

# Tough Talk: A Warning Against Apostasy

a sermon in the series  
Hebrews: An Epistle of Encouragement

A sermon delivered Sunday Morning, March 25, 2001  
at Oak Grove Baptist Church, Paducah, Ky.

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## Hebrews 6:1-8

*Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God, Of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. And this will we do, if God permit. 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. For the earth which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from God: But that which beareth thorns and briers is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing; whose end is to be burned.*

Some situations call for more drastic speech than others. For example, your basketball team is winning into the last thirty seconds of the game by just two points. You're only ahead by one basket. Your team had been leading with a comfortable margin of twenty points. But in the last five minutes, the other team has seemed to shut your offense down and you can't score a point, while they have made an incredible comeback. The coach calls a time-out. He gathers you on the side, and he begins to speak with the most serious of tones. The speech is not pleasant. In fact it sounds so very alarming that it seems there is no hope, you're going to lose. He warns with the sternest of terminology that your team is going to lose if you don't change your performance. But then he says he is confident that you can win the game, and he expects no less. And with the inspiration that the warning gives you and the encouragement that your coach has in you, your team keeps the other team from scoring and you win the game. Well, maybe this is an example of the necessity of a severe warning and tough talk.

Some think this is what the writer of Hebrews is doing in the sixth chapter. They think that he is warning the Christians to whom he is writing of the possibility of losing their salvation and trying to spark some motivation by some negative speech, some tough talk.

Is the writer telling us there's a possibility that a Christian can be winning, seeming to have heaven in hand, but begin to falter and be in jeopardy of losing altogether? The problem with the illustration that I gave earlier about the basketball team is that it maintains the possibility that

the team could truly, actually, lose the game. That's not what the writer of Hebrews is doing. He is in no way stating the possibility that a Christian will lose his or her salvation, although, that potential would be there for the Christian if God left believers to make it on their own. Praise God! the Bible tells us He does not leave us alone. Yet, many people read this same passage and come away believing, not just in theory but also in reality, that Christians do lose their salvation. And so I would encourage us, let's study the Bible together. Let's see what God says. With an open mind, let's listen to the Scriptures and do what the Bible tells us to do, rightly divide the word of truth. In the book of Hebrews, the writer has already given us sufficient evidence that a Christian cannot lose their salvation. I'm going to cite that evidence once again this morning before this sermon is finished.

But first, let me give you a different illustration that I think will help us to see exactly what God is saying in Hebrews' most controversial passage, if not the most in all of God's Word. Put yourself in the days leading up to the Civil War. Two slaves so hungered for freedom that they dared to dream of escape. They heard of a man who would be sympathetic to their cause, who could help them escape and find freedom in a new land. Their taste for freedom was stronger than their fear of their master, so one day they fled and they found this man who assured them that with his leadership he could lead them through the underground to freedom. But he promised that the journey would not be easy, and that they would have to follow his instructions explicitly, to the letter, if they were going to survive and find freedom. And as the man promised, the journey proved very difficult. They traveled at night in order to not be detected. The terrain was so bad that it was said it wasn't fit for a jackrabbit. Through thorns and briars that ripped their skin, they crawled on hands and knees. And when they got through that, they came to the swamps where many men were known to have died by alligators and poisonous snakes. Both men survived the reptiles but fell prey to a much smaller creature, just as deadly----malaria-infected mosquitoes. After recovering from the fever, one of the runaway slaves began to question if their guide could be trusted. He began to plead with his friend to turn back with him and take whatever punishment their master would dispense for running away. He reasoned with his companion that it could not be any worse than what they had already endured and were yet to face. The guide pleaded with both men to stay the course. He reminded them of what freedom would be like. And then he warned them, with the severest language; with tough talk, he said to them that there could be no way they could survive the trip back, it would mean certain death. He pleaded with them to trust him, to follow him, for turning back would mean death. One slave heeded the warning, and the other didn't. The one that didn't fulfilled the prophecy of the guide----he perished. The one who obeyed found freedom.

