



**Talmid תלמיד** a Hebrew word that means “a true disciple who desires to be what the Rabbi Jesus is.”  
*Whoever claims to live in Him must walk as Jesus did. 1 John 2:6 (NIV)*

STUDY TO SHEW THYSELF APPROVED UNTO GOD, A WORKMAN THAT NEEDETH NOT TO BE ASHAMED, RIGHTLY DIVIDING THE WORD OF TRUTH. 2 TIMOTHY 2:15



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## The Doctrines of Grace

### Christ’s Purposeful Atonement (Part-9) *(Continuation from last month)*

### 5. God’s Preservation of the Saints

The **P** of **TULIP** stands for **perseverance**, the **doctrine of the perseverance of the saints**. Like other terms represented by the acrostic **TULIP**, **perseverance** is somewhat **misleading**. It suggests that the continuity of faith and obedience is accomplished by the believer alone. Indeed the believer does persevere in faith and godliness, but this is

due to the gracious work of God in his behalf.

**More accurate than perseverance is preservation. We persevere because we are preserved by God.** If left to our own strength, none of us would persevere. Only because we are **preserved by grace** are we able **to persevere at all**.

A simple way to remember the essence of the doctrine of perseverance is to learn this ditty: “**If we have it, we never lose it. If we lose it, we never had it.**” This is a “**cute**” way of affirming that **full** and **final** apostasy is never the lot of the Christian. Another shorthand expression of this doctrine is the aphorism “**Once saved, always saved.**” This is sometimes called **eternal security**, since it calls attention to the enduring power of the salvation wrought for us and in us by the work of Christ.

#### Table 8

##### The Tulip’s Fifth Petal

- |                                      |                                         |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|
| <b>1. Total depravity</b>            | <b>Humanity’s radical corruption</b>    |
| <b>2. Unconditional election</b>     | <b>God’s sovereign choice</b>           |
| <b>3. Limited atonement</b>          | <b>Christ’s purposeful atonement</b>    |
| <b>4. Irresistible grace</b>         | <b>The Spirit’s effective call</b>      |
| <b>5. Perseverance of the saints</b> | <b>God’s preservation of the saints</b> |

The **doctrine of perseverance** has to do with the **permanency of our salvation**. The verb *to save* appears in the Bible in various tenses. We **have been** saved, **are being** saved, and **shall be** saved. There is a **past**, **present**, and **future** dimension to salvation. Our salvation began in **eternity**, is realized **in time**, and looks **forward to heaven**.

The New Testament speaks of enduring to the end, promising that “**he who endures to the end shall be saved**” (**Matthew 24:13**).

**Matthew 24:13 (NASB)**

<sup>13</sup> “**But the one who endures to the end, he will be saved.**”

*This may be* understood as a **condition** or **proviso** for salvation or as a veiled promise of eternal salvation. Endurance in faith is a condition for future salvation. Only those who endure in faith will be saved for eternity.

*This raises the obvious question, **Are there some who have genuine faith who do not endure to the end and are therefore not ultimately saved?*** The **semi-Pelagian** answers **yes**. **Semi-Pelagianism** teaches that a person may come to true, authentic, saving faith and fall away from that faith, losing his salvation. This is clearly what the Roman Catholic church teaches. Rome’s system of sacramental theology provides for penance, the restoration to salvation of those who have fallen away. **Penance** is called the “**second plank of salvation for those who have made shipwreck of their faith.**”

Rome prescribes penance for those who have committed mortal sin after having received the grace of justification. This sin is called “**mortal**” *because it kills the grace of justification*.

Rome distinguishes between **mortal** and **venial sins**. **Venial sin is real sin but not so serious as to destroy the grace of justification**. By contrast, mortal sin is so serious, so egregious, that it causes a person to lose his salvation. He may regain his salvation and be restored to a state of justification by the sacrament of penance. For Rome as for all forms of **semi-Pelagianism**, no one can have positive assurance of perseverance except for a few saints who receive a special divine revelation to that effect.

The **doctrine of the assurance of salvation** differs from the **doctrine of the perseverance of the saints**, but it is closely related. The two doctrines may be distinguished from one another, but they can never be separated. **Reformed theology affirms both the assurance of salvation and the perseverance of the saints**.

## ASSURANCE OF SALVATION

*The Westminster Confession of Faith* declares:

“Although hypocrites and other unregenerate men may vainly deceive themselves with false hopes and carnal presumptions of being in the favour of God, and estate of salvation (which hope of theirs shall perish): yet such as truly believe in the Lord Jesus, and love Him in sincerity, endeavouring to walk in all good conscience before Him, may, in this life, be certainly assured that they are in the state of grace, and may rejoice in the hope of the glory of God, which hope shall never make them ashamed.”

The confession *acknowledges* that there is such a thing as **false assurance**. False assurance is derived from an **incorrect view** of salvation or an **incorrect assumption** about one’s personal faith.

The **possibility of false assurance does not eliminate** the **possibility of true or genuine assurance**.

The Apostle Peter exhorts believers to seek the true assurance promised in the gospel:

**2 Peter 1:10-12 (NASB)**

<sup>10</sup> **Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble;**

<sup>11</sup> **for in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you.**

<sup>12</sup> **Therefore, I will always be ready to remind you of these things, even though you *already* know them, and have been established in the truth which is present with you.**

The apostle calls us to pursue assurance with diligence. It is the assurance of our election, which translates into an assurance of our salvation. All the elect are saved, so if we can be sure that we are the elect, we can

also be sure that we are saved.

To what end does the apostle exhort us to make our election sure? **“If you do these things or for as long as you practice these things,”** he says, **“you will never stumble.”**

**What does this mean?** Does it mean that if we gain an assurance of our election, we will never trip up and sin? Obviously not. The Bible is replete with examples of elect and saved people who fall into sin.

Assurance does not guarantee perfection. **So in what sense is it true that assurance means we will never stumble?**

This question is not easy to answer. Is the stumbling to which Peter refers so serious that we actually fall out of a state of salvation? Perhaps.

Or is the apostle stressing the role of assurance in the believer’s steady, sure-footed growth toward sanctification?

Perhaps this is what Peter means, and his use of the term **never** is a case of apostolic hyperbole. I do not know for sure.

One thing, however, is certain. ***There is clearly a link between our assurance and our sanctification.*** The person who lacks assurance of salvation is vulnerable to a myriad of threats to his personal growth. The confident Christian, certain of his salvation, is free from the paralyzing fear that can inhibit personal growth.

Without assurance we are assailed by doubt and uncertainty with respect to God’s promises, which serve as an anchor for our souls.

It is of utmost importance that new Christians become certain of their personal salvation. Such assurance is a mighty boon to the growth of faith to maturity.

***The Westminster Confession*** continues:

**“This certainty is not a bare conjectural and probable persuasion grounded upon a fallible hope; but an infallible assur-**

**ance of faith founded upon the divine truth of the promises of salvation, the inward evidence of those graces unto which these promises are made, the testimony of the Spirit of adoption witnessing with our spirits that we are the children of God, which Spirit is the earnest of our inheritance, whereby we are sealed to the day of redemption.”**

This section of the confession is filled with crucial theological content. First we see the contrast between **conjecture** and **certainty**. The ***certainty of our assurance*** rests on an **infallible basis**. This basis is not **our infallibility**, but that of the **One who grants it**. It is based on a truth that is divine, a truth that comes from God himself. It rests on the **“promises of salvation.”**

We know that all human beings are covenant breakers, breaking promises, violating oaths, and failing to fulfill vows. We are all capable and guilty of such trespasses against the sanctity of truth. But unlike fallen humanity God is absolutely a covenant keeper. He is incapable of lying, and he never breaks vows, oaths, or promises. He is the supreme Promise Keeper. His promises are clearly recorded for us in sacred Scripture, and these promises are **corroborated** and **confirmed** inwardly by the **sure and certain testimony of the Holy Spirit himself**, who is not only holy, but also the veritable Spirit of Truth.

