

Four Marks of a True Believer

Hebrews 6:9-12

Pastor Jeremy Cagle, September 11, 2022

Well, if you would, please take your Bibles and open up to the book of Hebrews. We have been going through the book of Hebrews for several months now as a church. And today we find ourselves in chapter six, which I want to read to you. Just to give you the setting for it, we're going to start back in chapter five and read that whole chapter up into the middle of chapter six. But if you look in Hebrews five, it says,

For every high priest taken from among men is appointed on behalf of men and things pertaining to God, in order to offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins; he can deal gently with the ignorant and misguided, since he himself also is beset with weakness; and because of it he is obligated to offer sacrifices for sins, as for the people, so also for himself. And no one takes the honor to himself, but receives it when he is called by God, even as Aaron was.

So also Christ did not glorify Himself so as to become a high priest, but He who said to Him, "You are My Son, today I have begotten you"; just as He says also in another passage, "You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek." In the days of His flesh, He offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying, and tears to the One able to save him from death, and He was heard because of His piety. Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered. And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation, being designated by God as a high priest, according to the order of Melchizedek.

Concerning him, we have much to say, and it is hard to explain since you have become dull of hearing. For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant. But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil. Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, of instruction about washings and laying on of hands, and the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment. And this we will do, if God permits. For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame. For ground that drinks the rain which often falls on it and brings forth vegetation useful to those for whose sake it is also tilled, receives a blessing from God; but if it yields thorns and thistles, it is worthless and lose to being cursed, and it ends up being burned.

We'll stop the reading there. That was quite a bit to take in all at once. And I appreciate your patience as I read through all of it with you, but the reason I wanted to go through it that way is because some of this is hard to follow if you just look at a few verses, but when you get the bigger picture, it makes sense, because the way it plays out is that after talking about Christ's high priesthood in chapter five, the author goes into a shepherding issue that's caused him some concern. And you see it in chapter five, verse 11 when he says, "Concerning Him we

have much to say, and it's hard to explain, since you had become dull of hearing." In other words, I want to tell you more about this, but I can't. And I want to go into more detail about Christ and His high priesthood, but it's not possible, because you're so immature.

Later on in the verse, he calls them childish over this, and then he'll call them infants who need someone to go over the elementary principles or ABCs. That's what they were acting like, elementary kids, so it leads him to write the words of warning in chapter six, verse four, which are some of the strongest ones ever given in the Bible, "For in the case of those who have been enlightened, and tasted of the heavenly gift, and have fallen away, it's impossible to renew them." We talked about that last time we were together and went into lots of details about this, because it doesn't mean that these people had their salvation and lost it. What it means is that some of them were never saved at all. That's why they fell away. There is a movement in the author's thought, and that is that if you start off being dull in verse 11, and you don't repent, and then you move on to being childish in verse 12, and you don't repent, then you act like an infant in verse 13 and don't repent. And then you move off the foundation in chapter six, and you don't repent, then you could easily get to the place where it's impossible to bring you back because you walk away from Christ forever.

It's a very serious passage here. It's one of the strongest ones in the New Testament. And if you missed the sermon last time, I would encourage you to go back and listen to it because we walk through these verses together. But what I want to do today is show you what he says next, because after giving that warning to them, he changes the tone in chapter six, verse nine. And he says, "But, beloved, we are convinced of better things concerning you." In other words, "Let me be clear, for a moment. I don't think this is talking about you guys. And I don't believe you have fallen away. Because even though you're making some mistakes in this area, I think you're safe because you are acting like the real thing." Isn't that a breath of fresh air? He has been pretty rough on these guys so far. I mean, he's been beating up on him with criticism after criticism, and rebuke after rebuke. And so he puts all that on hold for a moment in order to put his arm around them and say, but I know you will be fine.

This passage wasn't given to discourage you, but to encourage you and show you that you're not like these people in here. They told us in seminary that when you get done with your preaching, you shouldn't leave your people grounded on the floor, you need to pick them up a little bit, and give them hope. That is what this author is doing right here.

This is important to remember, because I've talked to people about Hebrews six who have told me that this is one of the scariest passages in the Bible for them, because they think it's talking about them and telling them that they are lost. And when I hear that, you have to remind people, that's not the intention here. It was written to show you that you are saved, not that you are lost. This was written to build you up in the things of God, not tear you down. It's a warning, but it's also a warning with a promise.