This is exactly what the author of Hebrews is warning us of here. He is speaking to a mixed congregation, saved and unsaved. For the most part he believed this congregation to be saved; we're going to see that in the next couple of weeks. There were those in this church who were genuinely born again, but there were also some in this church who had become sluggish in their journey to freedom. Some had actually reverted to immaturity. To these he speaks, in tough language, warning them that the most reliable proof that they were truly saved is that they persevered in their faith. Like the guide in my story, he uses the strongest language possible to warn

that for those who have appeared to follow Christ, and then decided that Christ is not sufficient and apostatized, there is no hope but certain destruction. The writer of Hebrews uses some of the most descriptive language of the Christian life found anywhere in the Bible. He says if they fall away it's impossible to renew them. Now why use this kind of terminology if these are not really truly believers, and if the believer is eternally secure? Well, I hope to answer that question this morning.

## **God's Encouragement to Maturity**

In verses one through three, the writer continues his arguments from chapter five, verses eleven through fourteen. He is encouraging them to maturity. Remember our author says in verses eleven through fourteen of chapter five that by this time you ought to be teachers but now you still need someone to go back and teach you the basic fundamentals of the Christian faith. Yet in verses one through three he says that he was not going to do that. In fact, he says he was going to move on if God will permit him. Let's look at verses one through three and first see God's encouragement to maturity.

*Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection (Hebrews 6:1 a).*

In other words, "I will not go back and lay down the basic understanding of Christ, I want to go deeper." He says. "Let's go on unto perfection," which means maturity. This is not surprising. He said in the fifth chapter that he wanted to go deeper into truths about Christ. He wanted to explain how Melchisedec was a type of the high priesthood of Jesus Christ. The problem that prevented him from doing so was not that they couldn't understand him, or that they did not have the intellectual capacity, but because they were dull of hearing. But now in today's text he is saying, "We're not going to lay the groundwork again; we're going to move on into maturity. In fact, we're going to talk about Melchisedec." We will discover in the next chapter that he does discuss Melchisedec.

He continues,

*Not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. And this will we do, if God permit (Hebrews 6:1 b-3)*

He is not insinuating that God may not allow him to teach deeper truths. Rather, he is referring to the words, "let us go on unto perfection." The word "perfection" is not to be interpreted sinless, but maturity.

## **God is sovereign over the maturation process**

He is establishing the fact that God is sovereign over the maturation process. It is God who superintends and controls your sanctification. That's a truth that I hold on to dearly today, and it is

changing my life. God has not left to me the sole responsibility of maturing myself or sanctifying myself. The One who called me to maturity is also faithful “who also will do it” (I Thessalonians 5:24). As we are justified by grace, we are also sanctified by grace.

Do not confuse my words and think I am saying we have no responsibility in our spiritual growth. We know better than that. Philippians two and verse twelve makes our responsibility very clear. “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.” But human responsibility must be seen against the backdrop of God’s gracious activity in our lives. In the thirteenth verse of the same Philippians chapter two, it says, “For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.” In First Thessalonians chapter five, he tells us to “abstain from all appearance of evil.” Paul tells us that God has called us to sanctification, and then he tells us in the next verse that it’s God who sanctifies us wholly before Him and will one day present us blameless, “Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it” (I Thessalonians 5:24). Ultimately, just as salvation is under the sovereign control of God, so is our sanctification.