The confession alludes to two New Testament affirmations regarding the Holy Spirit’s work in our lives: he is the **earnest of our inheritance** and he **seals us to the day of redemption**.

**Ephesians 1:12-14 (NASB)**

<sup>12</sup> **to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ would be to the praise of His glory.**

<sup>13</sup> **In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise,**

<sup>14</sup> **who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of *God’s own* possession, to the praise of His glory.**

**Ephesians 1:12-14 (KJV)**

<sup>12</sup> **That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ.**

<sup>13</sup> **In whom ye also *trusted*, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in**

whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise,<sup>14</sup> Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory.

The term *earnest* came from the language of commerce. We use the term *earnest* to refer to actions motivated by a sincere and passionate zeal.

We also use it occasionally in the field of modern commerce, particularly with reference to the buying of homes or other property. When signing a real estate contract, the buyer often puts down a deposit called “**pin money**” or “**earnest money.**” It is called earnest money because it demonstrates that the buyer is entering into the contract “**in earnest**” and fully intends to pay all of the money owed.

Sometimes people who put up earnest money renege on the deal and fail to pay the full amount. Their failure belies the genuine earnestness of the down payment. **But the Holy Spirit of Truth could never renege on a promise.** When God gives us the earnest of the Spirit, he promises to finish what he has begun. His promise to complete the arrangement in the future cannot fail to come to pass. When God gives an earnest, nothing can **vitiate [make something ineffective: to destroy or drastically reduce the effectiveness of something, or make it invalid]** his divine guarantee.

In addition to receiving “**the earnest of our inheritance,**” we are “**sealed**” by the Spirit. The idea of sealing is drawn from the ancient practice of sealing special royal documents. Documents were authenticated by pressing the king’s signet ring into wax, leaving an indelible impression that indicates royal ownership and authorization.

In a sense the Spirit acts as the signet ring of the divine King. He makes an indelible mark on our souls, indicating his ownership of us. A seal was also used to prevent an invasion. Just as the tomb of Christ was sealed to prevent desecration by thieves and robbers, so we are sealed to prevent the evil one from snatching us from the arms of Christ.

Together the promises of God, the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit, the earnest of the Spirit,

and the sealing of the Spirit comprise a solid ground for the believer’s full assurance of salvation.

## ASSURANCE AND SANCTIFICATION

*The Westminster Confession* adds:

**“This infallible assurance doth not so belong to the essence of faith, but that a true believer may wait long, and conflict with many difficulties, before he be[comes a] partaker of it: yet, being enabled by the Spirit to know the things which are freely given him of God, he may, without extraordinary revelation, in the right use of ordinary means, attain thereunto. And therefore it is the duty of every one to give all diligence to make his calling and election sure, that thereby his heart may be enlarged in peace and joy in the Holy Ghost, in love and thankfulness to God, and in strength and cheerfulness in the duties of obedience, the proper fruits of this assurance; so far is it from inclining men to looseness.”**

The Westminster divines make it clear that assurance of salvation is not a necessary condition of salvation. We do not have to know that we are saved in order to be saved.

This is what the confession means when it says that assurance does not “**belong to the essence of faith.**” Assurance is a fruit of faith and may, indeed ultimately should, accompany faith. But assurance is not an essential of saving faith, in that we may be saved without it. For example, personal trust in Christ is an essential of saving faith. Any faith that lacks such trust is not saving faith because it lacks an essential element.

***Though assurance is not essential to faith, it is nevertheless extremely important.*** The ancient distinction between the **being** or **esse** of a matter or thing, and the **well being** or **bene esse** of a matter or thing, may be helpful.

Assurance of salvation is not of **the essence** or **being (esse)** of the Christian life, but it is of the **well being (bene esse)** of the Christian life. Assurance of salvation is important because it is linked to our growth in sanctification.

Full assurance is not an automatic fruit of conver-

sion, nor is it necessarily an immediate fruit. The believer may be in a state of saving grace for a long time before attaining assurance. But attaining it is not a remote possibility; **it is eminently attainable** and **surely desirable**. The assurance of salvation is an enormous benefit to the Christian, yet it is also to be pursued as a duty. The confession alludes to the apostolic injunction to make our election and calling sure.

The believer is to pursue assurance so that **“his heart may be enlarged in peace and joy in the Holy Ghost, in love and thankfulness to God, and in strength and cheerfulness in the duties of obedience.”** Assurance is connected with the fruit of the Holy Spirit, and this fruit is the very essence of our sanctification. Assurance then does not promote a false ease in Zion, or a smug or complacent form of spirituality, or (God forbid) a license for loose living.

It promotes such things as **love** and **thankfulness to God**. These two elements, love and thankfulness, are the motivation for Christian obedience. The famous professor at **Free University in Amsterdam**, Chair of Systematic Theology Graduate School, **G. C. Berkouwer**, once remarked in class, “The essence of theology is grace; the essence of ethics is gratitude.” **Berkouwer** was getting at the inseparable relationship between the Christian’s obedience and his gratefulness for having been saved by grace.

**The confession** concludes by declaring: **“True believers may have the assurance of their salvation divers ways shaken, diminished, and intermitted; as, by negligence in preserving of it, by falling into some special sin which woundeth the conscience and grieveth the Spirit; by some sudden or vehement temptation, by God’s withdrawing the light of His countenance, and suffering even such as fear Him to walk in darkness and to have no light: yet are they never utterly destitute of that seed of God, and life of faith, that love of Christ and the brethren, that sincerity of heart, and conscience of duty, out of which, by the operation of the Spirit, this assurance may, in due time, be revived; and by the**

**which, in the mean time, they are supported from utter despair.”**

This section reveals clearly that the **Westminster divines** ***did not divorce theology from the Christian life***. They show keen insight into the manifold temptations that assail the ordinary Christian. They recognize that assurance is not frozen in concrete, incapable of augmentation or diminution. Our **faith** and **assurance** tend to be **frail** and **fragile**. Assurance can be easily **disrupted** and **rudely** shaken. It can be intermittent. It is particularly vulnerable to sin.

What Christian has not undergone what **Martin Luther** called the **Anfechtung**, the **“unbridled assault”** of Satan? We are faced daily with manifold temptations, some of them grievous in nature and intensity, and we all too often succumb to them. Sin is the great enemy of assurance. When we commit it, we ask ourselves, “How can a true Christian do such things?” Then we must flee to Christ in **confession** and **repentance**, seeking his pardon and finding our solace in the Consolation of Israel. He alone can restore us to the joy of our salvation and the assurance of it.

When our consciences are seriously wounded, we may enter into what saints of the past have called **“the dark night of the soul.”** This state is indescribably horrible for the believer, accompanied not by a glorious sense of God’s presence but by a dreadful sense of his absence. We can feel totally abandoned by God, and in our spirit we may approach the rim of the abyss of hell.

We experience what is declared by the **Apostle Paul**:

**2 Corinthians 4:7-16 (NASB)**

<sup>7</sup> But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves;

<sup>8</sup> *we are* afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing;

<sup>9</sup> persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed;

<sup>10</sup> always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body.

<sup>11</sup> For we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.

<sup>12</sup> So death works in us, but life in you.

<sup>13</sup> But having the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, "I BELIEVED, THEREFORE I SPOKE," we also believe, therefore we also speak,

<sup>14</sup> knowing that He who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and will present us with you.

<sup>15</sup> For all things *are* for your sakes, so that the grace which is spreading to more and more people may cause the giving of thanks to abound to the glory of God.

<sup>16</sup> Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day.

Paul speaks of being **hard pressed**, but **not crushed; perplexed**, but not **in despair**. When enduring the dark night of the soul, we come very close to despair. What assurance of salvation we have we cling to by our fingernails.

