

## Discerning True Believers from False Part 3

By David Harrell

**Bible Text:** Hebrews 6:9-12  
**Preached on:** Sunday, January 29, 2017

Well, it's good to be with you again this morning to open up the word of God to you and we find ourselves, once again, in Hebrews 6. This will be the third and final part of a series on "Discerning True Believers from False," an issue that that church was dealing with trying to somehow communicate the great truths of the Gospel to those that were a part of the church that really didn't know Christ, and this morning we will be looking at verses 9 through 12 of Hebrews 6.

Now, before we look at the text, I must say that I find myself having great compassion for these ancient Hebrew Christians in this early church, how they must have suffered. The persecution was intense for them. Their little churches were not all that different from ours. They would come together to worship, to sing, to pray, to hear the word of God taught to them, to fellowship with one another, but like every Christian church, they had those within the church that truly loved Christ and served Christ, they were truly born of the Spirit, but then there were others that were the borderline Christians; they really were not Christian at all, they were contemplating intellectually the truths of the Gospel but they just couldn't make a clean break from Judaism and commit themselves completely to their Messiah. And then there were others that had made some profession of faith but that's really all it was, it was a profession. Like perhaps some of you, they had deceived themselves into thinking that they really did, since they believed in Jesus, that they were somehow united to him in saving faith, but there was no real Spirit-generated new birth, no transformation of the inner man; they were not wholeheartedly committed to Christ; they didn't have the power to do so by the indwelling Spirit so there was no genuine love for him, no decisive determination to follow Christ come what may. And down deep because of the persecution that these people experienced from their family members and friends, they were all tempted to fall away from the truth of the Gospel and return to Judaism.

Now, not fall away from salvation. Nothing in all the world, dear friends, is more irreversible than the new birth. Anyone born of the Spirit cannot be unborn again. It sounds silly to even say that. No, they were in danger of falling away from the opportunity to receive salvation through genuine faith in Christ. And like the writer of this epistle, I know what it is to have a burden for these kinds of folks. Some of you are probably in that camp. And we see this pastoral concern manifested in the series of warnings that the inspired writer gives to the people, and I might add that this is so

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crucial for your understanding of the book, especially this section, and if I could review it for a moment because we need to keep this in our mind in order to understand the section that we will be dealing with here in a few minutes. The first warning was in chapter 2, verses 1 through 4 where because they refused to pay close attention to what they were being taught concerning the Gospel, they were drifting away from what they heard; they were neglecting so great a salvation. Then he gives a second warning in chapter 3, verses 7 through 19, like their ancestors in the wilderness, they had hardened their hearts against the truth and so they were tempted to fall away from it, fall back into Judaism. The third warning in chapter 5, verses 11 through 14, because they had become, he says, "dull of hearing," a process of regression was taking place. They were becoming apathetic to the great truths of the Gospel. They were becoming indifferent to the unfathomable grace offered in the new covenant. They had been taught, well taught, to a point where by now they ought to be teachers but they had need again for someone to teach them the elementary principles of the oracles of God. Then we come to the solemn, frightening, fourth warning that we examined last week in chapter 6, verses 1 through 8. There he warns them to leave the elementary teaching about the Christ, literally in the Greek, leave the beginnings. Leave, forsake the beginnings, those foundational doctrines of Judaism in the old covenant that pointed to Christ. And you will recall that he lists six prominent features of the old covenant doctrine in verses 1 through 2. Then he warned them to take full advantage of those temporary experiences, those incredible opportunities that they had been given to fully embrace Christ. He tells them that, "You know, your minds have been enlightened to the truth. You were allowed to be in association with or in the company of the Holy Spirit. You were constantly being exposed to his miraculous works and his word." They had been given opportunities to taste the heavenly gifts, to taste of the word and his power that will one day dominate the earth during the millennial kingdom. But in the case of those who have experienced all those opportunities to receive Christ and then, according to verse 6, "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." Again, not falling away from salvation but from the opportunity to be saved through faith in Christ. Again, to say that this falling away refers to salvation not only disregards the context of the passage and the clear series of warnings to these unbelieving Jews, but it would also contradict all of the New Testament passages that clearly affirm the perseverance of the saints that comes from divine protection, not from human effort.

