

# 6 – “Persevere” // *Christ is Better* // Hebrews 6:1–20

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## Announcements:

### ServeRDU video

- I hold here in my hand a copy of a NYT article from this Friday...
- This is what some of our Summit students are doing for *their* ServeRDU missions project... what are you doing?
- Spence Shelton, our small groups pastor, tweeted on Friday that one of our Summit missions teams was moonlighting as Batman in NYC.
- That’s got to be, by far, the best Summit missions story I’ve heard...
- But we’ve got a week set aside for you.
- We believe the church is God’s *demonstration community*, we want to make the invisible kingdom of God visible by loving and serving our community.

### 3 things I personally am praying...

- For progress in the HOPUD
- For our church to be consumed by a desire to love and serve our neighbors in the city
- For Jesus and the gospel to be glorified in the eyes of our city

## Introduction:

### Basketball story:

One afternoon I was at a local basketball court and picked up a game of “21” with a guy I’d seen there a few times. He was quite a character. He had so many tattoos on his body I wasn’t sure what the actual color of

his skin was and so many piercings he looked like he’d fallen headfirst into a tackle box. He cursed like a sailor and boasted continually about the girls he was sleeping with. Not the kind of guy you hope your daughter brings home one day.

As we played our game, I began to share my story of how I came to Christ. About 3 sentences into it, he stopped, grabbed the ball, and said, “Dude, are you trying to ‘witness’ to me?”

I said, “Uhhh... well... yes.”

He said, “That’s pretty awesome. No one has tried to witness to me in a long time... But dude, you’re wasting your time. I grew up in a Baptist church. I went to youth camp when I was 13 and I asked Jesus to come into my heart. And for the next couple of years, I was a super-Christian. I mean it: I went to **youth group** every week, I did the “**true love waits**” commitment to not have sex until I was married, I **memorized verses** and I went on **mission trips**. I even **led other friends to Jesus**.”

“About 2 years after that, however, I ‘discovered’ *sex*. One thing led to another and a year or so later I decided I didn’t believe in God anymore. So now I don’t go to church, I don’t pray, and I do whatever I want.”

He then added: “But here is what is awesome: the church I grew up in was Southern Baptist, and they taught eternal security—that means ‘once saved, always saved.’ By the way, aren’t you a Baptist?”

\*\*\*\*awkward silence from me\*\*\*\*

He went on, “That means that my salvation at age 13 still holds, even if I don’t believe in God anymore now. ‘Once saved, always saved,’ right? *That means* that even if you’re right, and God exists and Jesus is the only way, I’m safe! So either way, works out great for me... OK, it’s your shot.”

*What do you say to a person like that?* He had prayed to ask Jesus into his heart, and all indications were that he was very sincere. He showed immediate “fruit,” getting excited about Jesus and busy for Him.

*And I do believe that the Bible teaches eternal security. I’ll show you that in a minute.* So was he right?

Can he, because he made a decision at some point in the past, live with the assurance that he is saved forever, regardless of how he lives now?<sup>1</sup>

We're going to look at a passage of Scripture today that addresses that question (**Hebrews 6**).

But first, as you're turning there, let me explain that I do believe in eternal security. Here's why:

- *"All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out... And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day." (John 6:37-39) All that the Father gives, come. All that come are saved. None are lost.*
- *"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand." (John 10:27-28) Jesus gives His sheep eternal life and they never perish and the enemy (try as he may) cannot snatch them from his hand.*
- *"For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son... And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified." (Romans 8:29-30). Again, there's no room for any to be lost. He doesn't say "some of those he predestined and called he glorified..." Once God puts you on that train in vs 29, you make it all the way to glory. The conductor makes sure.*

But with that knowledge, I want us to read a warning in Hebrews 6 that seems, on the surface, like it is saying the opposite. [4] For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, [5] and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, [6] and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt.

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<sup>1</sup> From Chapter 1 from forthcoming book, *Stop Asking Jesus Into Your Heart: How to Know You are Saved*, released Feb 2013 with B&H Publishing.

OK, so let's make sure we know the context. (It always helps when you are interpreting a verse to know the context. A text without a context is a pretext.)

Last week I told you that the author brings up an obscure Old Testament prophet named Mel-chizzle, and right after he brings him up, he seems to get hacked off that the people he's writing to don't already understand this stuff...