**Despair crowds in on us but does not finally absorb us.** Though the light of God's countenance **may be severely dimmed**, it is **never altogether extinguished**. The Spirit always preserves for our troubled soul a ray of hope, no matter how dim it appears at the moment. The Christian may feel faint in heart, but he does not lose heart completely. Though the outward man is perishing, the inward man is being renewed day by day.

The anchor of the saint is his experience of God's tender mercy every morning. Though our assurance may stumble and crash for a season, the Holy Spirit revives it again and again. Even when we grieve the Holy Spirit and are chastised by the Father, the Spirit is not vindictive. He expresses grief over our sin, but he does not destroy us or abandon us to hell. The Father corrects those whom he loves and brings them to the fullness of salvation.

The Puritans were deeply concerned about assurance and its relationship to the Christian life. They echoed the view of *The Westminster Confession of Faith*. They refused to make justification depend on assurance, but they insisted on an organic relationship between justifying faith and assurance.

Joel R. Beeke, in his marvelous work *Assurance of Faith*, writes:

"This distinction between faith and assurance had profound doctrinal and pastoral implications for the Puritans. To make justification dependent upon assurance would compel the believer to rely upon his own subjective condition rather than on the sufficiency of a triune God in the order of redemption. Such reliance is not only unsound doctrine, but also bears adverse pastoral affects. God does not require full and perfect faith, but sincere and "unfeigned" faith. Fulfillment of God's promises depends on the matter received, Christ's righteousness, and not upon the degree of assurance exercised in the receiving. If salvation depended on the full assurance of faith, John Downname observes, many would despair for then "the palsied hand of faith should not receive Christ." Happily, salvation's sureness does not rest on the believer's sureness of his salvation, for "believers do not have the same assurance of grace and favor of God, nor do the same ones have it at all times." Pastorally, it is critical to maintain that justifying faith and the experience of doubt often coexist."

## PERSEVERANCE IN SALVATION

We have seen the close link between **the assurance of salvation** and **perseverance in the Christian life**. We must also remember, however, that they are not to be identified with or equated to each other. **They are to be distinguished, but not separated**. Assurance is our subjective confidence in both our present salvation and, by extension, our future salvation.

*Some believe that a believer can have assurance about his present state of redemption but no certainty of his future state.* He may be confident that at the moment he is in a state of grace, but lack assurance that he will continue in that state. They believe it is possible to fall away from grace and to lose the salvation one presently enjoys.

**The Reformed faith believes** that we can have assurance not only of our present state of salvation, but also of our continuity in that state. **This assurance for the future rests in the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints.**

*The Westminster Confession* declares:

**“They, whom God hath accepted in His Beloved, effectually called, and sanctified by His Spirit, can neither totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace, but shall certainly persevere therein to the end, and be eternally saved.”**

We are accepted in God’s **“Beloved,”** a reference of course to Christ. The grounds of our justification are the merit of grace, merit of no mere temporary value but of eternal value and efficacy. The merit of grace perseveres in our behalf. Our election is likewise in Christ, and there is absolutely no danger or possibility that he will lose his own election. **The question is, Will He lose those whom God has elected in Him and with Him?**

The confession says that the elect (those whom God has accepted in Christ) cannot totally or finally fall away from the state of grace. The term **can** refers to ability, so this assertion means it is impossible for the elect to fully or finally fall from grace. It is possible, however, for the believer to experience a serious and radical fall.

Scripture is replete with examples of believers who fell into grievous sin, such as **David** and **Peter**. Though their fall was dreadful, it was neither full nor final. Both were restored to repentance and grace. Believers can have a radical fall, but such falls are temporary and impermanent.

We have all known people who have made professions of faith and exhibited zeal for Christ, only to repudiate their confessions and turn away from Christ. **What should we make of this? We consider two possibilities.**

**The first possibility is that their profession was not genuine in the first place.** They confessed Christ with their mouths and then later committed a real apostasy from that confession. They are like the seed that fell in shallow soil and sprang up quickly, then withered and died (**Matthew 13:5-6**).

**Matthew 13:5-6 (NASB)**

**<sup>5</sup> "Others fell on the rocky places, where they did not have much soil; and immediately they sprang up, because they had no depth of soil.**

**<sup>6</sup> "But when the sun had risen, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they**

**withered away.**

The seed never really took root. They gave some outward signs of conversion, but their conversion was not genuine.

They are like those who honored Christ with their lips but whose hearts were far from him (**Matthew 15:7-8**).

**Matthew 15:7-8 (NASB)**

**<sup>7</sup> "You hypocrites, rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you:**

**<sup>8</sup> "THIS PEOPLE HONORS ME WITH THEIR LIPS, BUT THEIR HEART IS FAR AWAY FROM ME.**

Their faith was spurious from the beginning.

Into this category we can readily assign Judas (Jesus declared that he was of the devil from the beginning) and those about whom John says this:

**1 John 2:19-25 (NASB)**

**<sup>19</sup> They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, so that it would be shown that they all are not of us.**

**<sup>20</sup> But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you all know.**

**<sup>21</sup> I have not written to you because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it, and because no lie is of the truth.**

**<sup>22</sup> Who is the liar but the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, the one who denies the Father and the Son.**

**<sup>23</sup> Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father; the one who confesses the Son has the Father also.**

**<sup>24</sup> As for you, let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father.**

**<sup>25</sup> This is the promise which He Himself made to us: eternal life.**

John acknowledges that some did leave the company of believers. They were apostates. But John declares that they were really not **“of us.”** Their departure manifested their true state. Those who departed are contrasted with those who are anointed by God, those who have his Word abiding in them. If that Word truly abides in

them, then they will abide in Christ and receive the promise of eternal life.

**The second possible explanation** of those who make a profession of faith, give outward evidence of conversion, and then repudiate the faith, **is that they are true believers who have fallen into serious and radical apostasy, but who will repent of their sin and be restored before they die.** If they persist in apostasy until death, then theirs is a full and final fall from grace, which is evidence that they were not genuine believers in the first place.

**The semi-Pelagian position offers a third possibility:** such persons were truly converted, had true faith and salvation, and then fell away from faith and were fully and finally lost. **This view denies the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints.**

It allows for the full and final loss of salvation on the part of those who once had genuinely received it.

## PERSEVERANCE AND PRESERVATION

***The Westminster Confession*** goes on to say: **“This perseverance of the saints depends not upon their own free will, but upon the immutability of the decree of election, flowing from the free and unchangeable love of God the Father; upon the efficacy of the merit and intercession of Jesus Christ, the abiding of the Spirit, and of the seed of God within them, and the nature of the covenant of grace: from all which ariseth also the certainty and infallibility thereof.”**

**The perseverance of the saints** could more accurately be called the **preservation of the saints**, as this affirmation of the Westminster divines makes clear. The believer does not persevere through the power of his unaided will. **God’s preserving grace makes our perseverance both possible and actual.**

Even the regenerated person *with a liberated will is still vulnerable* to **sin** and **temptation** and the residual power of sin is so strong that without the aid of grace the believer would, in all probability, fall away. But God’s decree **is immutable**. *His sovereign purpose to save his elect from the founda-*

*tion of the world is not frustrated by our weakness.*

Were the Bible to say nothing about perseverance, **what it says about God’s electing grace would be sufficient to convince us of the doctrine of perseverance.**

But the Bible is not silent on these matters, declaring clearly and often that God will finish what He has begun for us and in us.

**For example, Paul declares:**

**Philippians 1:3-6 (NASB)**

<sup>3</sup> **I thank my God in all my remembrance of you,**

<sup>4</sup> **always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all,**

<sup>5</sup> **in view of your participation in the gospel from the first day until now.**

<sup>6</sup> **For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.**

**Note that Paul puts the stress on God, not on man,** when he says that **“He who has begun a good work in you will complete it.”** What God begins He finishes. His work is not left dangling like some sublime, unfinished symphony. **Christ** is called both the **Author** and the **Finisher** of our redemption. We are His handiwork. As an expert Craftsman, He never needs to destroy or discard an imperfect work of spiritual artisanship.