## **Desperate Dependence**

Now that opens up a lot of questions that we don’t have time to get in to. I do not understand why God will work in a greater measure in one life after conversion and progress it farther along in sanctification than He does others. But this one thing I do know, He does all things right. This is not a cop-out for you and me. We should not think, “Well, I don’t have the grace that someone else has, therefore, I am not as responsible to grow.” The writer of Hebrews is reminding his readers that the child of God must depend upon grace to grow. If God is sovereignly in control of our growth process, instead of thinking, “If God wants me to grow, I’ll grow,” you ought to have a more Biblical approach. The approach that our text suggests is that if God is in control of our growing, then we need to be desperately dependent upon Him for the grace to grow. Dear friend, it is perhaps subtle, but it’s in the text nonetheless. Those who are genuinely saved will want to press on to maturity. There is something in our inner man called the Spirit of God that will not let us rest, will not let us be satisfied in our progress, but will be always motivating us onward in Christ Jesus. Therefore, if you’re going to grow, and you must if you are truly a Christian, you must understand this principle----that God supplies a grace to grow and you need to be dependent upon Him for it. Yes, we are commanded to grow, but the God of grace is in control of our growth, and therefore, we should be desperately dependent upon Him. Please hear what the writer of Hebrews is saying to us, if there’s no growth, you ought to be afraid; no growth warrants a warning for us here.

## **God’s Warning Against Apostasy**

Let’s look at God’s warning against apostasy. Verses four through six are a warning against starting with Christ and apostatizing, which means totally and finally falling away. I must admit to you I have truly come to this passage with a great deal of fear. I have wrestled with this passage all of my life. Before I was saved, I wrestled with this passage, and after being saved, I’ve wrestled with it. Yesterday, I was really confident that I knew what this passage meant, but I read it again

yesterday afternoon and I started being challenged again. I didn't go to bed until one-thirty this morning, and then I couldn't go to sleep because this passage was so heavy on my heart.

I want to share with you some questions that I have approached this passage with in order to say what I'm going to say to you. First question, how do we understand this terminology here in verses four through six? He says,

*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).*

Now let me share with you some ideas that others have presented to help us understand the terminology, because this terminology is confusing here. It doesn't matter whether you're Arminian or Reformed. Both camps have admit there is some puzzling terminology here.

Some interpret this to be a hypothetical situation. In other words, a Christian really can't apostatize, but if a Christian could apostatize it would be impossible to renew them. I used to believe that this is what the passage stated, because the language that he uses to describe this individual is purely Christian terminology. In my mind, knowing that one could not fall from a true work of God, and knowing the Bible cannot contradict itself, the only possible solution to me was that this was simply hypothetical. If God would take grace away from one, then it would be impossible to renew them. But the problem with that interpretation is that the word "if" in the English translation of the Authorized Version is not in the Greek. Actually it is the word "and". It is not hypothetical. He is not presenting some hypothetical situation; he is stating a true, real situation. The Greek will not allow this to be hypothetical.

A second possibility for us to examine is that it does mean that a Christian can lose their salvation. Those who interpret this text this way do so because the terminology that the writer employs to describe these people is very Christian. It's the same way we would describe a born again believer; therefore, proponents of the possibility of Christians losing their salvation say that a Christian could possibly be lost in the end.

But again, friends, I say that is not possible. How do I come to that conclusion? From the author of the book of Hebrews, it has been established that he believed a true Christian could not lose their salvation. The writer cannot contradict himself. If he does, he's not inspired, and if it's not inspired, it shouldn't be in the Bible, and we ought to do what some actually wanted to do with the book of Hebrews, remove it. They wanted to remove it because of this passage. Some early church fathers wanted to throw out the book of Hebrews because of chapter six and chapter ten. I'm glad they didn't because this is the word of God.

Hebrews chapter three and verse fourteen, the author has proved by this one verse alone that he believed that a Christian could not truly lose their salvation. He says, "For we are made par-

takers of Christ.” Underscore the words “are made.” In the Greek language, which the writer wrote, this is one word, gegonamen. This word is in the perfect tense which describes an action which is viewed as having been completed in the past, once and for all, not needing to be repeated. This form of the word is used only one other time in the New Testament in Romans chapter six and verse five. It is translated into the English as “have been.” “For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection” (Romans 6:5). Clearly the word is describing something that has occurred in the past, never to be repeated.

