

The Danger of not Running Part I

a sermon in the series
Hebrews: An Epistle of Encouragement

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Hebrews 12:14-29

Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord: 15 looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled; 16 lest there be any fornicator or profane person like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright. 17 For you know that afterward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears. 18 For you have not come to the mountain that may be touched and that burned with fire, and to blackness and darkness and tempest, 19 and the sound of a trumpet and the voice of words, so that those who heard it begged that the word should not be spoken to them anymore. 20 (For they could not endure what was commanded: "And if so much as a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned or shot with an arrow.") 21 And so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, "I am exceedingly afraid and trembling.") 22 But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, 23 to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, 24 to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel. 25 See that you do not refuse Him who speaks. For if they did not escape who refused Him who spoke on earth, much more shall we not escape if we turn away from Him who speaks from heaven, 26 whose voice then shook the earth; but now He has promised, saying, "Yet once more I shake not only the earth, but also heaven." 27 Now this, "Yet once more," indicates the removal of those things that are being shaken, as of things that are made, that the things which cannot be shaken may remain. 28 Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. 29 For our God is a consuming fire.

I want to begin by reading verse one of chapter twelve before reading our text because it sets the context for everything the apostle will say from now to the end of the book. In fact, it is the central purpose for which he wrote the book. It reads,

Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset [us], and let us run with patience the race that is set before us (Hebrews 12:1).

We are in a race. The Christian life is often characterized as a sporting event, an endurance marathon. At other times it is characterized as a war, demanding war-like vigilance and determination. The idea is that the Christian is never to settle down and take it easy. There is no time for comfort; the stakes are too high for ease and pleasure. The exhortation has been given over and over throughout this book not to get comfortable. But we do not heed this warning because we do not see it as a warning. We have been taught that a Baptist is one who is eternally secure and his or her redemption is final and can never be in jeopardy. We have been told that we cannot fall from grace and lose our salvation and therefore we should not give it a second thought. But the writer of Hebrews never makes such statements. In fact, he goes to great lengths to prove otherwise. Oh no, please do not misunderstand me. He didn't say a true Christian would be lost in the end, or that he or she could lose their salvation. And, may I say, neither do I. Jesus said it so plainly, "And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand." (John 10:28) In John chapter six and verse thirty-nine our Lord said, "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." So you see, my friend, it is not a matter of you losing your salvation, but it is a matter of Christ losing you, and that He will never do!

The writer of Hebrews believed in the perseverance of the saint. He believed that God's elect would not in the end be lost. He also believed that believers should have a great confidence or assurance of their salvation. Listen to his words,

Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need (Hebrews 4:16).

Now, you do not come boldly if you do not have an assurance of salvation. This is a throne of grace. It is not by works. I have no hope of gaining my salvation or fear of losing it by my performance. It just will not happen. It is a throne of grace and I am to come boldly.

In the sixth chapter and verse nine we see the confidence of the author. This is an important passage because in verses four through six he has given one of the most traumatic warning passages of all the Bible. It speaks about one who had been enlightened, tasted the good Word of God and heaven to come, and had been illuminated by the Spirit of God. The author says if one like this should fall away it would be impossible to renew him to repentance. That is why this is a terrible warning passage. But he follows this warning with a confident assurance that what he has said in verses four through six will not happen to those to whom he has written this warning. He says,

But, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak.

In the eleventh verse of the same chapter he writes,

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

May I ask a question? If it is possible that the believer can lose his or her salvation, how could you ever have full assurance until the very end? You would be fearful that you might lose it. When you were not performing as you ought to perform, which for most of us is a good bit of the time, your assurance could not be full. There is no full assurance of hope until the end if there is the possibility of losing salvation.

In the seventeenth verse through the nineteenth of chapter six the author explains the hope of his assurance. It is in a promise made by God.

Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed [it] by an oath: That by two immutable things, in which [it was] impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us: Which [hope] we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil.