I've talked to other people who said this chapter also concerns them, because it makes them question things they have never thought about before, like, "Have I fallen away?" Or, "Have I gotten to the place where it's impossible for God to renew me? And the answer is, "I don't think so." Because the people that are being described here, don't even ask about that. They don't care. They've fallen away, and they are happy in their fallenness. And if you are struggling with it, that shows that you are not this category of people.

09:17

But the point is that all this was given to help them grow in the area of assurance. It was not given to make them doubt their salvation, just the opposite. We are going to talk about this phrase, “the things that accompany salvation” in verse nine when we get into the passage, but before we do, if you look at the section right above this, in verse seven, it says something very helpful. It says, “For ground that drinks the rain, which often falls on it and brings forth vegetation useful to those for whose sake it is also tilled, receives a blessing from God.” Now, what's that talking about? The reason the author says that is to give you an illustration from the world of farming in order to say that both good soil and the bad soil received the same amount of rain, the difference is what they do with it. Because we all know here in Chilliwack, two fields can receive the same amount of moisture, and one goes one way with it, and the other one goes another one. And it's the same way with people. Two people can sit in the same pew, read the same Bible, hear the same sermon, and have completely different responses. One listens, while the other one doesn't. One takes it to heart, while the other one just shuts their ears. And the question the author is asking here is, which one are you? The good soil or the bad soil? The one who hears the word or the one who ignores it? Because this is how you tell who the Christians are.

If you're reading all this and wondering, “How do I know if I am saved? Well, this is how you know. Jesus said, You will know them by their what? By their fruit. You won't know them by their race. You can't tell a Christian by the color of their skin. You can't identify them by the clothes, the care they drive, the house they live in, you will know them by how they behave. Christians act like Christ, it's what we do. The apostle James said that you believe in God and that's good, but remember, the demons believe and they shutter, because the only thing that separates you from a demon is your works. It's not the church you go to. It's not the denomination you belong with. It's not the fact that you are Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, Dutch Reformed or Mennonite, the only thing that sets you apart from the evil ones is your actions. The proper way to look at this is that we are saved by faith alone. But the faith that we have is never entirely alone, the two go together. The works don't come first, the faith does. And the actions don't go out ahead of the rain, the rain always precedes the action; this is what the rain does in your life: it produces vegetation.

I've heard it said before that faith and works are like two wings on a plane. So that if you take one wing off in the Christian life, it gets lopsided and it crashes to the ground. And that may be true. But I think the illustration needs a little work. It's more accurate, I think, to say that your faith is like the fuel for the plane. And your works are the body of it or the part that you can see with your eyes. Because without your faith, your plane crashes to the ground, it can't stay up in the air. And without your works, no one even knows the plane is there. There's no proof of it. There are millions of people today who professed faith in Christ, but they have no proof. We all know that. Their plane is not in the air. They act like the world, they talk like the world, walk like the world, they do what the world does. So as a result, this passage says they're probably of the world. A Christian doesn't act that way. His life is entirely different.

You can say this another way. But you can even write this down if you want to in your notes. This is not about perfection. It's about direction in your life. And it's not about being sinless, nobody can do that. It's about living a purposeful life that's headed in the right trajectory with God, because it's going this way toward heaven, and not that way toward hell. So that yes, you fail. And yes, you mess up. And yes, you do the wrong things from time to time. But when you do, you come running to the cross, and it changes you. Those are the things that accompany salvation.

My friends, I think a lot of us need to rethink this issue today. Because for some people, they do look at a passage like this one, and think they could never be good enough to receive this. But I want to tell you, that's not what this is about. This is not about your performance. This is about Christ and His goodness, and the things He does in your life. Everything that's mentioned in this passage moving forward here, at least for the next couple of verses is positive.

It's written to encourage you and that's how we want to approach it today. So if you're taking notes this morning, we're going to look at four marks of a true believer in this passage. As way to build you up, in Hebrews six, verses nine through 12, we are going to look at four marks of a true believer.

And the first mark of a true believer is works. We're going to follow along in the passage here. We've already said a few words about this one, but this is where the author begins. The first mark of a true believer is works or work in the singular which means that when someone is saved, this is what happens as they believe in God, the Lord changes them and does a work in their life.