The Hebrews author continues, “if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end.” In other words, if you make it to the end, it means that sometime in the past you became a partaker of Christ. You don’t live your life, die and then become a partaker of Christ. Nor do you live your life in uncertainty and then die and discover whether or not you made it. Because of a past experience, you have become a partaker if you truly believed upon Christ. Those that persevere are those who have in the past become a partaker of Christ. It is very clear.

In our sixth chapter in the seventeenth through the twentieth verses, the writer makes it very clear that a true Christian cannot lose out with God because God has sworn an oath, and that oath is by His own name and He cannot deny His name. Therefore, He cannot deny those whom He has promised to save. We have an anchor sure and steadfast beyond the veil, and it’s Christ Jesus. God has made an oath with His Son. He promised to give His Son a number and none of them should perish.

In Hebrews chapter seven and verse twenty-five it reads, “Wherefore he is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through him since he always lives to make intercession for them.” How long does Christ make intercession for His own and for how long is He able to save them? Forever! The only way a Christian could lose their salvation is for the Father to deny the blood and prayers of His Son. Jesus told us in John chapter six that those that draw near to Him do so because the Father gives them to the Son, and He promised that He would lose none of them.

Look at Hebrews chapter ten and verse fourteen. To me, it’s very clear that this author has no concept of a true believer losing his salvation. Speaking of the sacrifice of Christ, “For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.” The words “are sanctified” are in the present tense. In other words, it means are being sanctified. Thus the writer says, those who are being sanctified have been perfected. Now you must twist this verse to get it to say anything else. Now, I do not claim perfection. Those of you that know me know that I’m not perfect in reality and neither are you. The word perfection is another way of describing our justification. This is our position with God. God has legally declared you righteous. That declaration of your righteousness is eternal. It cannot be changed. Justification is not what God does in a believer, it’s what He does outside of a believer. He pronounces that person right with Him, positionally, not because of what they do. It’s a legal declaration that God makes. Forever I am in Christ who is my righteousness; I have no righteousness of my own, and if I want to claim my own righ-

teousness I have no hope of Heaven. It's the righteousness of Christ that we are in need of. The writer says that those who are being sanctified have been justified. Dear friends, you cannot have justification without sanctification.

If you don't understand justification, you'll never understand sanctification. If you have been truly justified, then the grace that brought that to pass will be working in you to sanctify you. If you are being sanctified, you have been saved. It's clear to me that the writer of this epistle did not believe in any possibility that one could lose their salvation. Therefore, that cannot be an option here in Hebrews six. It just can't be. And if you insist that it is, then you are doing disservice to the Word of God; you are not rightly dividing it.

Well, let me give you a third possible interpretation. Some interpret this as describing a work of the Holy Spirit that is short of saving grace. In other words, they say "those who were once enlightened," means that God gave them a knowledge of the truth but it was short of salvation. They were enlightened to know the truth of Christ and the truth of their sins, but they did not go on to true faith and repentance in Christ, and therefore, they're not really saved. Well, I find that hard to believe as a credible interpretation because of Hebrews chapter ten and verse thirty-two. The same word "enlightened" is used there. In the King James Version the word is translated "illuminated," but it's the same Greek word, it's the word "enlightened." The author says to those who he believes to be saved, "But call to remembrance the former days, in which, after ye were illuminated ye endured a great fight of afflictions." There's no doubt in his mind that these are the same people that have been illuminated by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit comes to a man and opens his mind and his heart to truth. It is a miracle of revelation. Not new revelation, but it reveals the truth that God has revealed in His Word, and makes it alive in that man's mind and heart.