In other words, to assure those who have inherited salvation, God made a promise. The promise is that they would make it—all the way. He even confirmed it by an oath. He did not just make a promise, dear friend, He took an oath. God has made a promise and additionally, He swore an oath on top of the promise. “And that by two immutable things,” two unchangeable things, “in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation.” The word “consolation” means hope or encouragement. We can have hope or full assurance of a final salvation because we have an anchor who is Christ Jesus the Lord. If the anchor doesn’t hold, you can have no assurance of your salvation. But oh, thank God, this morning, the Anchor holds.

Hebrews chapter ten and verse fourteen gives us once again the author’s belief that God’s people would not lose salvation and that they would finish the race.

For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified (Hebrews 10:14).

Again in the nineteenth verse of the same tenth chapter.

Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus,

It is an insult to God to draw near to Him doubting whether or not He will accept you. We are to “draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water” (Hebrews 10:22). It is clear to me that this writer not only believed that the elect were eternally saved, but that they could be sure of it.

Neither the writer of Hebrews, nor I, am questioning the final perseverance of the believer, or in the more modern vernacular, eternal security. What he and I are questioning is the manner in which eternal security is taught today. The unnamed apostle of this letter of the Hebrews challenged and rebuked a false notion of the security of the believer that would cause any Christian to become lax and careless. He, with power and with terror, warned of the terrible prospect

of what could happen to a person who professed to be a Christian who quit running the race because they saw no need to run. Those with a wrong view of eternal security, as far as they are concerned, have the race in the proverbial bag. To them it is already settled, you can take the rest of the time of your sojourn in ease. That is exactly what this writer is coming against. And, dear friend, please listen, most Baptists today have missed the Bible when it comes to this subject.

We preach and teach an eternal security that is causing many people to grow negligent in the pursuit of holiness. I want you to listen to why I believe that. I want us to go back to the beginning of this book again. I want us to look at and recount the strict and pungent warnings about believers and the danger of not running the race. It is my firm belief that these warning passages are just not for those who think they are saved, but are not. It is also written to those who have been saved, and you must keep that foremost in your mind to rightly interpret these biblical warnings. All the way through this book of Hebrews, this man has been warning believers, saints, Christians. No doubt there were some in the congregations who were not truly saved, although they confessed to be. Some had defected back to Judaism, therefore proving that they were not truly saved. But to those whom he is writing, he says repeatedly, "I am warning you to keep running the race." He warned them that if they did not keep running they would be lost forever. He says, "I may speak like this, but I am persuaded of better things of you." Even at the very conclusion of the book of Hebrews the author says, "Suffer the word of exhortation." In other words, he is saying "I know that this has been very difficult. You can't enjoy my words but you must endure them. It has been tough talk, but I have done this to help you to keep running the race."

Hebrews chapter two verses one through three contains a warning to believers.

Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip. For if the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward; How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him.

Please take notice that the writer addresses not just believers, but he includes himself when he uses the pronoun "we." Should we interpret this as an editorial "we"? The editorial "we" would include the author but does not mean the author is actually involved. It does not seem that the author is making use of the editorial "we." He is talking about something far too serious to just editorialize. He realizes that there must be constant vigilance even over his own soul.

He is making a comparison of judgment under the Old Covenant and judgment under the New Covenant. If the Old Covenant, which was mediated by angels, brought death to any who disobeyed it, how much more of a judgment was to fall upon him who neglected the salvation of the New Covenant.

In the third chapter and sixth verse the writer again uses the word "we" and says,

But Christ as a son over his own house; whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end.

This man knew that there is no prize for him, or his hearers, if they do not keep running the race. In verse twelve of chapter three the author calls his audience “brethren” and warns them.

Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God (Hebrews 3:12).

He proceeds to the fourth chapter and continues his warning.

Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it. For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it (Hebrews 4:1-2).

I was sharing this with a fellow minister friend of mine who insists that there is no way that a saint can be lost, therefore there cannot be a warning issued to a saint of losing his salvation. His argument was that you couldn't warn someone against doing something that is impossible for them to do. Sounds logical, doesn't it? However, it is taking good theology and reading it into the text, making the text say something that it does not really say. We must be very careful. Although the conclusion of the text may be the same as your theology, you will in the end miss some very important truths about that position if you overlook how the conclusion is reached. The way to the doctrinal conclusion is as important as the conclusion itself. The way you take must be the way in which the Bible leads you.