- these are, after all, Hebrew people, and of anybody, they should understand the significance of guys like that in the Old Testament...
- I mean, the Hebrews were given the Old Testament to prepare for them for the Messiah and they were supposed to teach it to the rest of the world. But here, they don't even get their own Old Testament. So he goes off on this rant:

**5:11** About this (Melchizedek) we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing.<sup>12</sup> For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God.

Then he starts talking about the difference between milk and meat, and says to them that by this point in their lives they ought to be eating meat, but they still need to be bottle-fed milk.

- When you're an infant all you get is milk and pureed food. But if you're 15 years old and your mom is still cutting up your food for you or you're still nursing. There's a problem.
- Right? That's creepy.

**[6:1]** Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity,

- Now, real quick, he's not talking about leaving behind the gospel and going on to maturity... He's not saying, "OK, you're done with Christ. Now you are ready for better things." You never do that.
- What he means are the elementary things about Christ... how you begin... you see....

not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, [2] and of instruction about washings, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment.

- He's talking about moving on from beginning in Christ. Remember, his definition of going deeper in Christ is understanding how Old Testament stories like Mel-chizzle point to Him.
- You never move on from Christ. Like I've told you, Christ is not the diving board, but the pool itself. The gospel is not the ABC's... but the A-Z.

[3] And this we will do if God permits. So, he's going back to discussing Melchizedek. But then he says this, almost in passing...

[4] For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, [5] and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, [6] and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt.

OK. Wow. So what does that mean? There are a number of problems...

- First, it sounds like you can lose your salvation. *"You can fall away."*
- Second, it sounds like if you do lose it, you can never get it back. *"Impossible to renew them again to repentance."*

So, the first question people ask about this passage is, "Who is he talking to? Saved or unsaved people?"

- Some say, *"Oh, unsaved people. Because truly saved people cannot lose their salvation."* Yet, it sure sounds like he's talking about a saved person, doesn't he? [4-5] *"enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have*

*shared in the Holy Spirit, [5] and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come,"*

- So is he teaching that people who have been saved can lose your salvation, and that you can never get it back if you do? Well, that can't be true because there are too many other places in the Bible that teach the opposite.
- *(I start with the assumption that the Bible does not contradict itself. If you start with that assumption, then you'll find that if you'll press into the places that look like a contradiction, beneath it is some of the richest, deepest truth in all the Bible. Studying the Bible is like encountering a great body of water: first, "It's wet." Then, "it's pure." Then, "it's deep." Then, "It's all interconnected. It's all the same stuff."*

**This passage does not teach that you can lose your salvation, but it does teach you something important about the nature of saving faith: it endures to the end.**

**(1) The writer is not trying to make a definitive statement about any one person's salvation. He is given a general, pastoral warning to a congregation made up of both genuine and superficial believers.**

In every congregation there are people who are just caught up in the movement but have never really dealt with Jesus Christ. They participate externally: they come, get excited, learn the songs, pray the sinner's prayer, get baptized, maybe join a small group... but it never represents a deep embrace of Jesus Christ.

I believe those words *"enlightened, shared in the Holy Spirit and tasted the goodness of God's word..."* these are more descriptions of the movement as a whole than any one person. As people who are part of this movement, they've all shared in those things.

What he is saying to them is essentially this: *"Look, if you've have seen the glory of Jesus and been convinced of the truth of His resurrection, only to return intentionally to your sin, what else is*

*there left for me to say? What could possibly be more 'convincing' than Jesus' death and resurrection? What 'greater argument' is there left to use on you?"*

Look at the verses that follow:

*[7] For land that has drunk the rain that often falls on it, and produces a crop useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God. [8] But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed, and its end is to be burned.*

If after being properly seeded and watered, a certain piece of ground only produces thorns and thistles, what else can you conclude but that the soil is worthless?

- In the same way, if after hearing the gospel only more thorns of rebellion are produced in your heart, what else can be done? What else can I say?
- If you have understood the gospel, especially if you are convinced it is true, and you are not moved to repentance... is there anything left that you can hear? *God stood in the way of His own justice for you, God, the Creator, humiliated and tortured for you...* you hear that and you say, "Yeah, I believe that..." but you just don't think it's important enough to give it any thought?
- It makes sense to me to walk away from all this stuff because you just don't believe it. What doesn't make sense to me is to believe it and then have an apathetic response to it. For it to affect your life "just a little" or for you to "casually" go to the church.
- The gospel is that the punishment you deserve is so bad Jesus had to die for you; He was so loving He was glad to die for you.
- What else would God have to do? In the cross we see severity of our sin, what awaits us at the judgment, and the glory of God. What else is there left to say?