God’s preservation of the saints is not based on a mere, abstract deduction from His decree of election. It rests also on His immutable and free love, a love that is abiding, a love of complacency that nothing can sever.

Again the **Apostle Paul** declares:

**Romans 8:31-36 (NASB)**

<sup>31</sup> **What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us?**

<sup>32</sup> **He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?**

<sup>33</sup> **Who will bring a charge against God’s elect? God is the one who justifies;**

<sup>34</sup> **who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us.**

<sup>35</sup> **Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or**



famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?

<sup>36</sup> **Just as it is written, "FOR YOUR SAKE WE ARE BEING PUT TO DEATH ALL DAY LONG; WE WERE CONSIDERED AS SHEEP TO BE SLAUGHTERED."**

Paul's list of things that conceivably could threaten or jeopardize Christ's love for His sheep is representative, not exhaustive. Paul is amplifying the general statement he made earlier, **that nothing can separate us from the love of God that is ours in Christ Jesus.**

*This love is enduring and permanent. We persevere in grace because God perseveres in His love toward us.*

Neither is there any limit to the merit of the grace bestowed on us, or to Christ's perpetual intercession for us. *Perhaps the strongest force enabling us to persevere is our High Priest's work of intercession in our behalf.*

*Also contributing to our preservation are the Holy Spirit's abiding within us as our earnest and seal, the seed of God planted in our souls, and finally the very nature of the covenant of grace, by which God's promises to us are assured absolutely.*

These assurances of perseverance are rooted in the idea expressed in the Latin phrase *Deus pro nobis*, "God for us." The apostle asks the rhetorical question "If God is for us, who can be against us?"

Of course many are against us. We expect to be hated, and hated all the day long, because our Lord indicated this would be the case. We are despised by Satan and his minions. All of them stand in opposition to us. All who are of Anti-Christ (*anti* meaning either "against" or "in place of") are also **anti-Christian.**

When Paul asks, "Who shall be against us?" he means that no one (and nothing) will prevail against us. God's preservation results in our becoming "more than conquerors."

This three-word phrase translates one Greek word, *hypernikon*, which is rendered in Latin by the

word *supervincemus*. The prefixes *hyper* and *super* elevate the idea of conqueror to the highest level.

Just as the *Westminster Confession* indicates the possibility of the believer's temporary loss of assurance, so the confession recognizes that perseverance is not always a steady, upward progress of sanctification without serious lapses. True Christians may fall seriously and radically, but they cannot finally fall from grace.

**The confession declares:**

"Nevertheless, they may, through the temptations of Satan and of the world, the prevalence of corruption remaining in them, and the neglect of the means of their preservation, fall into grievous sins; and, for a time, continue therein: whereby they incur God's displeasure, and grieve His Holy Spirit, come to be deprived of some measure of their graces and comforts, have their hearts hardened, and their consciences wounded; hurt and scandalize others, and bring temporal judgments upon themselves."

As part of the process of *our* sanctification, perseverance is a synergistic work. *This means it is a cooperative effort between God and us.* We persevere as he preserves.

An analogy of this is often used with children. A child and his father walk down a dangerous path while holding hands. There are two ways in which they can hold hands. First, the child can grasp his father's hand and hold on tightly. If he lets go, he may fall. Second, the father can hold the child's hand. Only if the father loosens his grip can the child fall. In the first instance the child's safety depends on the consistency and firmness by which he clings to his father. In the second instance the child's safety depends on the consistency and firmness by which the father clings to him.

We may push the analogy a bit and say that when the child loosens his grip on the father's hand, the father may let him stumble and scrape his knees. Though the child incurs the father's displeasure in the process, the father will not allow his grip on the child to be loosed entirely, preventing him from falling into an abyss.

**Even though God is holding onto us, we are to hold onto him at the same time.** We are capable of

losing our grip, and indeed we do so. We have a responsibility to hold on as tightly as we can, even though we are sure he will not let us go. **This is called Human Responsibility.**

The New Testament frequently admonishes us to do this and warns us of the consequences of letting go. We can fall from grace, but not absolutely. At times Scripture seems to forbid what is ultimately impossible and to command what is also impossible.

For example, it calls us to be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect ([Matthew 5:48](#)).

**Matthew 5:48 (NASB)**

<sup>48</sup> "Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

No one can reach this degree of perfection. Why then does Scripture speak in this manner? **Luther** called this the “**evangelical usage of the law.**” He meant that the gospel calls us to strive as diligently as we can to meet the highest standards of the law. **Such calls drive us to an ever increasing dependence on grace.**

**CORAM DEO (Before the face of God)**

## **Integrity, *Coram Deo***

(Continuation from last edition)

Jesus Christ is our treasure and our pearl. At some point in our lives we discovered that He was far more valuable than anything we had—whether possessions, fame, or desires. They all became valueless in comparison to Christ. So we trashed it all and turned to Him as our Savior and Lord. He became the supreme object of our affections. Our new desire was to know Him, love Him, serve Him, obey Him, and be like Him.

Is that still true of you? Is there anything in your life that competes with Christ? Is there anything in this world that captures your allegiance, devotion, and love more than Him? Do you still desire to know Him as much as you did when He first saved you? If not, you have compromised your relationship with Him and are dallying with the trash of the world. That is the danger of compromise.

If you are not careful to preserve and protect the treasure that is your relationship with Christ, the exuberance and devotion of your first days with Jesus can slowly and subtly turn into complacency and indifference. Eventually cold orthodoxy replaces loving obedience, and the result is a hypocritical life that will compromise with sin.

Fortunately for our sake, God has given us the resources in His Word to combat our tendency to sin and to restore our relationship with Christ. The apostle Paul shows us how by helping us see what we gained when we exchanged the trash for Christ. We have the benefits of a new life and a new relationship.

## **Pastoral in Nature**

### **We Can - And Should! - Preach Like the Apostles**

By Dayton Hartman

Only 50% of the next generations of Christians have any respect for the text of Scripture. How do you preach the Bible to them?

It is no secret that American culture is becoming increasingly post-Christian.

Recent research reveals that only 23% of Millennials believe that Scripture is truly the Word of God. Another 26% have adopted a liberal interpretation of Scripture by believing that it may contain some of the Word of God but should not be taken literally. In short, less than half of the next generations have any respect for the text of Scripture, and only a small minority of that group believes that it is authoritative.

Consider this data in light of William Edgar’s observation that “**...Christians have grown so used to their own language, terms, and culture that they have become isolated from those who surround them**” (*Reasons of the Heart*, 12).

There is a two-fold problem at hand:

1. In our proclamation, we have assumed a Christian worldview on the part of our listeners, and this is a false

assumption.

2. As we are communicating poorly, our audience isn't even listening.

## Recovering Apostolic Apologetics

The solution to this growing problem is to recapture the apostolic method of preaching. The first sermons of the apostles do two things: (1) make much of Jesus and His gospel and (2) defend the truths contained in the gospel.

In [Acts 2](#), Peter preaches the gospel message, explains the Scriptures and defends the claims contained therein by referencing the miracles of Jesus.

In [Acts 17](#), Paul reasons with the men of Athens through preaching the resurrection of Jesus and utilizing philosophical language that his listeners understand.

In the very next chapter ([Acts 18:24-28](#)), Apollos preaches about the ministry of Jesus and refutes those who would deny that Jesus is the Messiah.

Beyond the sermons preached by the first Christians, much of the text of Scripture itself is written as an apologetic.

The first chapters of Genesis are both a Scriptural account of creation and an apologetic against Ancient Near Eastern cosmogonies.