My friend said to me, “Brother, God has not given us a spirit of fear; we are not to be afraid.” But this is contrary to the Scriptures. Hebrews chapter four and verse one says,

Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left [us] of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it.

There is a godly fear that ought to rule our hearts. Modern teaching on eternal security has stolen from the people of God a fear, the right kind of fear, a Biblical fear; not a servile fear, or a dread of God, but a fear that is holy; a fear that will keep us motivated to run the race until we cross the finish line. It is a fear of sin and all that is ungodly. Does not the Bible say that the beginning of wisdom is the fear of God?

If we teach that eternal security simply means you ask Jesus to come into your heart and God waves some type of magic wand over you that makes it impossible for you to fall, then we have put into the heart of believers a false sense of security. We need a security that is based upon the truth and not a falsehood. Surely, this is one of the reasons why many Christians are so anemic today. We have told them, “Your salvation is in the bag, don't worry about it.” But that's not what this author of the epistle of Hebrews says.

I know that this is contrary to what many of you believe. And perhaps you are puzzled. We will clear this up in our next message from this epistle. Today is a general overview to get us started.

As we progress to chapter four and verse eleven,

Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief.

Let's hear Hebrews chapter six and verse four through six.

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, 5 And have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, 6 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.

Again, I caution us against reading our already formed theology into this text. Let the text speak for itself. You should read this and tremble.

*Let us hold fast the profession of [our] faith without wavering; (for he [is] faithful that promised;)
(Hebrews 10:23).*

Once again, notice the pronoun "us." If the author is writing to people who profess to be saved, but really aren't, he would have no need of including himself. But he includes himself because he assumes his audience to be saved, although he can't be sure of that any more than I can be sure that every one of you is saved. But if you declare yourself to be a Christian, then I will address you as my brother or my sister, and I will preach, exhort, rebuke, and encourage us as such.

Hebrews chapter ten and verse twenty-six,

For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins,

How clearly this is written to all who professed faith in Christ, and this is the warning of the text,

But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries. He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace? (Hebrews 10:27-29).

This is all terminology that describes a Christian. We cannot reject this or get around it. All of us must take these warnings seriously. The author summarizes this passage in verse thirty-five.

Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward.

The last warning of this book is our text, Hebrews chapter twelve and verses fourteen through twenty-nine. In verse fourteen we read,

Follow peace with all [men], and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.

While we do not believe in a salvation by works, we neither should believe in a salvation that doesn't produce good works. There is no salvation by works, but there is no salvation that doesn't evidence itself in good works. Salvation produces holy living. The word of the text is that without holy living, no man shall see the Lord. Do you think that just a prayer is sufficient for salvation? It is clear that the writer of Hebrews does not. Salvation includes the pursuit of holiness.

Moving to verse fifteen,

Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble [you], and thereby many be defiled;

“Looking diligently,” this is war-like speech. Our nation is at war with terrorism. In a time of war, orders are passed from generals to the colonels, to sergeants, and finally to the privates, and they are framed in this kind of speech.

The author is rallying the troops by saying, “I am praying for you and challenging you, be war-like in your vigilance. Don't let your guard down lest you fail of the grace of God!”

In verse sixteen he continues the warning,

Lest there be any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birth-right.

In verses eighteen through twenty-one the author returns again to Moses and the Old Testament people of Israel at Mount Sinai. What a frightful thought he presents. It was a frightful scene that day. Look how he explains it. When God came down on that mountain, they couldn't touch it. If an animal touched it they were not to go up and retrieve the animal. They were to stand back and shoot an arrow and kill it. Blackness, darkness, fire and the sound of a trumpet and the voice; a voice which so shattered the people's resolve that they begged Moses that he entreat God to not speak anymore to them in this manner. Israel heard the very voice of God and they trembled and said, “Please tell Him not to speak out loud to us again.” Notice how fearful this sight was when God comes down on Sinai. It was so fearful and so terrible that Moses said, “I exceedingly fear and quake.” Holy Moses trembled at the sight of God's mighty presence.