So the author is giving a warning to a congregation, a congregation filled with both genuine and superficial believers. He's not attempting to diagnose any one particular person or to lay out the mechanics of individual salvation. If he was doing that he might have used different terms.

He is describing what is going on in a movement and everyone who has shared in that movement has tasted of those things to some degree.

*#2... in this passage we see...*

**(2) The faith that saves is the faith that endures to the end.**

The Bible teaches that once you have been truly saved, you cannot lose it. But it also teaches that one of the signs of genuine faith is that it endures forever. This is a big theme in Hebrews:

- *"For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end..." (Hebrews 3:14)*
- *"See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no 'root of bitterness' springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled;" (Hebrews 12:15)*. Bitterness and unforgiveness can grow up in someone's heart and kill their faith. It causes you to fail to obtain the grace of God.
- *"My righteous one shall live by faith, and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him. We are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls." (Hebrews 10:38-39)*

And then here in Hebrews 6 (jump down to vs. 11)

- *"And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end" (Hebrews 6:11)* See that? You have the full assurance of hope *if you endure to the end.*

Jesus once told a story about a farmer that planted seeds into various types of soil. One soil, he said, had a soft, top layer of dirt, so young saplings sprung up quickly. When the sun came out, however, these saplings dried up. The roots of the plant did not go

deep enough, Jesus said, to withstand the heat of the sun. The plant withered and died.

Now, These short-lived plants in Jesus' parable—doe they represent saved people or unsaved people? Unsaved people who *for a while* looked like they were saved people. Jesus said, "They believe for a while, but in a time of testing fall away" (Luke 8:13).

What that shows you is that the difference between saving faith and superficial faith has nothing to do the intensity of emotion at the beginning but with its duration over time. The plants that died had such an encouraging beginning, but they withered and were ultimately cast out.

Faith that fades, no matter how luscious its first fruits, is not saving faith.<sup>2</sup>

- I used to see this all the time when I preached at high school student camps. Kids **hardly get any sleep** so by Thursday night they're exhausted; and I'd say something on that night that reminded some girl in the 3<sup>rd</sup> row about her **boyfriend breaking up** with her before camp... so she starts to cry... and feel sad... and, the girl next to her would see that she's crying and so she would start crying... and then, on down the line... because you know, with teenage girls, **crying spreads like a disease**... and so they all come down front crying and snotting on the altar, promising to be **missionaries** and **not date boys** until they are 30, and then they have a huge **hug-fest** and go back to their room holding hands and sing **Kum-ba-yah** until 2 a.m... And that spiritual blip lasts until about 10 a.m. the next morning.
- *And next year at camp we go through the same ordeal. Rinse and repeat.*

Listen: praying a prayer to ask Jesus into your heart, even if it's followed by a flurry of emotion and religious fervor, is not proof that you are saved.

Enduring in that faith to the end is.

It is true that once truly saved, always saved. It is also true that *once saved, forever following*. If salvation has really taken place in your heart, it never fades away. You stumble, yes, and you fall often, but you always get back up looking at Jesus!

- Shortly after college I read John Bunyan's classic *Pilgrim's Progress* and realized that Bunyan's understanding of "eternal security" seemed different from the way I had always heard it explained. Bunyan's protagonist in *Pilgrim's Progress*, Christian, encounters many people on his path to the Celestial City who had begun on the path toward heaven only to depart it when the going got tough. In the footnotes Bunyan (who was a Baptist) cites many of the same verses about true faith persevering to the end we discussed above. These were people, in Bunyan's view, who made an initial confession of faith but later departed, and ended up in the City of Destruction, not the City of God. Bunyan's message was clear: those who do not persevere until the end are not saved and will not end up in heaven.

Now, I know that raises some questions for you about what that means when you stumble and fall, or for a season your faith cools, and I'll get to those in a second, but first **let's consider the statement that it is "impossible" to renew those who have fallen away to repentance:**

*[4] For it is impossible... [6] to restore [those who have fallen away] again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt.*