If you look in verse nine, it says it this way, "But, beloved, we are convinced of better things concerning you, and the things that accompany salvation, though we're speaking in this way." In the passage above this, the author was being harsh, but now he says, "For God is not unjust, so as to forget your work." If you notice, verse nine starts off with the word "but" in order to form a contrast to what he's been saying, because it says right above this, in verse four, "In the case of those who have once been enlightened and tasted of the gift, and then have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them." That is a very difficult passage to work through, as we saw a couple of weeks ago. But it says, for those who have been enlightened and have been dull, and never repented, and fallen away, it's impossible to help them. And as he writes this, you can imagine the effect this would have had on the readers, it would have scared them to death. Some of you have had that response. Is this talking about me? So to answer that, the author says basically in verse nine, no, I'm not talking about you. Because beloved, we're convinced of better things concerning you.

Interestingly enough, if you survey the book of Hebrews, that's the only time he calls them "beloved" in the book, which would have been reassuring to them. Because this is a term that's only used to describe Christians, not non Christians, because that's what he thinks they are. He thinks they are saved because he has seen the evidence in verse nine and says it has convinced him. Now that's interesting, because that means that despite what some people tell you today, you can be convinced of someone's salvation. It says so right here, he had seen visible, tangible proof of it. And the verse goes on to say, "But beloved, we're convinced of better things concerning you, and the things that accompany salvation."

This phrase, "the things that accompany salvation," is not really defined here. It's left open ended. But it can refer to a lot of things. The Bible has a lot to say about what accompanies salvation like Galatians five where the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness and self-control. That's what it looks like to be a Christian.

If you want to know if someone is saved, just see if love is coming out of them and joy and peace and patience. Again, not in a perfect way, but just in a consistent way; their life is generally characterized by those things. This phrase can refer to the attitude of Christ in Philippians, to "have this attitude in yourselves which was in Christ Jesus, that you do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit." That's what a Christian does. It can also

refer to things like the deeds of the new man in Ephesians four, it can refer to the actions of the children of light in First Thessalonians five. There's a lot of ways to look at this. But in this passage, it's really summed up with the word work in verse 10, "Beloved, we are convinced of the things that accompany salvation in your life, for God is not unjust, so as to forget your work." And the idea here is that this is what displayed their conversion here. It was the good things they do for God. It says here in verse 10 that God will not forget them. And that means you shouldn't read a passage like Hebrews six and freak out about it, because you think it means that you're lost, because God will remember your righteous conduct and uphold you for it. Now that sounds legalistic. Frankly, when I first read this, I had a hard time getting my mind around it, it seems like he might be teaching works-based righteousness here where you earn salvation. But he's not because the word "work," as I just pointed out, is singular here. And that means that God is not looking at each and everything you do and upholding you for that. He's looking at the pattern in your life. Because, yes, you still sin and yes, you still mess up and yes, you fail. But when you do, you repent of it.

I also need to point out that when it says that God is not unjust, so as to forget your work, the phrase "your work," doesn't mean your work alone as if this is something you can take credit for. I think we all understand that anytime you do something good in the Christian life, it is God who is working through you and not you, yourself. On the one hand, when you get saved, you work and strive and labor for the Lord. But on the other hand, it all happens because of His power, not your own.

The Reformers used to explain it when they this way when they said that our good works are outside of ourselves until we get saved. And then at that time, they are inside of us and come from the Holy Spirit dwelling within us. But it all goes back to God.

And one more thing to point out in the text is that it starts off with the phrase, "for God," to highlight the fact that in salvation, God comes first and your works come second. His grace starts the process, and your efforts follow. Because they're all secondary to Him. After studying all this, the author makes it clear that the one thing you should put your faith in when you are wrestling with salvation is Christ and nothing else. Your works will disappoint you. But Christ never will. So keep your eyes fixed on Him.

As I told you last time, going back to the picture of farming, up in verse seven, we all know that you have good days and bad days on a farm, don't you? You have good seasons and bad seasons in agriculture. There are times when you take the combine out in the field, and you don't bring anything in. And there are seasons when you scrape the rake across the ground, and there's no fruit to show for it. But you don't give up, you still keep farming. And it's the same way in the Christian life because your eyes are fixed on the Lord.

There are going to be times when you try and try and try to get rid of your sin and you can't. And there are going to be days when you fight it and fight it and fight it all to no avail. But that doesn't mean you throw in the towel, because your hope is in the Lord.

In fact, just to encourage you in this, look back at verse 10. In the context here, it's almost as if he's saying that God will remember your works, because I know that some of you are forgetting them. And God will keep track of your good deeds, because I know that some of you can't, because you are doing good things for the Lord, and you are changing and you are growing and you are making progress and being sanctified and showing the fruit of the Spirit, but you can't see it. You are too caught up in the battle. But God's not. And you have to take hope in that.