This is not the kind of mountain that we, believers, have come to. We have come to a “better mountain.” Now should you think that Mount Zion is the kind of mountain where the Christian can relax because he is under grace, then you must take heed. This is exactly the mindset that the writer is opposing.

Some would say, “But that was the law back then. We can see why there was fire and terror and death and fear. But we are under grace.” The writer of Hebrews comes against such reasoning. Take note of verse twenty-five.

See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more [shall not] we [escape], if we turn away from him that [speaketh] from heaven:

Notice the typology here. In the Old Covenant God spoke on earth and those who rejected Him were judged. But now God speaks from heaven through Jesus. The writer’s argument is the judgment will much more severe for those who reject Christ. There is a shaking occurring now under the New Covenant.

Whose voice then shook the earth: but now he hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven (Hebrews 12:26).

This shaking is much more severe than the trembling of Mount Sinai. The author says in verse twenty-seven,

And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain.

Dear child of God, hear me, I plead. This man trembled at the prospect of what it would be like if he did not finish the race. I did not say that he feared that he would not make the end of the race. He feared the prospect of what would happen if he didn’t. There’s a big difference. In no way is the writer of Hebrews, nor am I, trying to get anyone to be in doubt of their salvation, if they are truly converted. What we must see is that all of these warnings were written to believers in order to alert them to a frightening prospect that if they don’t run as they should, there is destruction.

He wants us to imagine what would be the consequence of one who appeared to have started the race but didn’t finish the race. Why? So that they would be mobilized to seek the Lord God for what this writer calls the necessary fuel for the race—grace. This is the prime reason for all of the warnings of this epistle. I agree that the true child of God will not apostatize, but the guarantee of his salvation does not abolish his or her responsibility to run the race. In verse twenty-eight he turns our attention to the fuel for the race, the grace of God.

Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear:

We must have grace to run the race and God is the supplier of this needed fuel.

Now at this point, we have to stop and ask, “Is he talking about a salvation by works?” Are we by working, running, and fearing in order to earn our salvation? And can we really know if we are

saved or must we wait and see if we make it?” No, that certainly is not what the book of Hebrews is teaching. Bear with me. There is no salvation by works. The writer has made this very clear. Our salvation is in Christ and His finished work on the cross. We have covered this thoroughly in this book. There has to be something else that the author has in mind and is talking about.

Let me now move to explain how the writer of Hebrews can give all of these warnings, and yet at the same time be assured of the believer’s salvation. How can the anointed apostle write such warnings to Christians whose eternal destiny is safe and secure? Are you somewhat curious? How does he write so sternly that there is a possibility of coming short of the grace of God? How can he say that, and yet say that you are safe and secure if you are a believer?

For centuries, good men, theologians, and scholars have debated this question. Some answer the question explaining that the warnings prove the possibility that believers can lose their salvation. I respect that and I understand that. I believed that myself for years. On the other hand, there are others who have argued to the contrary and said that these warnings are not to believers. Rather, they argue these are warnings to those who think they are saved, but in truth are not. These passages are tests of genuineness. They are the means to test whether you are really a genuine believer or not. They are used to distinguish between those who are truly saved and those who are not. In the last century, there were others who came on the scene with a new idea and explained that these warnings were warnings of believers losing your rewards, not your salvation.

But, frankly, I believe that all of these views have a fatal flaw in them, and that is that they read their system of theology into the text rather than letting the text speak for itself. As I have already said, this is not hard to do. You don’t have to be a Bible scholar to understand this. If I believe that I am eternally secure and I cannot lose my salvation then when I read these warnings I will believe that the text surely can’t mean that I can lose my salvation. It must mean something else. This is how you read your theology into the text. I agree that the believer will not in the end lose. I believe that is good doctrine. But dear friend, you shouldn’t take your theology and press that upon the text because the text may mean something entirely else. It may mean something completely different.