Even many of the miracles recorded in Scripture are meant to serve apologetic purposes. These miracles range from the plagues in Egypt demonstrating the futility of Egyptian gods to the healing miracles performed by Jesus revealing that He is the Messiah.

The text of Scripture is so littered with apologetic elements; I would argue that it is difficult to preach the whole counsel of God without incorporating apologetic elements into one's sermons.

## Why Apologetic Preaching?

How does incorporating apologetics into our ser-

mons work itself out practically? Quite often, apologetics should be included out of necessity.

For example, in an age of increasing skepticism and ever-present access to materials from men like Bart Ehrman, we need to provide basic arguments at the onset for every new book series. When introducing a sermon series on II Timothy, it would be beneficial to briefly mention some of the evidence that leads us to believe this letter was written by Paul.

Why? Because many in our audience are being influenced to believe that we have no idea who wrote the books of the Bible. Are there some texts for which authorship is difficult to concretely ascertain? Absolutely! Nonetheless, the Scriptures are hardly anonymous in authorship.

Some texts of Scripture easily lend themselves to apologetic application (such as [I Corinthians 15](#)), while others are more difficult (i.e. [Song of Songs](#)). Yet in today's culture even the most innocuous of passages requires an apologetic.

For instance, when speaking of the gospel picture housed in the relationship between a husband and his wife, we must preach (even briefly) an apologetic for God's definition of marriage. The marriage covenant is one of the clearest pictures of the gospel, and it has practical applications for Christian living. However, it is under assault. So, when preaching on marriage or the picture of the gospel it provides, we must include apologetic elements.

It may seem that what I am proposing actually falls outside the context of corporate worship and should instead be considered as part of personal evangelism. The reality is that when the church gathers to worship through Word and song that time is specifically for the instruction and edification of the saints.

However, we can never assume that every self-professed believer is actually a believer. Further, we cannot live under the assumption that the person in the pew is free from the influence of our culture and battles with doubt. Moreover, whether recognized or not, most Christians adopt as their own the interpretation and application of Scripture that which is taught by their pastor.

Therefore, if we model an apologetic-free approach to the biblical text, that is what our people will practice. Thus, in an effort to edify and build up the body of Christ, we must **“contend earnestly for the faith ...”** ([Jude 3](#)) from the pulpit so that the pew will be a place of confidence and a place of preparation for cultural engagement.

*Each generation of the church in each setting has the responsibility of communicating the gospel in understandable terms, considering the language and thought-forms of that setting.* – Francis Schaeffer

## Mission Update

For the last several years Covington Theological Seminary under the leadership of its president Dr. Steve Sullivan has partnered with Grace Church of Catoosa County, Georgia and Dr. Eddie Ildefonso of West Los Angeles Living Word Christian Center to evangelize the villages of the northern part of Zimbabwe known as Matabeleland. Working along the Zambezi River there are approximately 269 villages.

This year we had the privilege of expanding the mission work with Pastor Phillip Anderson of Sunrise Fellowship Church of Ft. Oglethorpe, Georgia and Dr. Gary Fleetwood of Chime Bell Baptist Church, of Windsor, South Carolina. Both pastors brought a mission team from their respective churches to Zimbabwe. The Lord has truly blessed His work. During the last two years we have seen over 1,800 people come to Christ. Jesus said to His disciples, **“The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few.”** ([Matthew 9:37](#)). Today the mission work has resulted in the establishment of 50 village churches.

Here is the list of the village churches that have been established so far:

Monde  
Sizinda  
Dibudibu  
Chisuma 1  
Chisuma 2  
Chisuma 3  
Chisuma 4  
Chidobe 1  
Chidobe 2  
Chidobe 3

Chidobe 4  
Lupinyo  
BH 10  
BH 26  
BH 34  
BH 35  
BH 36  
Masue  
Jambezi  
Bubizhe  
Jade  
Khumado  
BH 59  
BH 126  
BH 127  
Jengwe 1  
Jengwe 2  
Jengwe 3  
Jengwe 4  
Canaan 1  
Canaan 2  
Canaan 3  
Canaan 4  
BH 128 - New  
BH 59A - New  
BH 59B - New  
BH 57 - New  
BH 56A - New  
BH 56B - New  
BH 134 A - New  
BH 134 B - New  
BH 134 C -New  
BH 134 D - New  
BH 55A - New  
BH 55B - New  
Kasikiri - New  
Sikhumbi - New  
Chenge - New  
Gavu (Next to Evangelize)  
Kanyambizi (Next to Evangelize)

Covington Theological Seminary and local churches have come together to fulfill the Great Commission. There is no better marriage between the church and the institutions that train the men and women for the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is being realized through the program that Covington Theological Seminary has instituted called “Impacting Eternity.”

## Matthew 28:19-20 (NASB)

<sup>19</sup> “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,  
<sup>20</sup> teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”



**Pastor Gary C. Fleetwood**  
Chime Bell Baptist Church  
Windsor, South Carolina

*Professor, Covington Theological Seminary  
Aiken, South Carolina Extension  
Dean, Covington Theological Seminary  
Country of Romania*

## Hebrews 6 – Overview Introduction

*Author’s Note: The overview study for each chapter of Hebrews is intended to simply provide a basic understanding of some of the various key elements of each chapter and is not written as an in-depth theological treatise. However, because of the critical importance of properly understanding Hebrews 6, additional time will be given to the overview of this chapter. Much of the content of the first part of this study on the nature of biblical warnings has been developed from the following excellent resource:*

Schreiner, Ardel B. Caneday and Thomas R. *The Race Set Before Us: A Biblical Theology of Perseverance and Assurance*. Westmont, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2001.

In beginning the overview study of [Hebrews 6](#), it is important to provide some foundational teaching on the warnings and admonitions in Scripture, and how to actually ensure that they are being interpreted properly. In Hebrews the warnings too often become the theological issue, and in many ways have detracted from the amazing presentation of Christ throughout the letter. The warnings in Hebrews have often been severely mishandled, and in that process they have been used to develop some very flawed and inaccurate doctrinal positions. Probably the most incorrect view comes from the Pentecostal and Holiness denominations and their interpretation of the warnings that a believer can actually lose their salvation. It has never been argued that believers can lose various things associated with their salvation such as their joy, peace, rewards, blessings, and assurance, but to teach that someone can actually lose their salvation is a very serious misunderstanding of Scripture. What has been clearly seen so far is that the warnings are given to Christians and that they are to be very sober about heeding them. The warnings have a very well-defined purpose.

The question that always seems to arise with the warnings is how they relate to the promises of Scripture. Sometimes, on the surface the two seem to be in conflict (which they are not). For instance, two major doctrines that seem to conflict with one another at times are the doctrine of perseverance and the doctrine of assurance. However, the biblical warnings and promises must be allowed to say what they say within their context. There are times when both warnings and promises are found side by side. Obviously, God has not written something to be conflicting with one another, but complementary to one another. As an example, if I warn my grandchildren about the dangers associated with riding their four-wheeler, it is not in conflict with the fact that I want them to enjoy it when they are riding it. The two go hand in hand, side by side – and without any conflict whatsoever.

So, when the reader comes to a warning in Scripture, what they do not want to do is to pit that warning against one of God’s promises as if they are in conflict with one another. For instance, all of God’s promises of the believer’s assured salvation have a specific function – that of grounding their faith in Christ, of assuring them that God is always faithful and keeps every single promise that He has ever made to any of His children.

It is the very cornerstone of God's character that He is faithful and cannot lie. However, side by side with that doctrinal position, it is also believed that God's admonitions and warnings have the very distinctive function of evoking the kind of faith within the believer that perseveres in its devotion to Christ. The promise and the warning are not in conflict, but each have a specific function for the Christian life. So, if the two are pitted one against the other, what invariably happens is that the one that is preferred is strengthened and intensified and the one that is not preferred is doctrinally abated and weakened. There are people who every time that they read one of the warnings in Hebrews immediately think that it is telling them that they are lost and that they have sinned against God so bad that He can never again forgive them. That is tragic! The point here is simple – God's warnings do not conflict with God's promises. To the contrary, they actually support them.