Those who believe that our text refers to a grace short of saving say the word "taste" proves their position. According to those who hold this interpretation, the phrases, "tasted of the heavenly gift," and "tasted of the good Word of God," means the person put it in their mouth and tasted it, but they didn't swallow it. But, friends, don't go there, because if you do you have a big soteriological problem. In Hebrews chapter two and verse nine, the same word "taste" is used to say that Jesus tasted death for every man. Now are you going to say that here it means Jesus simply tasted it and then spit it out and He really didn't die? Not hardly! But if you say in chapter six that the word "taste" means to sample but not swallow then you must interpret the same word in the same way in chapter two. This is one of the laws of hermeneutics. Unless the context tells you differently, you must interpret the same. Jesus did taste death for every man, and the person of Hebrews six has tasted of the heavenly gift and of the good Word of God. That is a description of what God does at the moment of salvation.

Again look at the word "partaker." He says we've been "partakers of the Holy Ghost." Many people believe that this is describing a work of the Holy Spirit, but it's short of saving that individual. In Hebrews chapter three and verse one, the word "partaker" is again used, "Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our pro-

fession, Christ Jesus.” And then in the same chapter verse fourteen, “For we are made partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end.” He uses the same word here to describe a genuine conversion.

### **What is the warning saying?**

What’s the interpretation then? The fourth option that I want to introduce to you today is in my opinion the correct interpretation. The interpretation is that he is using Christian terminology describing what happens to a person when they get saved. He purposely is using the same means of describing true conversion in describing this potential of apostasy. But why? What is this warning saying? It doesn’t matter whether you’re a member of this church, it doesn’t matter what you believe, you are affected by this statement, and by virtue of you being here and coming here frequently, it tells me you are really affected by this statement. He is saying that men can leave the world and identify themselves with Christ and His people and when that occurs the church says of that person, that they appear to have become Christians.

Such proves to me that when somebody professes faith in Christ we ought to accept that profession as genuine unless we see something in their life that contradicts their profession. In the New Testament, when a man or a woman presented himself or herself for baptism, they accepted them on the merit of their profession. A man would leave the world, identify with Christ and His church, thus the church would say that this was sufficient to accept they had been saved. If any of these publicly renounced Christ and returned to the world, they would find no repentance, and they were without hope. They had apostatized. Does that mean they were really saved? No, they were not genuinely saved. But, before the apostasy, from every indication that the church could tell, they were, and that’s why he uses Christian terminology.

Another question I want to present you and the text is why say it this way? The answer is because an apostate always begins and looks like the real thing. They always look like a real Christian getting saved. You and I cannot look into the heart of another man or woman who is professing faith and say, “You’re lost, you didn’t get it.” No, this is not ours to judge, unless they show us some fruit that would warrant such a statement, and if they do then we need to take them back to the Scriptures and show them what genuine repentance and faith is all about.

Before anyone who has ever apostatized began their fall you would have never been able to predict it. That’s why he uses Christian terminology here. Listen closely so that you won’t be confused. Repeatedly, the Bible does not try to show the difference between a work of grace and one that is short of saving grace. It describes that work as the same as a work that leads to genuine salvation. The reason being that none of us can look upon another and know with absolute certainty that he or she is a true Christian. Therefore, the warning carries power.

Let me show you the pattern of this through the New Testament. Until you understand the terminology you don’t understand what the warning is. In the book of John, for example, the word “believe” is used to describe both true and false converts. In John chapter two verse twenty-four



the Bible says there were many that believed on Jesus, "But Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all men." John uses for the word "faith" *pisteuw* (pronounced pist-yoo'-o) which is the same word he uses in John chapter three, verse sixteen, "Whosoever believeth in him should not perish." John doesn't editorialize and say those in chapter two had a faith that was human. You and I clarify the text thus in order to understand, but the writer does not do that. He wants to make the warning clear, that in the beginning all of us look like we've all been saved who profess to be saved. This way the warnings of Scripture can be applied to all of us. Jesus in the parable of four soils does the same thing. Notice how He describes them. He describes the stony soil as believing as he also says of the good ground. He doesn't stop and say, "Oh wait a minute, they believed, but it wasn't a saving faith." No, he describes both soils with the same word "believe."