*What does that mean?*

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<sup>2</sup> Mark 4:16–19

- **Well, again, the writer cannot mean that those who fall back into sinful habits after they are saved have forfeited their chances of salvation.**
- Even the greatest Christians fall back into old sinful habits—sometimes really bad ones, and sometimes for long periods of time. It’s called backsliding.
  - Peter denied Jesus three times in the space of an evening.
  - One of Paul’s travelling companions, a guy named John Mark, abandoned the mission field because it got difficult, only to be restored later.
  - King David committed adultery, murder, lied about it, and refused to repent for nearly a year.<sup>3</sup>
  - Abraham, whom the writer uses at the end of this chapter (Hebrews 6) as an example of persevering faith (6:15), doubted God so severely that he told another man his wife was his sister and that he could sleep with her—just to save his own skin!<sup>4</sup>
- All of these believers, however, were brought back to repentance, restoration, and great usefulness for the kingdom of God.
  - In 1 Corinthians Paul even describes a church member sleeping with his stepmother, whom he calls on the church to discipline (put outside of its fellowship and treat like an unbeliever). The *purpose* of that discipline, however, was *to restore his soul to God* (1 Cor 5:1–5).
  - This guy’s sin was not just a “mistake” or a “stumble.” Sleeping with your mom is a pretty twisted, Jerry Springer-level sin.
  - It was likely his stepmother, yes, but if you sleep with anybody you’ve ever called “mom,” I feel like you’re pretty far gone. **Agreed? When one day you**

call her mom, and then next day you take her to the prom... that’s just messed up, Yet Paul believed he could be brought back. Paul knew from personal experience that Jesus saves *really* bad sinners.

- Jesus said (John 6:37) that no one who came to Him He would ever, for any reason, cast out.<sup>5</sup> *Ever*. If you are willing to repent, He will always receive you.

***So what then does the writer mean when he says it is “impossible” to renew those who have fallen away to repentance?***

Scripture in several places about rejecting God’s voice so often and so decisively that God finally honors our refusal and leaves us alone. Forever. God said in Genesis, “*My Spirit will not always strive with man.*” In the Gospel of Luke Jesus refers to this as the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, where you say no to God so deliberately, decisively, and persistently that God finally says, “Have it your way.” He says that is a sin for which He says there is no forgiveness.<sup>6</sup>

I know many who have feared they had committed this blasphemy and forfeited their opportunity to be saved. I don’t have time to unpack all the passages about blasphemy against the Spirit here

- (though, if you go to the blog and get this transcript, I’ll point you to some resources where others have done so pretty thoroughly)<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> John 6:35–39

<sup>6</sup> Genesis 6:3; Luke 12:10. See also John 6:66; 2 Peter 3:17; Hebrews 10:26–29; Hebrews 10:39; and 2 Thessalonians 2:11. Paul said that his blasphemous rejection of God’s salvation was done “ignorantly, in unbelief” (1 Timothy 1:13). He recognized that there is a stubborn hardness of heart that can drive God’s Spirit away permanently.

<sup>7</sup> Ed Welch notes that the charge is made against religious *leaders* who were unwavering in the blasphemy and opposition to Jesus, even after being convinced He possessed divine authority. Welch

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<sup>3</sup> Mark 14:66–72; Acts 15:37–39; cp. w/ 2 Timothy 4:11; 2 Samuel 11:26–27.

<sup>4</sup> Cp. Genesis 20:2–6.

- but, as the popular advice goes, if you are worried that you have committed that blasphemy, you probably haven't. The final falling away to which Jesus and the writer of Hebrews are referring includes the removal of any desire to be reconciled to Jesus. It is God, after all, who puts in us the desire to come to Him.<sup>8</sup>
- Thus, your fear about having reached the point of no return is good proof that you haven't. If you want to repent, He will always receive you. He will not cast out, for any reason, any who come to Him.

Furthermore, we should never give up on someone for whom we are praying on the basis that we think the "Spirit of God is no longer striving with them."

- If and when that happens to a person, we cannot know it.
- What we *do know* is that the Bible is full of stories of God saving people who looked to everyone else like they were beyond all hope.
- The *purpose* of these warnings are not to help us diagnose stubborn people so that we *stop* praying for them, but to feel the urgency of the situation so that we *start* doing so more persistently.
- The only time we can conclude that God's Spirit is no longer striving with someone is when they are dead.
- Until then, we have the responsibility to pray, and they have the opportunity to repent.

I wonder if there is someone here who never come to Christ and you hear these warnings and you say, "That must be what has happened to me. I fell away after being enlightened. It is impossible for me now to repent."

Or you see the writer's analogy about the rain producing only thorns and thistles and you think, "*Is that what's wrong with me? I*

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has written a good, concise, pastoral article analyzing the passages in question at <http://www.ccef.org/unpardonable-sin>.

<sup>8</sup> Phil. 2:12-13; 1 Cor. 12:3; John 6:44.