I mentioned this because I know that some of you battle with this. You say you struggle with the same things you did when you first got saved. Can anybody identify with that? They might know what I'm talking about. And you wrestled with the same old sins. You were proud then and you are proud now. You were anxious then and you are anxious now, and I get that. But don't you see the passage is saying but if you're making progress, there's hope. Because by the grace of God, you don't battle it the same way. Your pride dies in here before it ever lashes out at somebody. Your anxiety is defeated in your heart before it ever produces fruit in your life.

And you have to take comfort in that; your works are showing your salvation. I know other people would say they are still making the same old mistakes they made when they first became a Christian, because they were a lousy parent then and they are a lousy parent now; they were a bad husband then, and they are a bad husband now. And I get that too. But don't you see you have grown? God has been changing you and the Spirit has been moving. You repent of your sin faster. You make it right with your wife quicker. It all happens by the grace of God.

Augustine said we work because of the work that God works in us. And may He get all the glory for it. The story was told at the time a little boy asked his father, "Daddy, do you ever get tired of going to work all the time? And the dad said, "Yes, I do." So the boy said, "Well, you don't show it." To which the Father said, "That's because I love you. And I love your mother. And that's what gives me the strength to keep going." It's the same way with this. We get our strength because we work unto the Lord.

And that brings us to another mark of a true believer and that is love. The first one in this passage is works. The second mark of a true believer is love, which refers to a concern for the Lord and His people. Because you are to work and labor and do something for Christ but you do it in this way, in the spirit of selflessness. And if you look in the in the passage, it says, "But, beloved, we are convinced of better things concerning you, and the things that accompany salvation, though we are speaking in this way, for God is not unjust, so as to forget your work, and the love which you have shown toward His name, in having ministered and instill ministering to the saints.

As the author goes on here, it's always important to remember the context for this. And that is that he is trying to build these Jews up in the faith. There are times when the authors of Scripture will point out your works as a rebuke. But that's not here. Here, he's trying to encourage them, and he does it by reminding them of their love.

Earlier in chapter five, verse 11, he says that they are dull of hearing. And here he says, that's true, you guys still need to read your Bible more and make some changes in that department. But I'll tell you what you're doing right. And that is that you are a very giving church. I know anytime someone needs something, you are the first one to come running. And anytime there is a problem, you are right in line to put the fire out. A lot of churches don't do that. But not you guys, you are really excelling in this. One commentator says these Jewish Christians certainly had their faults, which is why the author gives them such a stern rebuke. But at the same time, no one can deny the fact that they cared for one another. And that was positive proof of their conversion because nothing is more basic or fundamental to the Christian faith than this. Jesus said, there are two great commandments and what are they? Love God and love your neighbor. That's what it's all about. If you get that right, you get everything right. And if you are succeeding there, you succeed everywhere.

He also said, "A new commandment I give to you, that you may love one another, even as I have loved you. By this, all men will know that you are my disciples." How do you know you are a disciple of Christ? Because you

have a systematic theology book on the shelf? No. Because you spend all your time at the library? No, you will know it by your love. An unbeliever can mimic a lot of works in the Christian life. They can read the Bible like we do, they can repeat the prayers that we do, they can listen to preaching, but they can't love someone like this. That's how you know someone's a believer.

In fact, the word love here is important, because the Greeks had three terms for love. They had Eros, or from which we get the term erotic. It referred to a physical, carnal love, which they were very fascinated with in that culture, because it was very, very fleshly place. They had phileo love from which we get the word Philadelphia, the City of Brotherly Love, friendly love. They like to talk about that too. And then they had this word you see in verse 10, which is the word agape. And I refer to unconditional love or love that was given without expecting anything in return. And the interesting thing about the word is that it was very rarely ever mentioned in Greek literature. They barely ever talked about it at all, because no one knew what it was like. The poets didn't know what it was like. The philosophers Plato, Aristotle, they didn't know what it was like, neither did the great thinkers of the day. In fact, if you were a Jew, reading this letter in the first century, this might be the first time you saw this word in print, because no one knew how to depict it. But the author of Hebrews says, "I do, it looks like you all. I know what Agape is like, it's what you're doing." Because verse 10 says they ministered to, and were still ministering to one another. And that means they loved each other this way in the past and they are still loving each other now. It says that they were doing it toward His name, which means they didn't do it in their own name. They did it for Christ's name. As they were concerned, they could be forgotten. And it says they showed all this out of consideration for the saints. I think that's the most amazing thing. They did it within a Christian context. They didn't come to church and throw stones at each other and bite and devour one another; they genuinely cared.