The Apostle Peter, uses Christian terminology to describe a false convert. In Second Peter chapter one and verse nine, he says, "But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins." He's not talking about somebody backslidden; he's using Christian terminology to describe one who appeared to be right with God at one time in his life, but now isn't. Again Peter in Second Peter chapter two and verses twenty through twenty-two does not try to make a distinguishing mark between true and false conversions. He describes all conversions as a real conversion. "For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world." Well, what is that if that's not salvation? When God saves, He cleanses. The sinner has escaped and has come from the world of darkness to a world of light. "If after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour;" Do you notice the terminology? He uses the word "Saviour." Peter says that they have literally believed in the Saviorship and Lordship of Jesus Christ. Yet he continues, "they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness." He doesn't say that they didn't know righteousness, rather, he says they have known the way of righteousness." Listen to the apostle as he continues to describe these apostates, "after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them. But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire."

Peter gives evidence that these were not genuinely saved, for their nature had not been saved. That's why a dog goes back to his vomit, and why a sow will always go back to the mud pen no matter how clean. It will always go back to the mud. Why? Because it's a hog, it's its nature to do that. These people had not been genuinely saved and yet, notice how he describes them he uses Christian terminology. I think Judas was chosen for this very reason. Why would the Lord choose Judas knowing that he was a devil from the beginning? Jesus knew that Judas was never converted. He knew what he was, He knew his heart was unregenerate. Why did Jesus choose Judas? I think he was chosen as a part of the twelve in order to demonstrate this principle, when men and women start out with Christ, they all look the same. They all seem to have joy. They all have excitement. They all say the same thing, they use the same terminology, "Jesus saved me and I want to be baptized." They join the church and get involved in its ministries. Just like Judas. But

that is no guarantee that you are truly saved because you did all of those things. Look at Judas. He looked as genuine as the other eleven did. He was anointed to preach and to heal as the other eleven. In fact, the night of the betrayal, none of the other eleven disciples even suspected that it was Judas. When they were asking Jesus, who is it that's going to betray you? He answered that it would be the one He handed the bowl to, and then He turns and gives it to Judas. Christ tells Judas to do whatever he must do. The other disciples believed Judas' leaving was to buy for the poor and not because he was the betrayer. They had no idea that it was Judas. He looked as real as Peter looked, and perhaps even more so.

Judas is chosen to give us a very important principle, that performance only is not sufficient assurance of salvation. Performance is never sufficient by itself for assurance of salvation. Friends, many of you may have had very moving conversion experiences, but that's not why you're saved. You're saved because God took mercy on your soul. You may come to this church faithfully, you may contribute to this church, you may even be laboring in this church, but that is not the basis of your salvation, for you could be lost. The only way that I, or your brother, or your sister can know, is that we see you continuing in fruit bearing. That's the only assurance that we can see that's somewhat reliable. I say somewhat reliable because who is to say that ten years from now you cannot apostatize? Let me make this very clear to you. If ten years from now, I leave my wife and I join myself to someone else, and I leave the ministry, and I live the remainder of my life living for myself, then you can say about me that I never had genuine faith.

Additionally, if I fell in this manner, you can say that all of the prayers I prayed, I was praying for my own benefit and not the glory of God. The same with my preaching, I preached that I might glorify my name instead of the name of God. Dear friend, the only reliable evidence that we have to know that we are in the faith is that we are persevering in the faith. That's why the writer of Hebrews uses this kind of terminology. He uses Christian terminology to make the warning powerful. Why not just say that there's a possibility that some of you did not get the real thing, and if you deny and reject His salvation, then this only proves you were never saved and you never will be? Because if he said it that way, the warning no longer has power. The false believer always says in their heart, "I have the real thing, this does not apply to me." The deception of their hearts makes them believe they are saved. They are convinced that they have been saved, and they have been deceived by the devil to not doubt that they've gotten the real thing. We preachers are good about being used by the devil. We are not above being used by him. Don't forget Peter. After Peter's magnificent confession of Christ, the Lord must rebuke him because Satan used Peter to try to discourage Jesus. We of the ministry have been powerful tools in the hands of the deceiver. Someone professes faith in Christ, and the first thing we want to tell them is that they can be absolutely sure that they're saved because they prayed a prayer. If they asked Jesus to come into their hearts, then they must be saved. And then we finish the devil's work for him by telling them they should never doubt their experience of salvation. If ever they doubt the sincerity of their prayer, that's from the devil. But oh, dear friends, such doubt might be conviction by the Holy Spirit of God.