*heard the gospel and did not repent. Is my heart fatally flawed? Am I 'un-savable'?"*

- For a while my wife thought she couldn't repent because she was not "predestined" by God for salvation. The gospel she had heard so many times growing up had failed to take root in her heart and so she concluded that something was fundamentally wrong with her heart.
  - God had not predestined her to be saved, and that's why she hadn't believed.
  - When she graduated from high school, she concluded that she might as well pursue a life of sin because there was nothing she could do to reverse God's decrees.

The Bible *never* tells us, however, to analyze the wickedness of our or anyone else' hearts or to speculate about God's electing providences. It simply commands us to repent. "*If you hear God's voice,*" the writer of Hebrews says (3:15), "*obey today.*" That means if you are reading this right now the choice is yours. You have the opportunity and obligation, right now, to repent. If you obey it, God will save you.<sup>9</sup>

- The gospel message is that your heart *is indeed* fatally flawed, spiritually *dead* to be exact. The good news of the gospel is that God makes dead hearts new.<sup>10</sup> God turns hearts of stone into hearts of flesh (Ezekiel 36:26) and brings life back from the dead. He transformed Saul, a Pharisaical Jesus-hating murderer, Enemy #1 of the early church, into Paul, His greatest spokesman and advocate. He can do that for you, too. You just have to ask Him.
- So don't turn what the writer intended to be an encouragement to repent into a discouragement from it.

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<sup>9</sup> Hebrews 3:15

<sup>10</sup> Luke 3:8; Jeremiah 31:33-35; Ezekiel 36:26.

- He is not trying to help you determine your election status. He is trying to communicate the seriousness of the gospel you've heard and to urge you to obey it today.

[9] Though we speak in this way, yet in your case, beloved, we feel sure of better things—things that belong to salvation. [10] For God is not unjust so as to overlook your work and the love that you have shown for his name in serving the saints, as you still do.

- Despite the warnings he gives about the dangers of falling away, the writer of Hebrews goes on to say that he is convinced, for most of these people, of better things, things that belong to salvation.
- Why? He sees so much spiritual fruit in their life, which proves to him that they are saved.
- Love for God's name, service to others.
- He sees life change! TRUCK ANALOGY.

[11] And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end.

- So what's he saying? *PERSEVERE!*

Because... ***The faith that saves is the faith that endures***

- Once you are truly saved, you can never lose it. But once you are saved, you will also never stop following. So, again, *"once saved, always saved," but also "once saved, forever following!"*
- **Wayne Grudem** states: *"The perseverance of the saints means that all those who are truly born again will be kept by God's power and will persevere as Christians until the end of their lives, and that only those who persevere until the end have been truly born again."* Wayne Grudem, *Bible Doctrines*<sup>11</sup>
- Or, a slightly less academic sounding definition: *"A faith that fizzles before the finish was flawed from the first."*

<sup>11</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Bible Doctrines*, 336.

**Now, you say, "I have struggles with sin. Sometimes I fall back. Sometimes I struggle. Sometimes I doubt. Sometimes I grow cold. Does that mean I'm not saved?"**

- Every Christian has times where they backslide into sin... "Backsliding" is a churchy term that refers to falling back into old sinful habits. We all do it—technically, any time you sin you are "backsliding." That doesn't mean you weren't saved.
- ***So how long can you backslide before you conclude your initial profession of faith wasn't real?*** 6 months? 5 years?
- There's no real clear answer on this because the Bible never specifies a time limit. As I mentioned a few minutes ago, some of the greatest Bible heroes (like David, Peter, and others) fell back into sin for a pretty considerable amount of time before God brought them back to their senses.
- Then there are others, the Apostle John says, *"who went out from us because they were not really of us."*<sup>12</sup>
- For some people, the life change at their conversion was so significant and their lapse into sin was so brief that it is obvious that their conversion took place in the past and this was a time of backsliding. That seems to be the case with the people the writer in Hebrews is addressing.<sup>13</sup>
- For others, the opposite is true—there was hardly any life change after their initial profession of faith, and at some point they are re-awakened to the gospel and they count that as their true conversion, even though they prayed a sinner's prayer in the past.
  - We see this happen all the time at our church—someone says, *"I asked Jesus into my heart when I was*

<sup>12</sup> 1 John 2:19

<sup>13</sup> Hebrews 6:9–10, *"Though we speak this way, yet, in your case, beloved, we feel sure of better things—things that belong to salvation. For God is not so unjust so as to overlook your work and the love you have shown for his name in serving the saints, as you still do."*



*a kid and I even got baptized but I feel like for the first time I'm understanding the gospel.*" It is pretty obvious that this is their point of conversion. Their faith, for the first time, has become real.