This really helps to measure out what we said earlier about works. Because if you're not careful, when you read the first part of verse 10, you can get the impression that the thing God wants you to do now is to go out and work for Him with a scowl where you just grit your teeth and bear it all the time. There's a bumper sticker that says, "I owe, I owe, it's off to work I go." Some people come to church like that. This verse says, God doesn't want you to do that. He wants you to have an attitude of joy. When you love someone, it changes how you behave, it changes everything. You don't frown, you don't grimace, you don't get upset with every little irritation, you genuinely enjoy being there.

That's what he's commanding them for, this is something we need to remember in a church like ours, because we have we love being doctrinal here and theological, and rightly so because we want to rightly divide the word of truth. And we want to give the full counsel of God when we teach. But if you're not careful, you can get that out of whack. As you begin to learn new things like the doctrine of election, or predestination, we often joke that some of you need to be locked away in a cage for about a year until you calm down. Because you want to take those things and go beat up on people. You want to take the Bible and slap them across the head and say truth hurts. That's the wrong way to approach it. You need to let doctrines like that soften your heart. Because what those doctrines say is that you're such a terrible sinner, that if God didn't choose you, you never would go to heaven. And that should make you more loving.

I also find it in a congregation like ours that a lot of people can develop a passion for the ministry, because they love well, they love to learn doctrines like that and study them. And that's good. There's nothing wrong with that. But I'll say that that behavior alone does not prepare a man for the ministry. You need to learn how to go out and love somebody first. Sometimes I think the best thing you could do to prepare a man for the ministry is stick him

in the Grade One Sunday school class for about a year and see how he does with that. If you can survive that, you can make it through anything.

We've all known congregations that were as cold as ice, the second you walked through the door. The best thing they could do is just close down. I had a friend one time say when a church is dead, you know what you do with it? You bury it. And there are churches that should be buried because they don't have anything to do with any of this anymore. It's like their hearts been cut off from their head.

That's no way to go through the Christian life. And friends, maybe on the personal level, this should encourage you because some of you are growing in the doctrines, the verses of Scripture, all this stuff is new to you. And it's a bit of a struggle. But I want to encourage you I know many of you are genuinely caring for one another. And that is how you know that you are the real thing.

And it brings us to another mark of a true believer in here. And that's diligence. So the first one is work. The second one is love, which tempers the work and gives it the right flavor. The third is diligence, which refers to the ability to persist and keep on keeping on in the Christian life. You do these things, and then you keep doing them. As the passage moves on here you can tell he is giving them encouragement by making moving from work to love. And the way he says this next one is helpful.

Because after saying these other things, by way of description, this is an exhortation. And it's written like this, if you look in verse 10, "For God is not unjust, so as to forget your work and the love which you have shown toward His name in having ministered and still ministering to the saints. And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence."

That phrase, "each one of you" tells you what the problem is here. And that is it. Most of the people in this church were showing love toward each other like it says, but not all of them. Apparently, there was a breakdown here in some of their lives. Some of them are slacking off in that department and letting their love grow cold. And so he reminds them to cut it out. You want to take note of that, and here's why, because the rest of verse 11 says, "And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence, so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end." That's the part of the passage that should probably grab your attention the most because remember, this is the theme of the whole section. And that is the issue of assurance. You can see the word assurance in the verse here. He's trying to show these people why he thought they were saved.

The word for assurance here is another interesting Greek word, the word *plerophoria*, which refers to the idea of having confidence in something, specifically in your salvation, but depending on how it's used in the first century, it could refer to a ship that has the full wind in its sails, so that it keeps sailing on the ocean, because it doesn't get tired, and doesn't get weary, but because it has the strength to keep going. And that's a good picture of what the author wants for his readers. He doesn't want them to be perfect, that's not on the table. And he doesn't want them to be sinless, nobody can do that. But what he wants is for them to come to a place where they keep going in the Christian life, because they have the full motivation to do so. And in order to do that, he tells them to be diligent.