Those on the other side of the aisle on this issue, believing that a Christian can lose their salvation, will also read their theology into the text. How then are we to approach these texts of warnings? First, the key to understanding the warnings of this author is to understand that all of the New Testament writers use Christian terminology for both those who are really converted and those who are apostates. The Bible often does not distinguish between the two groups by using different terminology. It uses the same descriptive words to describe both parties. Both are said to have faith. Both are said to do works of righteousness. Both are said to have been forgiven. Just reading the terminology does not let you know if the person is really a Christian or not. You must appeal to the context to make that distinction, and sometimes context provides no help.

Second, we need to understand the Biblical concept of salvation. The Biblical concept of salvation is “now but not yet.” In other words, neither Jesus nor the apostles viewed salvation as some-

thing only in the Christian's past. "I have been saved" is a statement in the past tense. "I am being saved" is present tense. And "I will be saved," is future tense. All three of these tenses are found in the New Testament's handling of our great salvation.

Let me give you some examples. Matthew chapter ten and verse twenty-two Jesus sends the twelve apostles to preach and heal the sick. He says to them, "And ye shall be hated of all [men] for my name's sake: but he that endureth to the end shall be saved" (Matthew 10:22). Why would He address men in this manner who are already saved and their salvation secure? The answer is Jesus taught that there is a "now but not yet concept" to salvation. Jesus wanted His disciples to understand that just because you are saved doesn't mean that you are not to fight the good fight of faith. Just because you are saved does not mean that you are not supposed to run the race of faith. You are not to sit back and say, "It's all in the bag, saved and secure," do nothing and wait for Jesus to come back. Here again, we want to read our theology into this text as Baptists. We want this text to say, "He that is saved endures to the end." But that is not what the text says. The text says "he that endureth to the end shall be saved." Not are saved, but shall be saved. This is of course future tense. A few verses later we discover why He said this. "And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matthew 10:28). These men were going to be persecuted, thus He says to them, "Don't fear those who can hurt your body, but fear your Father who can destroy both your soul and your body in hell." Why would He say something like this? This is so foreign to our shallow view of God, but verse thirty-two sheds light on why He thus spoke. Jesus says, "Who-soever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 10:32). Our Lord taught them, and is teaching us, that salvation begins at a point in time, but it doesn't end until we stand before God. He is not speaking of the born again experience, nor of being justified, but of a future salvation, which includes the redemption of our bodies. Until then you are to run the race. And if anybody who appears to be in the midst of the race denies Christ and does not finish the race, let it be known that they were eternally lost.

Can we say that they were never saved? Absolutely, because other passages of Scripture tell us that those who are saved will endure because God will preserve them. But we cannot read that into the text. This was a warning for those men that day. It was given to them to stimulate them to run and not quit, no matter how arduous the race would one day become. This was a word to strengthen them to look to God.

In John chapter eight and verse thirty-one we read another verse that shows salvation as a continual process with a future end, "Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed." Now a careful reading is needed for our Lord is stating something that we do not like to hear. We who believe in the justification by faith, which I do believe with all of my heart and would die for in its defense, must not rule out other aspects of salvation other than justification. Justification is only one aspect of God's grace, there are others. This same grace that justifies us must also sanctify us, as well as one day glorify us. Jesus is teaching that continual obedience is required for us to receive full salvation. If at any time an individual who has seemingly walked with the Lord ceases to obey Christ, he or she can be

no longer considered a disciple. Therefore, obedience is a part of the salvation process. Oh, how dangerous a statement; let me not leave it unattended. Obedience is only a part of the salvation process because those who are disciples do indeed obey, but not because their obedience saves them. They obey because of the change that has been wrought in them by grace and the ongoing work of grace called sanctification. Sanctification, like justification, is an aspect of salvation. All who have truly been justified will be sanctified and ultimately glorified.

You may profess faith, but if there is no obedience to the Word of God, your profession is empty, you are not saved; and you will not be saved unless God takes mercy and humbles your heart and shows you the truth. We modern Baptists have so diluted truth by a false version of the security of the believer. Men and women walk an aisle and pray a prayer and are then asked by a clergyman, "Now, friend, did you believe it? Were you sincere?" To which the sinner says, "Yes, I was sincere."