What a frightening warning this is and a man willfully apostasizes with full knowledge of the truth. It is impossible to renew him again to repentance. Why? Two reasons: because, first of all, there is no greater evidence that can be offered with respect to the truth; but then, secondly, continual rejection of the truth about one's sin and the Savior hardens a man's heart to the point where he will respond to the truth of the Gospel with granite indifference. This would include persistent indecisiveness and seasoned hypocrisy that

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was a part of that church and a part of every church. Remember, he warned about these things in chapter 3, verse 12 and following. He tells them, "Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God. But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called 'Today,' so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin."

Dear friends, let me make this abundantly clear to you: the deceitfulness of sin in the human heart that keeps a man from wholeheartedly embracing the Lord Jesus Christ will eventually turn a man's heart into steel that is so hard that even the white hot flames of hell will not be able to soften it. Sometimes we can see this progression in the lives of people that we know. They hear the Gospel, they respond with enthusiasm but their heart is deceived and they never really manifest any resolute single-minded devotion to Christ resulting ultimately in spiritual apathy and perhaps even apostasy. But more often than not, we can't see this clearly. The tares grow up with the wheat and you can't tell them apart until the harvest.

This is certainly the concern that the writer has here for the Hebrew Christians and the unbelievers in that church, and after warning them that if they fall away from the opportunities to fully embrace Christ in genuine, sincere repentant faith, he tells them in essence that they are doomed, and he closes with that graphic illustration in verses 7 and 8 that contrasts the true believer with the false. The true believer will bring forth spiritual fruit, God will bless his life. The false believer will yield worthless thorns and thistles that will be cursed and burned up unless they repent and believe.

So this is absolutely terrifying stuff but aren't we thrilled to know of God's infinite grace and of his mercy? It's like you just need a breath of fresh air here after all of that warning, and like the sun breaking through the foreboding clouds of a terrible storm, he shifts his attention now to encourage the true believers that were hearing all of this, that were hearing it read in their congregations and he says this, beginning in verse 9,

9 But, beloved, we are convinced of better things concerning you, and things that accompany salvation, though we are speaking in this way. 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 in still ministering to the saints. 11 And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end, 12 so that you will not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

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Now, notice very carefully as we begin to unpack this a bit, he says in verse 9, "But, beloved." A great transition here to the beloved, *agapetos*; it comes from *agape*. It's a term that expresses that supreme self-sacrificing love of choice that one has for someone in a very special relationship. It's interesting that the term is used 60 times in the New Testament and the first nine times it is used by God the Father to express his love for his Son, and every other time, it refers to believers, Jews or Gentiles. So this is a term of endearment, a term of affection. He loves them deeply. "Beloved, we are convinced of better things concerning you, and things that accompany salvation, though we are speaking in this way," referring to the frightening warnings that undoubtedly caused them all to shudder, including the true believers.

So, what are these "better things concerning you"? What are these "things that accompany salvation" that he sees in their lives that is so convincing to him? Well, I would submit that we could break this down into three categories and we're going to look at the text in this manner this morning: first of all, what he sees as a life that contrasts with unbelievers previously described; secondly, he sees a heart that loves God and serves others; and then, thirdly, he sees an assurance that God will accomplish what he has promised. And frankly, I find this to be so very encouraging to my life and instructive as well, and I trust it will prove the same for you.

So, verse 9, "But, beloved, we are convinced of better things concerning you, and things that accompany salvation," and here 1: he speaks of a life that contrasts with unbelievers that has been previously described beginning in verse 11 of chapter 5, through verse 5 of chapter 6. You will remember all the way back at verse 11 in chapter 5 when he began this whole section, he began to instruct them concerning the glorious truths of the regal office and priesthood of Melchizedek and how all of that pictured and is now perfectly fulfilled in the Lord Jesus Christ and he says, "Concerning him we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing." They had become mentally lazy. They had become hard to move, literally bored, indifferent, unteachable. And the grammar in the text, the perfect tense implies that they were once eager to hear these things but have fallen into an apathetic condition. They were once interested and open but now they have retrogressed; they have moved backwards into an even worse state than before and they were no longer open to instruction. Folks, this is the mark of the unregenerate. This is the mark of an unbeliever. But he's saying, "Beloved, we're convinced of better things concerning you and the things accompanying salvation. You are not like that. You are hungry for the word. You are mentally alert. You are quick to learn and to apply the word of God."