Now, that means that the burden is on them for this, because he doesn't say, if you want to have assurance, the full assurance of salvation, you're going to have to wait for God to give you a bolt of lightning from heaven. And he doesn't say if you want to know for sure you're saved, you're going to have to sit back and put everything on hold

until you have some amazing testimony where you're getting a car crash, and your life is spared and that sort of thing. No, he says the way you get it is by taking some responsibility on yourself instead of being so passive all the time. Now, he's not saying you do this to save yourself, you get it to have assurance. If you want to use the shipping illustration, in order to take advantage of the wind on a ship, you have to keep your sails up. It doesn't make the wind blow; the wind is going to blow either way. It doesn't put you on the water or in the ship that's already taking place. But it makes it move and be encouraged. And you have to hold hoist them up, day in and day out, week in and week out. If you don't do that, the ship won't go anywhere. It's the same way in the Christian life. If you want to catch the power of God, you have to keep putting up your defenses against the evil one and taking it seriously. Sin has a tendency to do this with you, it has a tendency to take the wind out of your sails and steal away your passion for Christ, because it makes you feel so guilty all the time. So he says you can't let it do that. You have to work for the Lord and keep working for the Lord, you have to serve one another in love and keep doing that. Because the passage says here in verse 11 that it gives you hope, "the full assurance of hope."

And the word hope here can be interpreted several different ways because it can refer to your eternal hope. That's what you're being assured of in the passage. The author is reminding you of what it looks like to go to heaven, it looks like doing all the things in the passage.

It can also refer to your objective hope, or the signs of salvation that occur outside of you, because that's what these people needed to see. Again, they're confused about their soul, so he is given them hope outside of themselves.

It can refer to your emotional hope because the author is trying to encourage these people emotionally after criticizing them. But in reality, it's probably a combination of all these, because he's telling them this is how you get all of that now, you do it by being faithful to the Lord. And as you are faithful, it says it helps you to realize your assurance. The word realize is not in the actual Greek, so some of you may not see that in your Bibles. But it is a good way to translate it. Because the idea here is that your salvation can be realized.

I know that some of you come from a place that says that's not possible. And you come from a background which says there's no way you could ever know for sure that you are saved because you are just too sinful for that. But this passage says something else. It tells you that you can know with certainty that you are a believer, if you look at the pattern of your life. Because yes, you sin and you fail and have weak moments. But what do you do on a regular basis? That's the question here. When you sin, do you repent? Then you can know you are a Christian, because non-Christians don't do that. The world doesn't repent on a regular basis. Why would they do that? It is something only Christians will do when you fail. Do you go to the Lord and make it right? Then you should be encouraged. Are you humble? Are you gracious? One of the Puritans once said, "The one thing you can't fake in this world is the virtue of perseverance. The real thing lasts, it stands the test of time." It's not about whether you're doing something for the Lord only today. It's about whether you're doing it for Him today and tomorrow, and the next day and the day after that.

It's not about whether you just serve the Lord when you were first converted in your teens or 20s. But what are you doing in your 30s, 40s, 50s, and 60s as well? That's what you have to be focused on.

And the way this one works out practically is when you are struggling with something like lust, your first concern is not so much how can I stop lust right now? But how can I stop lust as a way of life? How can I break the habit? The sin is discouraging me. It's taking away all my joy. So what do I need to do to get rid of it?

When you are struggling with something like anger, the problem is not, how do I stop being angry just this second? But how do I stop being an angry person? Is my job a problem? Then my job has to go. I don't really need it anyway if it is ruining my relationship with the Lord. Is my schedule a problem because I leave too early, I come home too late, and I'm grouchy all the time? Then my schedule has to change. Are my sports teams a problem because the Tennessee Vols keep losing every fall? If I need to change sports teams then I need to change sports teams. I'm joking, because that does not need to happen. The Vols will turn it around. But if something is tempting me to fail, it's not worth it. The price is too high.

I can't tell you how many times someone has come into my office and told me they were wrestling with some sin. And it's tearing them up to the point that they don't know they are saved. They have no assurance. And when I ask them, "What are you doing to fight it?" They say, "Nothing." Well, that's not random. They don't have any diligence. So they don't have any assurance. The two things go together. You have to fight your sin on a regular basis. One pastor told me this story once upon a time he was talking to a young man who was discouraged in this area, because he said he kept giving into the sin of pornography. And so the pastor said, "Well, young man, if I was a drunk, do you think it would be wise for me to hang out at a bar?" And the young man said, "No." And he said, "Well, if I was a drug addict, do you think it would be smart for me to go to the corner and hang out there where they sell drugs?" And he said, "No." So the pastor said, "Then why do you think it is wise for you to keep an iPhone in your pocket with no guard and no filter and no accountability? You need to learn how to show some diligence in this." You can't mess around with your sin and think God is going to bless it.

