loves God. Nor is it to be interpreted that by loving others you are acceptable to God. Such would be a salvation by works.

How is the writer to be interpreted? Verse ten shows that there is a relationship between service and loving God but not in a meritorious way. The writer is saying in essence, "Because I see your love of the saints of God, I know you must love God." There is a connection between service and loving one another and loving God. But what's the connection? If we are not careful, we will fall into a subtle trap in thinking that our works is what he is talking about here, and that is equal to loving God. It's not. Jesus taught that love for Him would translate into obedience.

This verse is stating a major truth found throughout the Scriptures. The truth is, loving God and loving His glory produces loving acts to others. Look at the verse more closely. The emphasis is on the name of God. It says, "God is not unrighteous," meaning God's justice is perfect and He is not unjust to forget what you have done as a labor of love, not toward the saints, but toward His name. He is dealing with the motivation for why they were ministering to the saints. They were ministering to the belabored Christians not because they were trying to earn their salvation, or prove to themselves that they were saved. They did what they did because they loved God and wanted God to be glorified. Let me put in my words, they loved God by enjoying God, and when you love God by enjoying God, you will love others.

John says in his epistle, "for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?" (1 John 4:20). If you really love God, you are going to love your brothers and sisters in Christ. But loving people cannot be the same thing as loving God. Why? Because there are many philanthropists that will fill hell. Many men who have done good humanitarian acts still died and went to hell. The difference is in our Lord's words, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind (Matthew 22:37).

Dear religious friend hear me, Christianity is not a religion of "do gooders". Christianity is not a religion of humanitarian acts. Christianity is to be passionately in love with God as He is revealed to us in Christ Jesus the Lord. It's a love relationship that you experience. You experience His love in you, and you experience your love towards Him. When God becomes the center of your focus, when God becomes the focal point of your religion, then and only then, my dear friend, you will want God to be glorified. This is one of the evidences that somebody is literally saved; they love God and they want to see God glorified, magnified, honored, respected, and bragged about.

Men, the day you married your wives, she prepared herself, and you never saw her so beautiful as when she walked down that aisle. Weren't you proud when the minister said, "I now present to you "Mr. and Mrs. _____"? You took her by the arm and you walked down the aisle. Were you not proud to be associated with her? You wanted people to know, "This is my wife!" Do I need to ask why? It was because you loved her, for she was valuable and worthy of knowing. It is the same with God. You can't say you love God if you're not concerned about His reputation. You cannot really love God when you say, "I love God because I get warm fuzzy feelings in my heart when I think about Him." If you are not actively pursuing God's name to be advanced among people, then God is not the most valuable and precious treasure to you. As long as there are people in your family, your neighborhood, at school, at work, or even at this church who have not yet come to know the God you profess to love so much, then it our business to help them discover His greatness. If you're not involved in their discovering the glory of God, then your love is weak, perhaps non-existent.

So I want to ask you, do you so love God that you are passionate about His name being glorified and as a result of that passion you are working to honor His name?

If you are one that professes to be saved, yet why is it that other people see you do things that bring shame to the name of Jesus? Why is it that you can violate the glory of God? When you violate His commandments and disobey Him, you bring shame to Him. How can you say you are living for the glory of God if everything you do contradicts His glory? What kind of literature are you reading? What movies do you view? What kind of music do you listen to? Have I stopped preaching and become legalistic? Far from it! If you really love God then you are passionate about His glory. It affects everything about you----everything.

If you are of God, the Holy Spirit resides in you. When you are involved in something that does not glorify the name of God, but brings a reproach to the name of God, an alarm inside of you goes off. Something is not right, and you know it. And the warnings of God's word work to incite the fear of God that resides within you.

What was the ministry of love the church in our text that had shown to the saints for the name and fame of Christ? In Hebrews chapter ten and verse thirty-three through thirty-four the author gives us some idea of what they had endured for the sake of love and the cause of God's glory. Many of their brothers and sisters had been persecuted. In fact, the author of the book of Hebrews was imprisoned for his faith, and they ministered to him while in bonds. They identified themselves with those saints of God that had been imprisoned, and he says in verse thirty-three in the tenth chapter,

Partly, whilst ye were made a gazingstock both by reproaches and afflictions; and partly, whilst ye became companions of them that were so used (Hebrews 10:33).

They had been publicly ridiculed, and some were arrested and imprisoned. Others were not persecuted but identified themselves with those who had been by going to them in prison and giving them care. They cared for their wounds, fed them, and clothed them. In verse thirty-four the writer says,

For ye had compassion of me in my bonds, and took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and an enduring substance (Hebrews 10:34).

