

Week 13: FORMED Series

Our Hope is Secure

Hebrews 6:4–20

⁴ *It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, ⁵ who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age ⁶ and who have fallen away, to be brought back to repentance. To their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace. ⁷ Land that drinks in the rain often falling on it and that produces a crop useful to those for whom it is farmed receives the blessing of God. ⁸ But land that produces thorns and thistles is worthless and is in danger of being cursed. In the end it will be burned.*

⁹ *Even though we speak like this, dear friends, we are convinced of better things in your case—the things that have to do with salvation. ¹⁰ God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them. ¹¹ We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, so that what you hope for may be fully realized. ¹² We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised.*

¹³ *When God made his promise to Abraham, since there was no one greater for him to swear by, he swore by himself, ¹⁴ saying, “I will surely bless you and give you many descendants.” ¹⁵ And so after waiting patiently, Abraham received what was promised.*

¹⁶ *People swear by someone greater than themselves, and the oath confirms what is said and puts an end to all argument. ¹⁷ Because God wanted to make the unchanging nature of his purpose very clear to the heirs of what was promised, he confirmed it with an oath. ¹⁸ God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to take hold of the hope set before us may be greatly encouraged. ¹⁹ We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, ²⁰ where our forerunner, Jesus, has entered on our behalf. He has become a high priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.*

From this week's sermon:

Luke and Janelle unpacked this chapter outlining that this scripture teaches: that those who wholeheartedly reject Jesus have no hope of return, but the fruit of persevering love is evidence of genuine, secure faith, because God's promise and oath make our hope an unbreakable anchor.

Scholarly Insight:

The opening lines of this passage 6:4-6 are a challenging text, wrestled with by many. But in context, please note the tremendous reassurance and hope that comes from verses 9-20.

Guthrie States:¹

IT IS NO EXAGGERATION to designate the passage we now consider as one of the most controversial in the book of Hebrews—indeed, one of the most disputed in the entire New Testament. It would not be surprising, therefore, if some readers of this commentary have come

¹ George Guthrie, Hebrews, (Zondervan Academic, 2009), pg 216.

first to this spot in the volume to see where I stand on the issue of apostasy! This theological issue, although only one component among the concerns of Hebrews, does constitute a matter of the gravest concern and a matter at the heart of the author's intention for the book. The two passages grouped in this section of the commentary (6:4–8 and 6:9–12) offer two sides of a balanced approach to exhortation: stern warning and mitigation, or softening, of the warning. In 6:4–8 the writer presents a well-crafted and harsh caution meant to put fear into the hearts of those drifting from the faith. Verses 9–12 then express the author's confidence that those in his audience do not fit the description just provided. This word of encouragement ends with twin exhortations: "show ... diligence" and "do not ... become lazy" (vv. 11–12). In crafting an exhortation composed of both warning and mitigation, the author presents a symmetry in the rhetoric of this portion of his sermon.

In another commentary he and a team suggest:²

This is, therefore, a bridging passage, like many in Hebrews: taking its cue from the pastoral exhortation of vv.11–12, with its reference to the faith of the patriarchs, it leads us back into the main stream of the argument, establishing in the process the important principle that God's word, and still more God's oath, is a firm foundation for Christian assurance. In a remarkable series of metaphors in vv.18–20, the author gives vivid expression to the security we have in Christ, a security that contrasts sharply with the terrible condition of the apostates, which he has set out in vv.4–8.

Witherington's comments:³

We have arrived here at perhaps the most controverted part of the whole discourse, especially in the medieval debate about postbaptismal sin and whether one could be restored after abandoning the Christian faith. This text is about apostasy, a very specific grave sin, not about sins in general that might be committed after baptism. One of the key factors in analyzing this section is to realize that our author is trying to put the "fear of God" into his audience by using rhetoric to prevent defections, and so one is not sure how far to press the specifics here, since it is possible to argue that some of this involves dramatic hyperbole. More clearly, our author sees his audience as Christians who need to be moving on to more mature Christian teaching and reflection and living. Instead, they had become stagnant or sluggish in their progress toward full maturity, and so to some extent the rhetoric serves as an intended stimulus so they will persevere and press on to the goal, and our author gives a passing reference to his beliefs and hopes for better things from them than apostasy. A good deal of this section is meant as a kind of honor challenge, meant to force the audience to wake up and be prepared to grapple with harder concepts about Jesus' priesthood, but it is also a moral wake-up call as well, reminding the audience that those who are not busily moving forward are instead treading water at best and falling back or defecting altogether at worst.