Back to chapter 5 and verse 12, he goes on and he says, "by this time they should have been teachers but they needed again for someone to teach them the elementary principles

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of the oracles of God," referring to the Old Testament that foreshadowed and pictured God's plan of redemption and the coming Messiah; the old covenant which God gave them to prepare them for Christ. But they had regressed in their spiritual understanding to the point where they once again needed "milk, not solid food." They were actually returning to a state of spiritual infancy like undeveloped, toothless, little babies. They were unable to chew up and swallow the rich truths of new covenant revelation. Verse 14, "But solid food," he says, "is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil."

Folks, let me summarize in essence what he's saying here. Beloved, we are convinced of better things concerning you and things that accompany salvation. You crave the life-giving solid food of the word of God and you practice, you diligently apply, you make it your habit to live these things out. You have trained your senses to discern good and evil. You saw the danger of falling back into Judaism. You saw the danger of mixing law with grace. You took God at his word, that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the living God and salvation is only available by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. You saw all of that and you believed and as a result you make godly choices in your life. Your conduct and your character reflects Christ. People see Christ in you and you have grown into spiritual maturity, having left all the "elementary teachings about the Christ," all of the beginnings revealed in the old covenant. You have grown beyond all of the ceremonies, sacrifices, holy days, rituals, cleansings, ordinances, all of the symbols and types and shadows that pointed to the Messiah who has now come. You have pressed on to maturity. You have left the ABCs of the old covenant and you have seized the glorious riches of the new covenant. You are no longer laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God, and of instruction about washing, and laying on of hands, and the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. You have moved beyond an obsession with those prominent features of the old covenant that pointed to Christ and you have now embraced Christ himself. Furthermore, beloved, we are convinced of better things concerning you, and things that accompany salvation, because you obviously took advantage of those astounding opportunities that God gave you to embrace Christ as Savior and Lord, when he enlightened your mind to the truth of your sin and the Savior, when your heart was broken over your sin and you cried out for undeserved mercy and believed in him, and you were given the privilege of being in the company of the Holy Spirit and you witnessed those incredible signs and wonders. Maybe you were even part of them. Maybe you ate of the fish and the loaves on the mountain with the Lord. Maybe you were healed by him. You took advantage of what you tasted in those heavenly gifts. You devoured his word. You believed in him. You responded to that power that you saw that would one day dominate the earth in the messianic kingdom. Your heart melted in humble repentance and you cried out for mercy and God saved you. Beloved, we are convinced of better things concerning you, and the

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things that accompany salvation. It is so obvious that you never fell away from those opportunities, those invitations that God gave you to be saved, but you embraced Christ by his grace.

So our confidence is full because of what we see and now as Peter says, your eternal inheritance in salvation is perfected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you what? Greatly rejoice. Can I hear that? Greatly rejoice. So our confidence of better things for you and the things that accompany salvation, not only includes 1: a life that contrasts with the unbelievers that were previously described but, secondly, we see a heart that loves God and serves others. Notice 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 in still ministering to the saints." My, what comforting words these are. Don't you know they were just thrilled to hear this? God is not unjust so as to forget your work and love for him and the saints. Beloved, I pray that we all hear this, especially in those seasons of life when we might be tempted to think that he has just forgotten us; as if we labor and we love in vain; as if God is indifferent at best, and unfaithful at worst, which would make him unjust. But God is not unjust because in truth God's righteousness is based upon his very character. It is related to his perfect judgment and his covenant faithfulness in salvation. Speaking through the prophet Isaiah, the Lord says this in Isaiah 49, he says, "Can a woman forget her nursing child And have no compassion on the son of her womb?" The answer is obviously, "No way." Then he says this, "Even those may forget, I will not forget you. Behold, I have inscribed you on the palms of My hands."