Now, think through this for a moment. In Scripture there are "conditional" promises and "conditional" warnings. Some promises that God makes are "conditional" and some are "unconditional" - i.e., they do not depend on the believer in any way. However, the conditional promises are different. In the conditional promises and admonitions, the believer has a very specific responsibility to play in order to enjoy the promise and the blessing of heeding the admonition. For instance, one cannot read Scripture without recognizing that there are many admonitions that call for every believer to maintain a sustained call for perseverance in the faith. The New Testament is replete, full, and overflowing with such admonitions to the believer – and they simply cannot be ignored. Each warning and each promise has a biblically designed function – to alter the believer's behavior. Biblical faith does not exist without altering the believer's behavior. Whenever there is genuine biblical faith present in a person's life, there will be repentance, confession of sin, obedience, a love for the things of God, a striving after holiness, and a pursuit of the eternal life that the believer has been given. Eternal life is not just something that the believer receives in the future, but something that they already possess. And embedded within biblical eternal life is a distinct quality of life that has to be learned and pursued. That God honoring quality of life with its distinct spiritual

characteristics is something that the true believer is always striving to attain. So, when coming to a particular warning in Scripture, it is not designed to convince a believer that they can lose their salvation, but rather to help them actually enjoy it. Be assured that any Christian who consciously chooses to live in sin and ignore the warnings will be miserable and has much to lose. This series has repeatedly emphasized that what is lost cannot actually be quantified, but it is more than apparent that there are things to lose.

Just to emphasize how this biblical tension works side by side, it is important to look at [Hebrews 6](#). [Hebrews 6:4-6](#) is one of the strongest warnings in all of Scripture. To someone who is living in sin or who is weak in their faith, these verses can be very disconcerting.

**<sup>4</sup>For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, <sup>5</sup>and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, <sup>6</sup>if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put *Him* to an open shame.**

But then in [Hebrews 6:9-12](#) there is a very strong encouragement, and it must be kept in mind at this point that the writer **has not changed his audience**. He has not gone from talking to saved people to talking to lost people and back to talking to saved people. He is talking to the same exact people in v9 and following verses that he was talking to in v4-6 and in [Hebrews 5](#). Contextually, his audience has never changed – nor will it change.

**<sup>9</sup>But, beloved, we are confident of better things concerning you, yes, things that accompany salvation, though we speak in this manner. <sup>10</sup>For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, *in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister.* <sup>11</sup>And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end, <sup>12</sup>that you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.**

These verses are words of incredibly strong encouragement and confident assurance about what these believ-

ers will actually do. The writer says to them that he is “**confident**” about them, that they have exercised a “**labor of love**”, that they have “**ministered to the saints**” and are continuing to do so, that they maintain their personal “**diligence**”, and that they continue to “**imitate**” those who are faithful. These are very strong words of encouragement, and they are not in contradiction to what he has just warned them against. The Bible clearly provides assurance to all believers that they will in fact enter into the inheritance that God has promised to them. Yet, at the very same time, the Scriptures admonish them not to fall short of the grace of God. For instance, [Hebrews 12:15](#) states,

**<sup>15</sup>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;**

It is important to see the obvious here – “fall short of what?” The author does not want his readers to “**fall short of the grace of God**”. The grace of God is obviously very multi-faceted, but in its simplicity, it is when God gives the believer two things – the desire to do His will and the power to do His will. And that is exactly what the author does not want His readers to fall short of. He wants them to always be experiencing that amazing grace of God that fills them with both desire and power to do what honors and glorifies God. However, their responsibility is to live “**carefully**” and to not become bitter or immoral in their life (v16). Is that a threat? Absolutely not! To the contrary, it is a great encouragement. Believers cannot escape the ever-present admonitions to live out their faith in a way that honors Christ. They are inescapable. The gospel has a very two-fold nature to it. On the one hand it calls on the unbeliever to come to Christ on God’s terms, and then on the other hand, once that individual comes to Christ it constantly admonishes them to persevere in the faith that they have been given.

Now, the five major warnings in Hebrews have a kind of crescendo affect. They actually become more intense with each warning. We have done this as parents. We would give our children a particular warning, but then when they would continue to “bump the line” we would increase the severity of our warning to them, I.e., we intensified it above

what we had previously said. Just to show how this is apparent in Hebrews, [Hebrews 2:1-4](#) speaks about being careless in giving “**earnest heed to the things we have heard**”. But then in the last warning in [Hebrews 12:12-29](#), the author warns against a kind of defiant refusal to hear Christ when he speaks in [Hebrews 12:25](#).

**<sup>25</sup>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,**

Just to emphasize exactly what the author is saying in this verse, the Greek word for “**refuse**” is “*paraiteomai*” and is actually translated in the Greek Interlinear Bible as “**reject**”. Strong’s says that it can be translated as “beg off, deprecate, shun”. Renn’s Expository Dictionary says that it has the underlying sense to “have nothing to do with”. This is a great word picture of what happens in so many Christian’s lives. God speaks, and they simply refuse to listen, they reject what has been said, and do not want to do anything that God has said in any way. Are there consequences to that kind of response? Sure there are. What are they? No one knows. If people treated their boss that way, most likely they would be fired – and rightfully so. No one could blame their boss for the individual's personal refusal to do what he said. You see, the easy way to deal with this (which many have done) is to simply say that the author is talking to non-Christians. For instance, Wayne Grudem in his exposition of [Hebrews 6:4-6](#) makes this huge supposition and assumption. He concludes that the passage is referring to people who “*had never truly been saved in the first place.*” Well, then what good does the warning do the believer? None!

Hebrews is a very pastoral document. It is written by someone who deeply cares for his readers. All warnings project consequences. That is what they are designed to do. If someone is riding in the mountains with very sharp curves and no outside rails to prevent them from going over the edge of the mountain, when they see a 25mph speed limit warning, the best thing to do is heed it. The sign does NOT tell the driver what the consequences may be – not one word. It is the warning itself that implies to the driver that if they do not heed the speed limit, that there may be severe consequences to going around a sharp curve at a high rate of speed. And if that happens, it is not the sign’s fault, but the driver’s fault. By their very nature, every warning projects unfa-

vorable consequences and undesirable outcomes. The road sign is not there to cause the driver to doubt their personal ability to drive by frightening them that they may crash. When they see the sign, they do not become frightened, but simply slow down. If the highway department were to post warning signs indiscriminately, then no one would heed them. Warnings are only posted where there is a potential for an accident. And in like manner, every warning in Scripture warns the believer to avoid one particular course of action and by doing so the warning invariably admonishes them to take another course of action. In reality, these warnings are the believer's friends.

If a Christian continues to just persist in sin, depart from Christ, and disobey His Word, Scripture does not identify what the ultimate outcome will be or what actual measures God will take regarding that individual. How God chooses to manage that is His divine and sovereign prerogative. However, from a personal perspective, this author never wants to find out. Why would a believer ever want to either casually or blatantly ignore, refuse, or reject God or His Word? What would ever be the benefit of that? All of the warnings are conditional. They do not function to indicate anything about possible failure or fulfillment any more than the warning sign in the mountain indicates possible failure or fulfillment. It is just a warning. What these conditional warnings do is that they make an appeal to the believer's mind so that they can imagine the invariable consequences that come to all who depart from Christ. When someone sees the speed limit sign in the mountains, immediately they imagine what will happen if they fail to obey it – and they do not like the idea or consequences of going over a mountain cliff at 75mph. The sign has fulfilled its purpose, and that is exactly what these warnings are there to do.