When they identified themselves with those who had been persecuted, they too were persecuted. The authorities came and took possession of their properties. They didn't weep and cry saying, "Oh no! My home's gone. Everything I worked for is gone!" They said, "Oh thank you, Lord, because I know that man can strip me of everything I might have, but I have you. For your sake it is worth the loss of everything."

The fruit of the Holy Spirit

Love is the fruit of the spirit, and it's an evidence of assurance that you're saved. Jesus said in John chapter fifteen and verse eight, "Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples." Fruit bearing is a evidence to others that you are a disciple of Jesus Christ,

and the greatest of all fruits is love. Now, we must remember that fruitfulness is not proof of our goodness, but the goodness of God who dwells in us. If you are wrestling with whether or not you are a true Christian, you must not hear these verses and think you must start doing good things. You must not think that it all depends upon you doing good deeds and acts of religion. No! You can't have your property seized joyfully if there is not a new heart in you.

The reason these Hebrews could produce this fruit was not because of their fortitude, their strength, their resolve to endure, but because of the Holy Spirit in them. The fruit of love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance, is not you, but is the fruit of the Spirit of God. It's a by-product of God in you! So the question this morning is, is this fruit being developed in you? If it is, you can be sure you're His because you could have never produced that. The fruit of the Spirit accompanies salvation.

Some of you have reason to grieve because you can't find God's fruit in you. Repent and go to God! Ask Him to change your heart and place Himself in you, and thereby, the fruit of the Spirit will begin to be evident in your life.

Faith in God's promises

The third evidence, or reason for assurance, is faith in God's promises. We could spend much time, here and we're going to next Sunday. Look at verse twelve, thirteen, fourteen, and fifteen.

That ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises. For when God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he swore by himself, saying, Surely blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee. And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise (Hebrews 6:12-15).

The writer of Hebrews illustrates faith using Abraham. He is basically telling them one of the reasons he knew those to whom he wrote were converted was because they, like Abraham, exercised faith in God's promises. God had covenanted to bless Abraham. And this covenant was a unilateral covenant. A unilateral covenant means only one party is obligated to perform the conditions of the covenant. Abraham believed God's oath to bless him with a son and God accounted it to Abraham for righteousness. So a stronger and even more reliable source of assurance is faith in God's faithfulness to keep His promises.

Perseverance

The fourth item found in our text to accompany salvation is perseverance. You keep believing God no matter the circumstances. Again in verse eleven the writer stresses perseverance in the word, "diligence."

And we desire that every one of you do shew the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end (Hebrews 6:11).

He encourages them to not be sluggish, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit promises. Just as Abraham who “patiently endured . . . obtained the promise.”

I said to you last week, and I say it again, if ten years from now I stop persevering and totally and finally fall, I was never converted. I am thoroughly convinced that I’m saved and a child of God. I have no doubt of my conversion. That doesn’t mean I haven’t wrestled with it before. I’ve told you at times that I have, and I’m sure that I will be assaulted in future. I pray God keep me from it. But I am equally certain that if I do not persevere until the end, it’s not that I was saved and then I lost my salvation. The truth of this text and many others is that I was never converted! It is those who “patiently endure” that will not only be saved in the end, but also those who were saved through the duration of their pilgrimage.

Dear friend, I have a joy today. I’m not afraid that I’m going to lose my salvation. That never crosses my mind. I truthfully don’t worry about that. And the reason why is because I consider God faithful to keep His promise to me. He says if you believe, even if your faith is like the grain of a mustard seed, so small you barely see it, if you have ever had that kind of faith in Him, then you are His. That’s all the faith that is needed to be saved. If you have been converted by the loving mercy of God, make no mistake about it, God made a promise with you. He swore an oath, and He could swear by no greater than Himself. He promised to Himself and to His Son, “Son, I give you him, I give you her, and you’re going to keep them.”

All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out . . . And this is the Father’s will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day. (John 6:37,39)

So have you ever had saving faith? A faith that trusted not only in Jesus and what He did, but loved Him and produced a desire for His glory? If so, dear friend, you will persevere! And perseverance doesn’t mean only getting to heaven. It means you persevere in your faith and in your obedience until you arrive in heaven. There’s a big difference between perseverance to heaven and perseverance in faith and obedience to heaven.

A lot of people are saying that they are saved, and that they are going to stay saved because they believe in “once saved always saved.” Their concept of salvation is escaping hell and nothing more. Where they are sadly in error is that one does not receive justification without the process of sanctification following. We will never achieve perfection in this life, but nonetheless, without holiness no man shall see the Lord (Hebrews 12:14). If God has begun a good work in you, and in me, He will finish it. He will bring it to completion. Hallelujah! Glory unto the Lord God who is faithful to His promises to us.

The way to grow in assurance is to continue in these evidences of salvation: perseverance, faith, fruitfulness and the love of God and His glory. May God help us all to so continue in His great salvation and its attending company. Amen.