Allister McGrath Explains (Arguing from his belief in a person's Eternal Security, that once obtained, a person cannot lose their salvation):

At this point someone might ask: If salvation is sure and permanent, what is the point of the warnings and commands given to the believer? The answer is that they are the means by which God renders it certain that the saved individual will not fall away. Consider as an analogy the case of parents who fear that their young child may run out into the street and be struck by a

² George Guthrie, Tremper Longman, and David Garland, *Hebrews*, James, (Zondervan Academic, 2017), pg 87.

³ Ben Witherington, *Letters and Homilies for Jewish Christians*, (IVP Academic, 2010), pg 205

car. One way the parents can prevent that from happening is to build a fence around the yard, which would prevent the child from leaving the yard, but would also remove the child's freedom. Try as he or she might, the child could not possibly get out of the yard. That is the idea some persons have of what perseverance is. Another possibility is for the parents to teach and train the child regarding the danger of going into the street and the importance of being careful. This is the nature of the security we are discussing. It is not that God renders apostasy impossible by removing the very option. Rather, he uses every possible means of grace, including the warnings contained in Scripture, to motivate us to remain committed to him.

For Reflection:

- Luke encouraged us to examine our faith and belief against God's word and wrestle with difficult questions when they come up. Do you have any questions that you are holding onto? Jesus can handle your questions, so who can you talk to about this? A friend, family member, pastor? Remember, our faith is in an unchangeable person!
- While we can and should wrestle with Jesus' teaching, we don't get to decide which parts we keep and which we throw away, that's *deconstruction*. Is there anywhere in your life where have you been tempted to pick and choose which parts of Jesus' teaching you will follow?
- Verses 13–20 anchor our hope in two unchangeable things: God's promise and God's oath. Is there anywhere in your life where you have been resting your hope in something that *can* change, whether finances, health, a relationship and/or a plan, instead of in Jesus?

For Discussion:

1. Did the Holy Spirit highlight anything to you as you listened to the sermon (and/or read Hebrews 6:4–20)?
2. Do you think there is a reason that the writer begins with such a strong warning (verses 4–8) before moving to words of encouragement (verses 9–20)? What does this balance of warning and reassurance reveal about God's heart for his people?
3. The writer points to perseverance, love, and diligence as evidence of genuine faith (vv. 9–12). Have you seen God producing these kinds of fruit in your own life? Where do you sense he is still growing you?
4. Hebrews describes hope in Christ as "an anchor for the soul, firm and secure" (verses 19–20). Have you experienced hope as an anchor at a challenging time in your life? If you are comfortable, share your testimony with those in the group.
5. God's promise and oath to Abraham remind us that God's character, not our performance, is the foundation of our confidence (verses 13–18). How would trusting in God's faithfulness change the way you face trials, uncertainty, disappointment, or waiting?
6. After reading this chapter, what is one practical step you can take this week to continue growing in faith rather than becoming spiritually sluggish (verse 12)? Consider one specific action that will help you remain anchored in Christ and encourage others in their faith.

Pray for each other:

Father, thank You that our hope is anchored in Your unchanging character and in Jesus, our great High Priest. Holy Spirit, strengthen us to persevere in faith, to trust Your promises, and to keep growing in love and obedience. Help us to encourage one another this week and remain firmly anchored in Christ, whatever we face. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Formation Practice:

As we explore being Formed by Jesus this series; we want to encourage you to do this simple exercise every day for the next 2 months. It can take 5 minutes or more, whatever you are able to achieve (and as you do it more and more, you'll likely find it easier to spend longer listening and reflecting).

"Draw Near Daily" Rhythm (5–10 minutes)

- ***Come:*** *Quiet yourself before God.*
- ***Confess:*** *Be honest about sin/struggle.*
- ***Receive:*** *Remember what Christ has done.*
- ***Respond:*** *Take one step of obedience.*