- For a lot of people, though, the answer is not as obvious. You're not sure if your "re-awakening to the gospel" was simply repentance from a time of backsliding or your true conversion. Sometimes you don't know exactly.
- So just remember that at the end of the day, knowing the moment of your conversion is not essential. What is essential is that you know you are now.
- Salvation is being a posture of repentance and faith. CHAIR ILLUSTRATION
  - (chair represents the Lordship to Christ and the understanding that He has paid it all).
  - There was a point!
- Knowing *when* you were seated is helpful; but knowing *that* you are seated now is what is essential.
- Listen—as a believer, you will struggle with indwelling sin for the rest of your life. The greatest saints have experienced such bitter, unsuccessful struggles with sin it almost drove them to despair! I love that old hymn where the writer says,
  - *"Prone to wander, Lord I feel it; Prone to leave the God I love; Here's my heart, Lord, take and seal it, Seal it for Thy courts above!"*<sup>14</sup>
  - That is really good proof of saving faith.
- **Prov. 24:16:** righteous falls 7 times. Imagine watching a guy fall 7x!
- The righteous fall often, but each time you get up again, looking heavenward.
- As Tom Schreiner says it, **"Perseverance is not perfection; it is a new direction."**<sup>15</sup> You struggle a lot, but the trajectory of

your life points heavenward and your whole life is a cry for God to change your heart.

- The ones I worry about are those who don't struggle. I worry about some of you. I really do. There are so many who just seem to be going through the motions, participating in church like it's a club or social organization. But there's just **no evidence of a desire for God or a supernatural change**. You're **not concerned about living in community in a small group** with others who are encouraging one another to go deeper into the gospel. You don't show any signs of **serving and using your gifts** in the body of Christ.
- **And when I mention all of those things it's not to make you feel guilty about not doing them, because starting to do them isn't going to make you a Christian.**
- But, if you're content in not growing, isn't that a strong sign you've never really experienced the gospel? Every follower of Christ struggles with sin. It is those of you who are content with where you are and aren't struggling that I worry about the most.

**[11] And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end.**

This is a warning to you. It is a warning to a bunch of you who think that because you prayed a prayer in the past everything is OK, even though you're not walking with Jesus; not pursuing Him now. **The faith that saves is the faith that endures.**

If you are not walking with Jesus now, then whatever decision you made in the past was the wrong one.

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<sup>15</sup> See Thomas R. Schreiner and Ardel B. Caneday. *The Race Set Before Us: A Biblical Theology of Perseverance and Assurance*. Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2001. Again, this chapter owes much to his work and insight in that book.

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<sup>14</sup> *Come Thou Fount*, 1758. Words by Robert Robinson.

The “full assurance of hope” comes only from resting in Jesus in the present.

I know that sometimes when I give a warning like this, there may be a true believer who gets rattled. But here’s the bottom line. The Bible gives both warnings and assurances. When you emphasize the warnings, sometimes a true believer will get rattled. But if all you talk about are the assurances, superficial believers may never be awakened to repentance.

I have been on both sides of the issue. For a while I was a falsely assured impostor and I’m glad a Sunday School teacher helped me see that my superficial confession of faith would not save me on the day of judgment. God used his warning to rouse me out of my sleep of death.

But I also know the struggle of being unable to find assurance. Doubting made my life miserable and stilted my spiritual growth.

- If there were a *Guinness Book of World Records* entry...
- I’ve been saved at youth camps all over the world.
- I have been saved in every denomination.

Both the warnings and assurances are important. In the one place the Bible tells us, “*Examine yourselves, whether you are (really) in the faith*” (2 Corinthians 13:5). But in another it tells us what we are safe in Jesus’ hand, and that even when we are faithless, He’ll remain faithful.<sup>16</sup>

So, he tells you, **(vs. 11)** “press on to the end for the full assurance of hope!” The best proof of your faith is its tenacity.

- CHAIR: There was a point at which I sat down. But the best proof is that you are seated there now. Imagine if I asked you why you hadn’t set down and you told me, ‘Oh, but I have’ and vividly recalled the decision making process... tears in your eyes... but I would say, “You are not sitting

down now.” **Your present posture is a better indicator of whether you made the decision than is your recall of a past memory.**

- Right now, are you seated in submission or standing in defiance; are you seated in trust in Christ’s finished work, or standing in the hopes of your own goodness to get you to heaven?

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<sup>16</sup> 2 Timothy 2:13