I wish to offer you another example of this. As I meditated upon this passage, it ministered to my heart as I thought about this. Less than 100 years after approximately 50,000 Jews in exile returned to Judah from the Babylonian captivity, those covenant people of God began to repeat the very sins that got them in trouble in the first place. Does it sound familiar? The very sins that brought about God's judgment through the Assyrian and the Babylonian deportations, so God spoke words of coming judgment upon them through his prophet Malachi. But some of the people who heard these solemn words of judgment were truly faithful. They loved the Lord and they served the Lord. Think how hard it would have been for them to hear about coming judgment. They're thinking to themselves, you know, it's been 2,000 years since God made his covenant promises to Abraham and none of the glorious promises of the Abraham and the Davidic and the new covenant had been fulfilled in their ultimate sense, and so it's easy to think, "Well, has God forgotten us? We love him, we're serving him and now we're hearing of judgment because of all of the sin."

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In Malachi 3:16, we read this, "Then those who feared the LORD spoke to one another, and the LORD gave attention and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear the LORD and who esteem His name." God said this, "They will be Mine," says the LORD of hosts, 'on the day that I prepare My own possession, and I will spare them as a man spares his own son who serves him. So you will again distinguish between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve Him.'" Then in chapter 4, verse 2, he goes on to say, "But for you who fear My name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings; and you will go forth and skip about like calves from the stall." Oh, child of God, hear this: God is not unjust so as to forget who we are and what we do. Dear Christian, he is intimately and eternally aware of us. Our names have been written in the Lamb's book of life before the foundation of the world. The Triune Godhead dwells within us. Jesus said in Luke 12:7, "Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear; you are more valuable than many sparrows."

You Sunday school teachers, you nursery workers, you Awana workers, you musicians, those of you who clean the church, prepare the food and wash the dishes and pay the bills and keep the grounds, God is not unjust so as to forget your work. You pastors who are listening, who serve in obscure little churches perhaps in places that nobody knows, know this: God is not unjust so as to forget your work. You missionary church planters that have given your life to a particular people, know this: God is not unjust so as to forget your work. You parents, you grandparents who exhaust yourselves serving your children, praying for them, you prayer warriors who perhaps are unable maybe because of your physical condition aren't able to do anything else, know this: when the tears roll down your cheeks in the middle of the night as you lament over the souls of those that you love, know that God is not unjust so as to forget your work.

I'm inclined to camp upon this a bit more. It's such a precious truth, isn't it? I was reminded as well in my time of study with the Lord of when David was fleeing from Saul. I've been to the very place where all of that happened, maybe some of you have been there, and in an effort to somehow conquer his fears, he recalled the faithfulness of God. We read about this in Psalm 56, but especially in verse 8 he says this, "Thou has taken account of my wanderings, put my tears in thy bottle. Are they not in thy book?" In his suffering, in his anguish, in his fear, David appealed to the intimate love of God for his own and the imagery of tears in his bottle really captures the depth of God's tender care and concern for his own. Ancient Jews would make their own, it literally looks like a little glass vial and I've got a friend that has a collection of these, I have held them in my hand. They are very very fragile. And that was a reminder that God keeps their tears and they would even put their tears in those little vials. Likewise David says, "are they not in thy book?" So in other words, David was emboldened, he was encouraged because he

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knows that God remembers. He knows that God is just and he never forgets our work and our love for him. Oh, child of God, to know that God is intimately aware of all that we do for his glory, to know that he is intimately concerned with all of our ways to the point where he remembers our every tear, this should stir our hearts to praise and to rejoicing come what may. Paul says in Galatians 6:9, "Let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap if we do not give up." And do you know what? True believers never give up.

So no true believers should ever fear God's judgment. We are hidden with Christ. We are clothed in the righteousness of Christ. We can never be condemned. And if that isn't enough, notice verse 10 again, "For God is not unjust so as to forget your work and the love which you have shown toward His name," that is, the love for God as revealed in Christ, "in having ministered and in still ministering to the saints." You see, those who truly love God as revealed in Christ, will live for his glory and will minister to those who belong to him and they will do this because of his name. I think of 3 John 7, remember the passage there speaks of itinerant missionaries that are risking their lives to share the Gospel. Why did they do it? John says they have gone out for the sake of the name, for the glory of God, because his consummate perfections and his power are all capsulized in his name. You see, true believers are so deeply humbled by God's work of redemption, so overwhelmed by his undeserved love, that they will automatically serve and love those that he has redeemed. Again, folks, these types of kindnesses are marks of true believers. John speaks of this in 1 John 3, beginning in verse 16. There we read, "We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth." Then he goes on in verse 23, "This is His commandment, that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as He commanded us. The one who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. We know by this that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us."