No doubt many have had a sense of conviction of sin. They have been made aware of a need for Christ. They have become somewhat acute to their own sinfulness. Can we not say this is a grace of God? Yes. To understand that there is a need for a change in your life is a grace that God has given you. It is a grace that will not allow you to be comfortable in your sins. You say, "I'm going to make a difference. I'm going to start going to church. I'm going to get under the preaching. I'm going to change my life." That is a grace. But it's not saving grace. I cannot help but believe that happens to many people.

In order for the writer of Hebrews to expose this kind of person, he can't simply say to them, "Now it appears that you are saved, but in truth you're really not." If he were to have done this, the first thing they would have said is, "That's not me, that's somebody else. I had a saving experience." The warning would have no power in it. But if the preacher says, "Here's what a Christian is and what happens at conversion, and if they fall away . . ." Now the warning has teeth because everyone that believes they have been saved has to take note and examine themselves. All who have fallen away (not from genuine salvation but from their profession of faith in Christ) have at one time or another subscribed to having the genuine experience.

### **What is the power of the warning?**

This warning of Hebrews chapter six has teeth. The power of the warning is the truth that the most reliable source of assurance is perseverance. Even though God is sovereign over the process of our sanctification, human responsibility is still a necessary component. Now this text is not just a warning for the unconverted church member. It is also a warning to believers who are sluggish in maturity. Remember, the writer has just told them in chapter five, verses eleven through fourteen that they should have become teachers, but they had not. They still needed to be taught. They had become sluggish in grace. He gives this warning in order to do what is necessary to put a godly fear in their heart that will stimulate growth. Please listen to the warning and apply it to your own hearts. If you're not progressing, and if you continue not to progress, eventually, we're going to be forced to say of you, you are not one of us. John preaches the same in his first epistle, chapter two. John says about those who departed from them,

*They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us; but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us (1 John 2:19).*

It matters not whether you are saved or not saved, the warning speaks to both. As I read this, it means something to me. It's not some warning that some apostate is going to lose out with God in the end. It's a frightful thing to think that he could be describing me. Friends, I'm convinced of what I have. I know what I experienced and am experiencing. "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day" (2 Timothy 1:12). But, as I said to you a moment ago, if ten years from now I am living contrary to that, and I renounce my faith in Christ, it doesn't matter how real it is at this moment, I never had it. And so there's the warning. Now let me be clear here. There are some of you in this room

who are in this very predicament this morning. From all indication to your heart and to mine, it looks like you started out well, and that God had really saved you, but you are not progressing in faith; you are not maturing. Let me hold up to you and over you this warning this morning. Please listen. At this moment, the thing you ought to do is tremble. Am I here to try to get you to doubt genuine salvation? I am not. I am here to ask you to question it, to examine it. If there is not the faith of Christ in you, then acknowledge that before God and seek His mercy this morning. The only reliable sign is that you're persevering and growing in the faith of Jesus Christ. If there is no growth, no perseverance, you can go through the motions of being a Christian and be apostatizing at the same time. This warning is to alert you to this, and if the Spirit of God is indeed in you then you will be motivated to arouse from your sleep and once again fight the good fight of faith. The warning becomes a means of grace that God uses to preserve you.