How foolish a question! They were sincere, otherwise why would they have come forward? The question is a part of his technique and strategy. The counselor may ask them, "Do you believe that Jesus died on the cross and arose from the dead?"

"Oh, yes, I believe it," is their reply.

And then the noose is tightened around the sinner's neck when told, "Well, you know that the Bible says that if you really believe it, you are saved. How do you feel?"

"Uh, I . . . well . . ." he awkwardly answers.

The religious expert shores up his illegitimate birth, "You believe it, don't you?"

"Yes," the answer timidly comes.

The trap is finally sprung on the victim, "Well then, you are saved. Rejoice, brother. And by the way, God has also promised that those whom He has saved He will keep secure. They can't lose their salvation; once saved always saved. You mustn't doubt this because you are doubting God if you do. That's the devil speaking to you if you doubt it."

Do not think I am jesting. I have often heard this type of counsel word for word. Not once, not twice, but dozens of times. That is what people are being told today. Salvation is nothing more than a profession that you believe that Jesus died on a cross and arose from the dead. That's all. This is the faith of devils, for even devils believe these certain facts about Christ. Christ-likeness and fruit bearing is completely removed from the equation. These topics are reserved for an elite group of Christians who are called to "discipleship." They preach that discipleship is not for everybody, only the really dedicated like pastors and church leaders.

I know the hour grows late and I have gone beyond my normal time, but I must plead with you. Some of you are so concerned about time right now that you will let your soul die and go to hell over your stomachs, and the Bible will say to you, my dear friend, that your god is your belly. Please, I don't mean to be rude; I am in earnest about your soul. If you want your belly to be filled, then go right now. But I pray you in the name of Christ, stay and hear the word of the Lord and be saved.

The Bible is replete with examples of what it means to be genuinely a Christian. It demonstrates true Christianity by the individual who lives for righteousness' sake, while it demonstrates false Christianity by the individual who practices a lifestyle of sin. Preachers, yes, even Baptist preachers, are deceiving folks when they say that you can profess Jesus as your Savior and you don't have to make Him your Lord. And even if you live in continual disobedience, if you really believe that Jesus died on the cross for your sins, they will tell you that you are still going to heaven.

This is the Word of God, "Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous . . . In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother" (1 John 3:7, 10).

I don't want anybody to deceive you. Continual obedience is required, and therefore, it makes sense that Jesus and the apostles would warn us and exhort us to persevere in faith. Paul says, "Knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed" (Romans 13:11). The early church believed in a future salvation. To the apostles the Christian life was a race, a marathon to the distance. It is wrong to view salvation only in the past. If you look at it as a point in time only, and not a continual experience, then you have missed it. You will tend to be lax and unfaithful to God. I will stop here and will pick up here in a couple of weeks when I return.

Dear Friend, these warning passages should speak clearly to us today. All week long, I have been so blessed by this study. You would think that I would be coming to the pulpit biting my nails, worrying if I am saved or not with the way that I am talking. I want you to know that I am all the more confirmed in my salvation because of studying this. And I want you to know that there has been a joy worked in my heart by studying this truth. God loves me so much to give me these warnings to spur me on. I will explain that in a couple of weeks. And that is how you and I ought to view these warnings. They should be understood to say that if I am not working righteousness by His Spirit, through the grace that is given to all of God's saints, I need to be afraid and repent. These warnings preach to me to keep vigilant and on guard because I have an adversary who would devour me. These warnings work a grace in me that help me to stay sharp, alert, and ready.

Is there a work of righteousness occurring in your life? Do you see yourself by God's grace and help growing in righteousness and obedience? If that is not occurring in your life, be warned today. Do not reason with yourself that you are eternally secure and you have nothing to be con-

cerned about. If there is no walking in the Spirit, no fruits born by a spirit of repentance, if there is not a desire or pursuit of holiness, I tell you again with heaviness of heart, you should be afraid.

Work, run, and fear, all in the power of grace. Let's not take our salvation lightly. Let us give diligence lest any of us fall short of the grace of God. Amen.