Now, think for a moment the kind of ministry that must have taken place in that early church. Do you realize that those who truly came to Christ would have been outcasts in their community, outcasts from their families? Many of them had no place to live anymore. Some of them had lost their job. They had no income. No food. No place to stay. Imagine if that was the case here and so we would have to take you into our homes. They had to meet in secret locations to avoid persecution. I've been to some of the underground churches in Israel. To this day they have to meet that way for fear of persecution from the Jews. And for this reason, many of them would try to keep their distance from those that loved Christ, even true believers would do that, and that

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prompted the exhortation in Hebrews 10:23 where the writer says, "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near." Well, obviously the writer to the Hebrews saw how some of the saints tirelessly served their brothers and sisters in Christ and, folks, these are the works that accompany salvation. These are the things that are so compelling, so powerful, that it gave him confidence of better things concerning them, things that accompany salvation in contrast to the grave danger of judgment that would be the certain doom of those who would fall away from the truth and fall back into Judaism.

Now, practically speaking, I trust that you can all see that true believers are not born into isolation. We're not born into isolation. We're not to be Lone Rangers. We're born into the family of God. We're part of a body. We have brothers and sisters in Christ. And any man that says he is a Christian yet lives in isolation and has no desire to associate with or minister to other Christians, is a hypocrite. Scripture is very clear. James 2:26, "faith without works is dead." It's phony. It's not alive. And it's our service to Christ that really validates genuine saving faith and love for him. Now, what does this say about people who hang around the church and yet show no desire to minister to their brothers and sisters in Christ? Well, it certainly says they have no burning love for Christ, and it may even say that they don't belong to him. John speaks about this in 1 John 3:14, "We know that we have passed out of death into life," we know, in other words, that we are truly born again, why? "Because we love the brethren." Is that so hard to understand? "He who does not love abides in death."

You see, folks, true believers crave and they deeply enjoy being with and sacrificially serving those who share a common bond of love for Christ and our effectiveness in serving Christ is really proportional to our love for him. The more passionately we love the Lord, the more passionate we will be in doing his will which includes, first and foremost, ministering to the saints in the body. And I have to say, except for maybe a few exceptions here at Calvary Bible Church, I am so thankful that I can say of you what Paul said about the saints in Thessalonica in 1 Thessalonians 1:2. He says, "We give thanks to God always for all of you, making mention of you in our prayers; constantly bearing in mind your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of our God and Father, knowing, brethren beloved by God, His choice of you."

So the better things concerning you, things that accompany salvation that he sees in their lives, are so convincing. Not only a life 1, that contrasts with the unbelievers that were previously described; and secondly, a heart that loves God and serves others; but finally,

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he sees an assurance in them, an assurance that God will accomplish what he has promised. Now, bear in mind, speaking again to the borderline believers and the Christian unbelievers, he says this, he shifts here in verse 11 and he speaks to them and he says, "And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence." The term "diligence" means "zeal," it means "haste," it means "passion," it means "eagerness; an eagerness to love God; to trust Christ and live for the glory of God." "We desire that each one of you show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end." To paraphrase it, he's saying this: we want you to look at those within the church, those who truly love Christ, who live for his glory, who minister to the saints, and show the same earnestness for the full assurance of hope until the end. We could put it this way: show the same zeal for the sovereign grace of God that saves us because some of you don't understand that. Some of you don't get that. Some of you still think that you can contribute something to your salvation by keeping the law rather than trusting solely in Christ.

Folks, this is so profound. I hope you don't miss this because this is really the climax of this whole section of warnings to these dear unbelievers. Here's where he's going with this: you see, whenever man thinks that he can contribute something to salvation, he will never realize the full assurance of hope until the end. It's impossible for that to happen because he's got to trust in himself. I don't trust myself. You hear people say, "You just need to trust yourself." No, I don't. "Oh, you just need to trust your heart." Oh, no I don't. I need to trust God, I need to trust his word but I don't need to trust me. I don't have much confidence in me.