Charles Spurgeon wrote this about the warning in [Hebrews 6:4-6](#). He said,

*“God preserves His children from falling away; but he keeps them by the use of means.... There is a deep precipice: what is the best way to keep any one from going down there? Why, to tell him that if he did he would inevitably be dashed to pieces.*

*Our friend puts away from us a cup of arsenic;*

*he does not want us to drink it, but he says, “if you drink it, it will kill you.” Does he suppose for a moment that we should drink it? No; he tells us the consequences, and he is sure we will not do it.*

None of the warnings in Hebrews are designed in any way to cause believers to doubt their salvation, but rather to encourage them to persevere in the faith no matter what it may cost. The warnings are one of the means, one of the tools, and one of the spiritual instruments that God uses to get the believer's attention. If someone believes in the Lord Jesus Christ, they will be saved – that is clear and doctrinally undeniable. If someone fails to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, they will perish – that is just as clear and as doctrinally irrefutable. In the same way that believers have received Christ by faith, they now walk by that same faith. [Colossians 2:6-7](#) says,

**<sup>6</sup>As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, <sup>7</sup>rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving.**

So, what the warnings do is that they are there to relentlessly call the believer to be faithful to Christ throughout their entire life. That is a good thing. The warnings are there to encourage believers to be faithful. It is a good thing because many believers have a propensity at times to lose their willingness to persevere and to be faithful. The biblical testimony is really very simple. It is that God's grace and sovereignty precede all human faith and obedience. What any believer is able to do spiritually is only because of God's enabling and God's grace functioning in their life. And these warnings are simply one of the ways that God uses to help all believers to persevere. They continually point out the way of salvation, and that is faithfulness to Jesus Christ.

God secures what He promises by means – and urgent warnings are one of those means that motivate believers to godly living. If someone is a true believer, then their eternal salvation is not in question whatsoever. It is secure. It is not even an issue. Just read [Romans 8:31-39](#) – the greatest doxology in all of Scripture. However, what may be in question is the believer's faithfulness to Christ, and that is an issue. God has promised that even though a believer may be unfaithful that He as the living God will always remain faithful. [II Timothy 2:13](#) says,



**<sup>13</sup> If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself.**

Now, in beginning the overview study of [Hebrews 6](#), it is critically important to understand how [Hebrews 5](#) was completed. The context has NOT changed. The author is still talking to immature believers ([Hebrews 5:11-14](#)), and the simple reason that is known is because of the word “**therefore**” in [Hebrews 6:1](#). The word “**therefore**” clearly points the reader back to what he has just been talking about – immature believers. So, what needs to be kept in mind in beginning the overview process is simply that the context and the audience have not changed – immature believers. The author is maintaining the continuity of the subject he is addressing and in the process is continuing to urge his readers to do something. That should be clear. And by understanding that the chapters and verses were not a part of the original document, it makes the author’s continuity even more obvious.

Also, the word “**for**” is used five times (v4, 7, 10, 13, and 16). The word “**for**” is similar to the word “**therefore**”. It is a common term that is a primary particle or conjunction. It properly assigns a reason for what has just been said and is used in an argument, an explanation, or for the intensification of a passage. It is used to express cause. For all practical purposes, the word “because” could be substituted for the word “**for**” and retain the same meaning. Now, why is that important to understand? It is because the word “**for**” is the word that introduces the first warning beginning in v4. In other words, the author is still talking about immature believers and when he comes to his warning to them, the word “**for**” is the term identifying that he is continuing his argument and giving further explanation to what he has just said. He clearly understands that certain actions can have specific consequences if the individual does not change the direction of their life. Every one clearly understands that truth. Everyone knows that wrong actions lead to wrong results. Here the readers come to this difficult warning, and if they do not pay attention to this very small word “**for**”, then invariably they will reach the wrong conclusion. In proper biblical exposition, the small words are just as important as the large words. They are connecting words, lead in words, transition

words – and they are all very important, sometimes absolutely crucial to the proper exposition of a passage. They need to be thought of as words that connect two related passages – not two unrelated passages.

Now, why is all of this so important? It is because the reader needs to appreciate that the author is not going from talking about one audience or subject to talking about a completely different audience or subject. Once again, this is a very pastoral document, and the author cares deeply about these people that he is encouraging. As a pastor, when I see a believer just drifting away from the faith and even abandoning the things of God in their life it deeply hurts me and causes me to spiritually agonize for them. I do not agonize in the same way over those members that are faithful. It should be obvious that the author of Hebrews was experiencing the same kind of emotions relative to his audience.

So, the author is still talking about these immature believers – and he hurts for them. They have been “**enlightened**”, they “**have tasted the heavenly gift**”, they have “**become partakers of the Holy Spirit**”, and they “**have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come**”. None of those words – not one of them – is a description of a lost person, not one word. And to make it even more certain, a lost person cannot “**fall away**”. “**Fall away**” from what – from salvation? A lost person has nothing from which to “**fall away**”. A person cannot “**fall away**” from something that they do not have. Can someone fall off of a bridge that they are not on? Can someone fall off of a ladder that they are not standing on? How can someone “**fall away**” from a salvation that they do not even have?

The term “**fall away**” is *parapiptō* - a rare verb found only in [Hebrews 6:6](#) referring to someone who commits apostasy. Why is this so important to understand, and why does the author speak so strongly to the issue? The answer is really very simple. **IT IS MUCH MORE SERIOUS FOR A CHRISTIAN TO PUT CHRIST TO AN OPEN SHAME THAN IT IS FOR A NON-CHRISTIAN TO DO SO.** It would be much more serious for a husband to publically disgrace and dishonor his wife than for someone else to do it. It is the intimacy of their relationship that makes it such a horrible thing for him to do. The lost person has no such relationship to Christ. For instance, it would be much worse for a Christian to use God’s name in vain than it would be for a lost person to do so. Why? It is because

of his relationship to Christ.

So, from the simple principle of maintaining contextual continuity, [Hebrews 6:4-8](#) is talking about some actual believers that the author knows who are very close to falling away from their faith. The warning does not mean that they actually have, but is simply given as an appeal to their conscience as to what is the right thing to do. It is as if the author has some specific people in mind who have simply forsaken and clearly neglected some of their Christian moorings and are actually abandoning holding fast to Christ. Some of them may even have already gone back to Judaism to escape persecution. The author's assessment is that if that is the case then they have crucified Christ again and "**put Him to an open shame**" (v6). The phrase "**put Him to an open shame**" is very critical to understanding this passage. When someone was crucified, it was one of the most humiliating, demeaning, and shameful of all kinds of torture. The victim was actually stripped naked for everyone to see. People would come by and hiss at those being crucified, spit at them, and mock them openly. They were completely exposed for all to see and the humiliation of that event was as degrading to the individual as it could possibly be. The very last thing that any Christian should want to do is to live in such a way that it demeans and humiliates the work of Christ on their behalf. Every believer should earnestly desire for people to see Christ as a risen Christ and not as One who is still hanging helplessly on a cross. He is a Savior who has great power to strengthen all who come to Him.

However, that is exactly what these believers potentially are doing, and this is one of the primary issues of such a concern to the author. Because of their falling away from what they know is right, they as believers are bringing "**an open shame**" on the person of Christ. They are demeaning everything that He says that He will do for them. They are bringing reproach on the name and person of Christ, on the work of salvation, and on the sovereignty of God in their lives. Other people look at their lives and come to the conclusion that Jesus Christ is not much of a Savior and that He is not worthy of worship and affection. Actions always have consequences – always. Everyone reaps what they sow. No one ever sins in a vacuum. **There is always the possibility for any Chris-**

**tian of reaching a point of no return where their actions create an unrepairable condition.** No Christian is exempt from the consequences of being unfaithful to Christ, and the longer that they persist in their unfaithfulness, the more difficult it becomes to return back to where they need to be.