And that brings you to one more mark of a true believer in the passage here, just to review the these other ones that the first one is work. And then secondly, the act of love. Thirdly, it's diligence, which is probably the most overlooked one in the list, because we are all so impatient nowadays. We want what we want. And we want it now so when we are looking for assurance, we often really do want God to zap us with it. But it doesn't always work that way. To be clear, some people do get assurance quickly. They have a Damascus Road experience, like the apostle Paul did, where a light shines down from heaven or something like that. And they know they are born again. But some people don't. Some people have the experience more like the apostle Peter, where he's on again, off again, and his relationship with the Lord. And one day is following Him. And the next day he's betraying Him. But the point is that Peter stuck with it. And that's where his assurance came from. He didn't give up. That's how he knew he was saved. And it's the same way with some of you.

And that brings us to one more mark of a true believer, and that is patience. A fourth mark of a believer here that we see in Hebrews six is patience. Or we could say "faith and patience," as the passage says, which refers to the act of trusting God for the future. If you look in verse 11, it says, "And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence, so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end, so that you will not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promise. Now as you come to the end of the text here, he uses the phrase "so that" which is known as a purpose clause in Greek because he gives you the purpose, why he writes all this, he's doing it so that you will not be sluggish.

The significance of that is that the word *sluggish* is the same word that's translated *dull* back up in chapter five, verse 11. So it is taking you back full circle to where he started this. If you remember, that's what led to his discussion about falling away. And that is that these Jews were being apathetic and dulled to the things of God. So in order to stop that, he says in chapter six, verse 12, that this is what you have to do, you need to be imitators of those who through faith and patience have inherited the promises. Now, that may sound strange when you first read it, because you might not know where he is coming from, but remember, this is given to the Jews. And as such, he would have referred to those who inherited the promises God made in the Old Testament, specifically Abraham, because the author mentions Abraham by name in verse 13. So this is a reference to him. And the connection is that Abraham struggled with the same things you do in this, he wrestled with issues like doubt and assurance, and the issue of salvation. But the way he overcame it was through his faith, and his patience and God.

If you remember the story, we'll say more about this next time, but Genesis 12 says that the Lord called out to Abraham and said, "Abraham, go forth from your country, and from your father's house, and I will make you into a great nation." And Abraham did that. But the ironic thing about it is that Abraham didn't have any kids yet. When he left his house, on the terms that God would make him into a great nation, he had no children. I am not sure about you but that doesn't sound like a great start to being a great nation. But he did it anyway because he took God at His word.

Take the example of his son Isaac as well, same thing happens there. The Lord gave Isaac the same promise, He told him he would make him into a great family as well, but when Isaac died, you know how many kids he had? Two. Jacob and Esau, and that that doesn't sound like much of a family either, especially back then when they had very large families. But Isaac kept following Yaweh because he did the same thing. He followed his father's example.

The same thing happens with Jacob because with Jacob, the family gets bigger, Jacob has 12 sons, but he still has a long way to go. And yet he still kept following the Lord. And the idea in all these passages is that all that happened, those men survived that ordeal because they trusted God in faith.

I have heard different numbers on this, but it's been said somewhere that Abraham was 75 years old when the Lord called him. That's pretty old to leave the house on a new journey. Then he was 99 when he was circumcised, and he was 100 when Isaac was born. He was playing with his kids at an age when a lot of people play with their great grandkids. And what did he do between all that time? He was patient, day by day, moment by moment, hour by hour, he didn't tell God to hurry it up so he can get on with his life. He didn't tell God to stop wasting his time. He put his hand on his mouth, and he was silent, because he knew that God would take care of him. And the author says you have to do the same thing when it comes to this issue of assurance.

God has given you the promise right above this in verse 11 that you can have confidence in your salvation, but like Abraham, it may take time for that to materialize and it may not come right away. So what do you have to do until it does? You have to be willing to be patient. It has been said that God doesn't always operate on our timetable. He operates on His. He doesn't do things according to our schedule. He does it when He pleases. So you have to be willing to wait on Him. There may be times when you wrestle with doubt on this issue and seasons when God doesn't feel close to you, because you are not sure where you stand with him. Because you don't see a lot of fruit coming off the tree and the good soil feels barren. But the answer is not to give up, not to throw in the towel, not to quit, you keep going because the Lord will answer in His time if you are consistent.