You see, at the most fundamental level, those unbelieving Jews simply could not bring themselves to genuine faith in the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ. They could not bring themselves to a place where they completely, without reservation, trusted in sovereign grace, the sovereign grace of God alone to save them. Just can't go that far. You see, they didn't understand that the law of God in the old covenant was given to them in order to demonstrate the holy character of God and the utter impossibility of man to be able to conform to his holy character. They did not understand that it was designed to show man his sin, to prove to man his innate inability to conform to the moral character and desires of God. They didn't understand that it was a tutor to help them see their need for a Savior that would come as a part of the new covenant. It was not given to them so that they could somehow manipulate it and deceive themselves into believing that they could keep enough of it to somehow earn their salvation. This was their big problem and this is why they would embrace certain aspects of the Gospel but not wholeheartedly commit themselves to Christ and make a clean break from Judaism. That would require too much faith, not to mention a whole lot of persecution.

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So they would fall away from that opportunity to receive salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, and they would fall back into Judaism. They would fall back into what we could call a man-centered religion. All false religions are man-centered at some level and, of course, a man-centered religion will rob a person of any zeal to realize the full assurance of hope until the end. You just can't do it because you're depending upon yourself. And isn't it interesting that law-keeping or legalism in any form gives a person merely the illusion of spirituality? He feels good about himself because he's keeping certain rules and when he keeps those certain rules, he believes in his heart, foolishly, that God is much more impressed with him than he was before. I run across this a lot with folks who believe that. When I do, I always look for an opportunity to say to them, "So I'm curious, do you think you'll make the cut?" And they are pretty silent when you say that. I remember talking with a dear brother in Christ, loves the Lord, godly man, but he didn't understand these things. He didn't believe you could ever have any assurance of salvation and he would say, "Well, you know, we just won't know until the end." Really?

You see, with these kind of people there is always this lingering doubt, especially if a person is not saved. There is this lingering doubt because for the unsaved person, the Spirit of God is not dwelling in them, bearing with their spirit that they are indeed children of God. So what do people do in situations like that? Well, typically two things: one, come up with more rules and regulations because if some is good, more is even better and that's why when you get around these people, there is no end to the rules. All you have to do is look at the Pharisees and see that. I mean, it just turned into absurdity the things that they would do. The second thing that people will do and we see this all the time in our culture, they will have to find ways to animate their emotions to make them feel spiritual. We've all seen this. Christianity is not based upon faith but upon subjective feeling, kind of how I feel, and truth claims are validated primarily by subjective experiences, not objective revelation. So people go to church and, for example, they go to church to get charged up emotionally. The worship services focus upon emotion. You see, worship is what happens before the guy or the gal comes up to preach. I mean, that's kind of the thinking. So you have all of the music and the clapping and the singing and the dancing around and the waving and a lot of times tongues, if you've been in those situations, and of course, a careful exposition of the word is typically not to be found because that's not important, in fact, that's not even considered worship. I remember one lady who had come out of those circles who had come to visit our church and she was all upset when she left. She only came one time which isn't all that uncommon, and I heard through someone else that she had talked to that she said, "Oh, that church is dead. The Spirit isn't there. All they want to do is study the Bible. All they want to do is study the Bible." So, you see, what we're doing now isn't considered worship because it's not all emotional.

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## Discerning True Believers from False Part 3

By David Harrell

**Bible Text:** Hebrews 6:9-12  
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So what's important to people like this is convincing themselves that somehow they are in good graces with God, and in order to do that, you have to find things that will pump up your emotions so that you can have some assurance that you are heaven bound. And I have found over the years that these are the people that have the greatest problem with assurance because their focus is not on the God who is going to accomplish his will but upon man who determines God's will. You see, for them God's will is ultimately subject to their will and whenever there exists an unbiblical man-centered focus in doctrine and preaching in the church, there rises a form of Christianity that is governed by subjective feeling rather than objective truth.

We all know people who are ruled by their emotions. They are like a boat at the mercy of the waves. They are up one day and down the next, sometimes one hour and then the next they are different. You see, their joy and their assurance of faith, their hope is all subject to their circumstances and their emotions that rule them. Is it any wonder why so many people today are diagnosed bipolar? I've counseled many people that think this way. Here's kind of how they think, they will say to themselves, "Oh, I'm so excited about life today! I'm feeling good! I'm making it happen! God must be pleased with me! Things are going my way! I feel good about myself! Uh-oh, what just happened? I can't believe that just happened. I can't believe he just said that or she just said that. I'm done. It's over. Oh no, life stinks. Maybe I've offended God. I wonder if he has forsaken me? I wonder if I've lost my salvation?" And this cycle goes back and forth and back and forth. Folks, this is what happens when a person has no zeal for the steadfast faithfulness of a sovereign God and therefore they cannot relax with great confidence in the purposes that God has to accomplish all that he has promised. They do not have the full assurance of hope until the end.