Therefore, we can say the text is for all who read it. It has application to the false believer who does not have saving grace within their heart. This person cannot say this warning doesn't apply to him. Perhaps through this very warning the false convert will take heed and the Holy Spirit will awaken a dead conscience. The deceived sinner will say to his own soul, "Wait a minute, if this is true, then maybe I haven't really been saved." He begins to examine his heart, and calls out to God, and God is gracious to save the sinner. At the same time it has application to the true believer who is not running as faithfully as he should. It's a warning. Since the writer of Hebrews has used Christian terminology all must wrestle with this verse. Don't lessen the severity of the warning and never render it useless for any group.

### **God's Illustration of Apostasy**

Lastly, the author illustrates this apostasy in verses seven and eight. Both parcels of land received rain. Both the good land and the bad land. The good land produced fruit, the other produced thorns and thistles. Here we see the rain upon both parcels of land represents something extremely important. It illustrates the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of an apostate as well as a believer. The apostate received rain. Rain represents a grace, a mercy. This is going to be hard to handle, but listen to me, often there is a work of God in the heart that brings conviction but no salvation. We can call this a grace no less than it is in the one who is converted. It is a mercy they didn't deserve it.

The genuine believer will produce fruit while the false professor produces none. Herein is the difference. Look at Luke chapter eight verse thirteen. This is the story that this reminds me of. Jesus said that there were four different soils in which a sower of seed sowed the Word of God. In verse thirteen our Lord said, "They on the rock are they which, when they hear, receive the word with joy." It's the same Christian terminology that you would describe anybody who was genuinely saved. They received word and not only did they receive it, but they received it with joy. "And these have no root, which for a while believe," He doesn't even quibble over what kind of faith it is, He simply said they believed. "And in time of temptation fall away." But oh, there's another type of ground, verse fifteen. I hope this describes you, "But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience."

## **What's the difference? Genuine fruit of God.**

The final question this morning must not be avoided, why is one ground, or in this case heart, honest and good while the other heart is not? Let's go back to the parable that I began my sermon with. Why did one slave stay with the guide trusting him to get him to freedom, while the other slave refused to trust the guide? In my illustration it would seem that one was more discerning or wiser than the other. Yes, it would seem so, and that would explain why one was saved and one was lost. But what if I told you that the one who remained with the guide had a father who had also escaped to freedom by the hand of this same guide? This father had sent word by a handwritten letter given to the guide to give to his son to encourage him to trust the man. His father knew that his son would get discouraged because of the difficulty, and therefore, teaches his son by his own example in the handwritten note that all would be well if he heeds the underground leader. The other man had no such confidence, and even though the fellow slave shows him the letter of his father, he refuses to believe it.

Here's the difference. It's not in the discernment or the wisdom of one over the other, the difference is this: that one had the witness of the father and the other did not. And the same is true with why one is saved and another hearing the same truth goes away lost. One has received a direct communiqué from the Father of heaven to his heart. One has been taught of the Father and the other wasn't. He heard the truth of the Scriptures and it made sense to his mind and the truth alone affected him, but friends, truth alone can never change your heart. It has to be a supernatural work of God, and I plead with you, my friend, have you experienced the supernatural work of God by His grace? For Jesus said in John chapter six and verse forty-four, "No man can come to me, except the Father which has sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, And they shall all be taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father cometh, unto me."

Have you truly heard from the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ? If you have then you will keep to the task of trusting Him. That is our labor and this is our work, to believe upon Him that God has sent (John 6:29). All that hear the Father come to the Son. "It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me (John 6:45). And all that come to the Son never perish. "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out" (John 6:37).

So, I plead with you this morning, this warning is for every one of us here. Many times we've skipped over this passage because we're saying it describes somebody who had an inferior work of grace. Yes, ultimately that is what has happened, but don't read it that way. Read it just the way the writer wanted you to read it, that, that person could be you. In verse nine he says, "I think better things about you, things concerning salvation". We'll talk about that next week. But this text is a warning for us today. Are you so caught up in religion that you are missing the Son of God? Are you one among my hearers that when you die you will be shocked with the horror of having come short of saving grace? May God grant you mercy to know your own heart I pray in Christ's name. Amen.