Someone asked me the other day, they said I'm a new Christian. And all this stuff is new to me. When you guys throw out certain terms, I don't know what they mean when you sing certain songs. I'm not familiar with them. What do I do? I said, "You walk with God day by day." That's all you can do. So you look at those old Christians over there, and you think that they have it got it all figured out. Number one, they don't. But number two, they did the same thing. That's how God works in your life. In this verse, it's really a summary statement of all we've talked about so far in this passage, so you can't really understand it unless you kind of tie it back into the previous ones. So we need to do this here and take the issue of works.

I know some of you are having trouble with works today. It's been a discouraging thing in your life. Because you have told me you don't feel like your works are ever good enough for God. Because it seems like no matter what you do, you always fall short of it somewhere. So you wake up one day and you fail, and you wake up the next day. And it's the same thing. It's like an ongoing pattern.

Do you know what you need to do to get through it? You need to have faith. Going back to where we started this, you need to realize that you're saved through grace alone and not by your works anyway, so that even when you fail, the Lord will forgive you if you keep coming back to Him. He is that kind of God.

Or we can look at the issue of loving people and serving them with the right attitude. Some of you are having a tough time with that one, because let's be honest, your attitude stinks sometimes. I don't say that to be mean, just to be honest. But there are days when you come to church, and this is a burden for you because you don't want to be here. Everything gets on your nerves, the people get on your nerves, the building gets on your nerves, the hot air gets on your nerves. The preaching gets on your nerves. Heaven forbid, I know none of you would ever say that. You know the answer, it is the same thing, put your faith in the Lord's hands, call out to Him for help, and He will help you. He doesn't want you to act that way. So when you ask Him to change, he'll help you change.

Take the topic of being diligent. I think that's the toughest one in here. In a world like this one, it's almost impossible. It seems impossible to follow the Lord day by day because there is so much junk coming at us right now. You turn on the television and it's junk, you turn on the computer and it's sin. So how do you stick with it? Same way. You pray, you call out to God, be humble, and the Lord will help you

Several years ago, I came across an email from a biblical counseling ministry that said there are three steps to trusting God. You need to realize that it's not all about you. It's not all about you. And it's not all about you, and thinking that you're strong enough, because you're not. That's not what this is about. It's about Christ, and remembering that He is. That's what these people from the Old Testament were commended for. The reason men like Abraham and Isaac and Jacob could do the amazing things they did is because they understood that God was mighty and not them. That's the way to be faithful.

Friends, I said at the introduction, that this passage is not given to discourage you, so if you walk out of here, feeling frustrated, please understand, that's not my intention here. The goal is to lift your spirits, because you can know for sure that you are saved the day. It doesn't have to be a guessing game. But it all goes back to the Lord. If you look at yourself, you'll be discouraged. If you look at Him, you won't.

There is a song that we like to sing here at Grace, called In Christ alone. And it says this,

Christ alone, my hope is found.
He is my light, my strength, my song.
This cornerstone, this solid ground,
Firm through the fiercest drought and storm.
What heights of love, what depths of peace,
what fears are stilled, what strivings cease.
My Comforter, my all in all,
Here in the love of Christ, I stand.

Beloved, when you understand that, that's when you have assurance with God. Your hope is in Christ alone. Let's go to Him in a word of prayer.

Heavenly Father, we are so thrilled at the thought that our salvation is found in You. In this discussion of faith and works, it can be so muddled in many of our minds today. It is a wrestling match, but at the same time, there is a refreshing truth, that it's your work that saves us and not ours, we rejoice in that. I do pray for those who were here this morning and considering all that this passage says about their works. Maybe for some of them, they do need to be exhorted to make changes. Maybe they do need to be diligent and repent of any areas of laziness, spiritual laziness in their life. But Lord, I pray they would do it with a spring in their step, remembering what Christ has ultimately done it for them. For others who are here today, Lord, I pray that they had may have walked in here with a thought of doubt about their salvation, but they would walk out with a thought of encouragement. Lord, You are a merciful God to take sinners like us and produce good works in us. There is no other religion in the world, no other manufactured God that could do anything like that. We praise You for that, Lord, and rejoice, and as we come to the Lord's table, it's a very appropriate thing to talk about, to remember what our Saviour has done for us. He paid the price for all our sins. He was broken and beaten and Calvary, He was bruised, so that our salvation would be a full and complete salvation. There is nothing more to be added to it because of Christ. May He be glorified this morning, as we worship Him in taking of this table. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.