For instance, a husband can cheat on his wife so much that it makes it impossible to restore the marriage. It just reaches a point of no return. Many Christians never realize the full impact that their personal lives and demeanor have on other people – and especially lost people. If a believer is not living for Christ and has abandoned their faith and faithfulness to Christ, there is no telling what kind of impact that ultimately has on a lost person who has been witnessing their spiritual demise. The impression it gives them of Christ is degrading to the person of Christ and causes the name of Christ to be dishonored.

At this point, one comment needs to be made relative to v4 and the word "**impossible**". This is a word that has created a great deal of consternation and apprehension for some. They immediately interpret it to mean that once a believer falls away that they lose their salvation. However, the phrase "**it is impossible**" is NOT referring to salvation, but to the act of repentance in [Hebrews 6:6](#). This will be discussed in greater detail in an upcoming study, but suffice it to say that the phrase regarding not being renewed again to repentance does not indicate a loss of salvation, but a place where a person no longer has a desire to repent of their sins. They have abandoned vital parts of their Christian life and in the process have lost any desire whatsoever to repent of those things. It is no different than the marriage partner who has forsaken their faithfulness in the marriage, have engaged in an affair, and now have absolutely no desire for their former marriage partner. All personal desire has been extinguished and removed from their life. Their sin has enamored them from doing the right thing. And the same exact thing happens in the spiritual life. The Scriptures do not reveal "when" this actually takes place, and it is clear that it is not a loss of salvation, but it is a major spiritual loss of losing the desire for repentance. Just think how bad that actually is for a believer – no longer wanting to follow Christ, no longer wanting to obey Christ, and no longer caring about honoring Christ. No wonder the author uses such

strong warnings. If someone can see that, then the warnings have accomplished their purpose.

The verb tense for the word “**fall away**” is the aorist tense which simply means that it is something that has taken place in the past, but is having an effect and impact on the present. And that effect of having fallen away from Christ in the past is that the believer actually loses their desire for repentance in the ongoing present. This whole subject will be addressed in an upcoming study, but suffice it to say at this point that God is very long-suffering and patient. It is not the idea that someone makes a few bad decisions in their life and it is all over for them. That is not the case at all. The testimony of Scripture is that God is merciful, gracious, and long-suffering towards those who believe, but there is a place in time when a believer can simply lose their desire for repentance. And when that happens, these Scriptures indicate that it will be impossible for them to be renewed “**again**” to repentance. It is not known when that may happen, but certainly no committed believer wants to find out. When this actually happens in a believer’s life (and it often does), it becomes very difficult to know how to actually help that individual.

And just to further support what the author is doing in this passage, [Hebrews 6:7-8](#) is clearly talking about a believer’s spiritual “usefulness”.

**<sup>7</sup>For the earth which drinks in the rain that often comes upon it, and bears herbs useful for those by whom it is cultivated, receives blessing from God; <sup>8</sup>but if it bears thorns and briers, *it is rejected and near to being cursed, whose end is to be burned.***

One bears herbs and is useful and the other bears thorns and briers and is not useful. This is a real life illustration of what a farmer does with his land to make it useful. In these verses there is a very strong contrast, but it is not a contrast of two different things – good soil and bad soil. It is speaking about the same “**earth**”. In v7 he calls it “**the earth**”, and then in v8 he uses the word “**it**” referring to “**the earth**” in v7. In one case the earth bears useful “**herbs**” and in the next case it bears “**thorns and thistles**”. In one case what it bears is useful and in

the next case it is useless. It must be kept in mind that a non-Christian cannot bear anything spiritually useful in God’s kingdom – not one single thing. Just to validate this point, [Romans 3:10-18](#) reads as follows,

**<sup>10</sup>As it is written: “There is none righteous, no, not one; <sup>11</sup>there is none who understands; there is none who seeks after God. <sup>12</sup>They have all turned aside; they have together become unprofitable; there is none who does good, no, not one.” <sup>13</sup>Their throat is an open tomb; with their tongues they have practiced deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips; <sup>14</sup>whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness. <sup>15</sup>Their feet are swift to shed blood; <sup>16</sup>destruction and misery are in their ways; <sup>17</sup>and the way of peace they have not known. <sup>18</sup>There is no fear of God before their eyes.”**

There would be no value in the author telling these Hebrew believers that non-Christian’s do not bear spiritual fruit in their life. [Hebrews 6:7-8](#) is talking about an “**earth**” that can bear fruit, but does not, and contextually is still referring to those believers who are not going forward into spiritual maturity. That is the point.

Unfortunately, the problem that is created with this passage comes from the use of the word “**burned**”. Many commentators have chosen to give it the meaning of going to hell in eternal judgment. If that position is taken, then the whole subject of salvation and eternal security is brought back into the argument. However, it is important not to lose sight of the fact that the author is not talking about salvation! He is talking about being faithful to Christ, about being the kind of Christian who is maturing in their faith and not bringing an open shame on the person of Christ. It is a normal process of farming to burn the thorns and briers and to get rid of the underbrush in the fields that will be detrimental to the growth of the crops. Every spring I clear out our planting beds of weeds, leaves, and debris and take them out into the field and burn them simply because I know that they are not useful to a healthy gardening process. The author is not telling an unbeliever that they will go to hell if they do not bear fruit. Unbelievers cannot bear spiritual fruit. Everything in their life is “**thorns and briers**”. By the same token, however, he is not telling a believer that they can lose their salvation. He is simply identifying that there are real consequences for not bearing spiritual fruit in their life and for no longer being spiritually useful in God’s kingdom. It would be diffi-

cult to know what those consequences are or how they may be manifested in someone's life, however, what is known is that they are real.

In coming to [Hebrews 6:9-11](#), it says,

**<sup>9</sup>But, beloved, we are confident of better things concerning you, yes, things that accompany salvation, though we speak in this manner. <sup>10</sup>For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister. <sup>11</sup>And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end, <sup>12</sup>that you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.**

Once again, the author is still speaking to the same audience – believers. He has been speaking to believers the whole time, but he has warned them of some of the consequences of not growing in their faith and that spiritual lifestyle eventually leading to unfaithfulness. The major warnings given throughout the letter let the reader know that the author has consistently sensed the spiritual potential of some of the believers not holding fast to what they know is right. In v11 he defines his subject as that of maintaining spiritual “**diligence**” and in v12 of them not becoming spiritually “**sluggish**”. What he wants them to do is to “**imitate**” those who are faithful and patient. The word for “**patience**” is the Greek word “*macrothumias*” which means “**longsuffering**”. It is a word indicating that living the Christian life demands endurance. [Hebrews 6:15](#) says that Abraham did not obtain the promise that God had made to him until “**after he had patiently endured**”. In fact, it was actually twenty-five years later before God gave him a son.

The author will spend the next 3 ½ chapters talking about how great Christ is and then enter immediately into another strong warning in [Hebrews 10:26-29](#). In this writer's mind, this is actually the strongest of all of the warnings. And his conclusion for this warning is given in [Hebrews 10:30](#) that God will judge His people,

**<sup>30</sup>For we know Him who said, “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,” says the Lord. And again,**

**“The Lord will judge His people.”**

It is not a verse that says that God will judge lost people, but one that says that God “**will judge His people**”. Once again, sin in the life of a believer is much worse than sin in the life of an unbeliever. And then in [Hebrews 10:36](#) the author reiterates that these Christians need endurance.

**<sup>36</sup>For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise:**

If a Christian truly wants to enter into the blessings of God and receive the “conditional” promises of God for their lives, then every believer must understand the need for personal spiritual “**endurance**”. The question that has to be asked at this point is why would the author would give such a strong exhortation to the believers on the absolute greatness of Christ and then start talking to unbelievers who are not even saved? Well, he does not do that. In every case he is talking to and about believers, and that principle is one that needs to be consistently applied at every warning in Hebrews.

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