You see, true Christianity is not based upon what man does or how man feels about himself. True Christianity is based upon what God has done. That objective truth. Our full assurance of hope to the end is not something that we feel on Sundays when the music is playing, but rather it is the dominant theme of our heart anchored securely in the character and the promises of a sovereign God. That's what faith is all about. In fact, later on the writer of Hebrews will tell us in verse 19 of chapter 6, "This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast and one which enters within the veil, where Jesus has entered as a forerunner for us, having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek." Oh yes, I know some of you don't want to hear that. Your ears have become dull. You have become insensitive to all of this and that goes back to the earlier warning. By the way, later on he will expand upon that.

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So we come back to our text in verse 11, "And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence," the same zeal, "so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end, so that you will not be sluggish," dull, lazy, apathetic, "but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises." In other words, be imitators of those who have this kind of zeal for the truth; who have this earnestness to trust in Christ completely, to live for his glory; those who realize the full assurance of hope until the end evidenced by their patience, by their faith, by their love and their service for Christ.

Then he's going to go on now to give an example of Abraham that we will look at the next time we're together, but in closing with our time almost gone, I want to give you another example of one who had this kind of diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end because, folks, I so desperately want this for you, I want this for me and I'm so thankful it's available to us if we understand the Gospel. Let me tell you about one of my favorite Bible heroes, the Apostle Paul. He endured enormous amounts of suffering at the hands of evil men, both inside and outside of the church. In fact, he spent about 25% of his time as a missionary in prison. In the last months of his life, we know that he languished in the miseries of an overcrowded, cold, damp, dark, Roman dungeon. Those dungeons, by the way, were inhumane. They tell us that the stench was unimaginable. There were no toilets and basically those dungeons were kind of like the septic tank of the prison. Men and women were put together. Like all prisoners, Paul would have been stripped naked, then he would have been flogged, his back would have been open, just torn all to pieces. The wounds would be left untreated and they would put the garments back on, garments covered in blood. Then they would have to sit in painful leg or wrist irons, chains, and often they were chained by the neck. Sometimes they were chained to other prisoners. We don't know for sure with Paul exactly how he was chained. Sleep would have been almost impossible, as you can imagine. Food and water were scarce and often prisoners would have to depend upon people outside, family members, friends, to bring something in for them to eat. Suicide and even rape were commonplace.

Paul is facing imminent execution. He had served the Lord all these years and with virtually all of his friends gone and abandoned him because of fear of persecution, Paul passes the mantle of ministry onto young Timothy in his second epistle and young Timothy was a man that was prone to fear and discouragement and even depression and so here's what Paul says to Timothy in this condition, 2 Timothy 1:6, "Timothy, kindle afresh the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline. Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord or of me His prisoner, but join with me in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God." Verse 12 he went on to say, "For this reason I also suffer these things, but I am not ashamed," now catch what he says, "for I know whom I have believed and I am convinced that He is able to guard what I have

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entrusted to Him until that day." Talk about assurance. Don't tell me that you can't have assurance of salvation. Either God is who he says he is or he's a liar. He went on in chapter 4 and verse 6 and following to say, "For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing."

Oh, child of God, be diligent to realize the full assurance of hope until the end by God's grace.

Let's pray together.

*Father, thank you for these eternal truths that you have so graciously given to us. They are such a profound encouragement to our souls. Thank you for the hope that is ours in Christ. Thank you for the gift of faith. And I pray that by the power of your Spirit, you will bring conviction to anyone within the sound of my voice that may not know Christ as Savior. Lord, we trust you to that end and we thank you in Jesus' name. Amen.*

We pray you've been edified by this presentation. You've been listening to Pastor, Bible Teacher and Author, Dr. David Harrell. For more information or for other messages from Dr. Harrell, please visit the Olive Tree Christian Resources website at [otcr.org](http://otcr.org).

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