

Title: Don't Stop Believing
Text: Hebrews 10.39
Theme: Perseverance
Series: Hebrews #33
Aim: I aim to help my people understand the true nature of conversion and call them to repent and believe in Christ.
Prop Stmt. If we truly repented and believed, we will not stop repenting and believing.

It has been nearly 30 years since Journey, released the song, "Don't Stop Believing" and yet it continues to be one of the most downloaded songs on the internet. But when you examine the lyrics, they are actually rather pathetic. The refrain tells us, "Don't Stop Believing" but the verses provide very little reason to support the refrain. "Some will win, some will lose, some were born to sing the blues so Don't Stop Believing." Ok, no one said that it made any sense, and besides, the opening keyboard riff is pretty tight, so even though it is not a laudable work of poetry, the chorus continues to resonate over a generation later with kids about old enough to be the Journey's grandchildren. Religion, sadly, is a great deal like this song. There is a lot of hype about believing but, when you examine the reason for believing, then you are often met with a lot of empty tradition. "Why do you believe that?" "Well, I was raised that way." That is not good enough.

For this past year, we have been studying the book of Hebrews verse by verse and chapter by chapter. We have just concluded chapter 10 and are about to launch into the gloriously encouraging and convicting chapter 11. But, before we do that, I am doing a mini-series on perseverance in order to summarize and synchronize what we have been learning, particularly as this relates to the warning passages in this book. This book warns us about the dangers of not persevering. The theme of this book is, "Press on Pilgrim." But, this call to perseverance is based on some rigorous theology. And this morning, I aim to help you understand the true nature of conversion and if you are not a genuine follower of Christ to call you to repent and believe in Christ. If you are a believer, I want you to see that repentance and faith is not only the means by which we become a believer, but repentance and faith now marks our lives as believers. I also want you to see what the Scriptures say about the person, who at one time claimed to be a believer, but whose life longer has the fruit of repentance (does not really care about sin) nor the fruit of belief (has not affection for Christ, His Word, His people, for holiness).

Has it ever amazed you to hear the statistics of people who claim to be believers in this country? So, what does it really mean to be a believer? Does faith mean that you simply acknowledge that there are unseen, spiritual forces at work, like the some undefined higher power? Is faith something that we all have and that we all get to define however we want? There is deep doctrinal content that anchors the flags of commitment and provides foundation and substantive reasons for believing. We are never called to believe in believing. God calls us to believe. But God does not call us to believe in faith. God calls us to respond with repentance and faith to the truth of the gospel. Last week, I began by stating that "Profession of faith does not guarantee conversion." I pointed out that

Christ himself was rightfully suspicious of the validity of some professions of faith. This same suspicion was echoed throughout the rest of the NT. So, what is conversion?

Question #1 – What is genuine conversion?

How do the Scriptures present it? What we find is that conversion is our willing response to the call of the gospel, in which we sincerely repent of our sins and place our trust in Christ for salvation Acts 20.20-21 Paul, speaking to the elders from the church at Ephesus is reviewing his ministry with them and say, “*I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.*” Later in verse 27, he reminds them that he taught them the “whole counsel of God.” Do you see the two aspects of conversion? They are genuine repentance and genuine faith. Genuine repentance and genuine faith go hand in hand, like two sides of the same coin. But, repentance is not talked about much these days and my concern is that the evangelical church has been preaching (sharing – sorry, we are not supposed to preach anymore – too opinionated) a deficient gospel by not bringing the whole thing. Paul says that he taught them the whole counsel of God, both repentance and faith. Do you remember what Jesus preached? Mark 1.14 “...*Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”* Genuine repentance is united to genuine belief. Both Genuine repentance and genuine faith have three components: understanding, affection and will. Let’s look at genuine repentance keeping in mind that I am talking about biblical repentance. I am talking about repentance the way God defines it. This is not simply being sorry for the embarrassment of the action or the consequences of the action but is grieving over the very nature of the sin itself.

A. Genuine Repentance is comprised of:

- 1) *A Change of Understanding:* One needs to understand the actual sinfulness of the thought or deed.

This is not simply a flaw, a defect, a weak spot or disappointment. This is more than, “everyone has their stuff” language. Repentance starts with using the language that God does about our thinking and actions. We have to cognitively, consciously realize that wrongness of our actions and identify it as such. That leads to a change in affection.

- 2) *A Change of Affection:* Affection refers to grieving over MY sin.

When I am grieving over my sin, I am not making jokes about it, making light of it, nor am I making any excuses for it. This means that I not only understand that this is a sin, but that I man-up and own it and feel the weight of my own sin and see the seriousness of my true condition.

- 3) *A Change of Will*: The final aspect of repentance is when after recognizing the sinfulness of the thought or deed and after owning up to my guilt, I renounce the sin and go the other direction.

This means that I do not tolerate it. I do not give it any quarter. I make no compromises with it. In repentance, we take no prisoners and we show no mercy to the sin. Sin is your enemy. You must be ruthless with it. Repentance understands this.

Therefore, repentance is, understanding the nature of my sin, grieving over it and despising it in my heart, renouncing it and committing to walk in harmony with Christ.

The Scriptures are clear that you may feel remorse over your sins for any number of reasons. 2 Cor. 7.9-10 calls this worldly grief. Esau, Saul and Judas Iscariot are examples of this. Judas was sorry of the mess that he made. He was so sorry that he committed suicide. But that was not biblical repentance because it did not drive him to Christ. True repentance is sorrow for sin as your response to your awareness of not only the immediate and eternal consequences of your sin but also of the filthiness and odiousness of your sins as being contrary to the holy nature and righteous law of God, which then compels you to so hate your sins that you turn from them to God in such a way that you rely completely upon his mercy.

There is a difference between being sorry because you have embarrassed yourself and brought disgrace to your family, and being overwhelmed at the actual sinfulness of your sin and how offensive it is to God. When you see sin the way God does, it leads to repentance and this repentance is not a picky repentance that is negotiating terms and cutting deals. This is repentance that says, "I am done. I am finished. Unless someone completely rescues me, I have no hope. I am a mess. I have no excuses. I have no solutions. I cannot fight this sin in my own strength. I am utterly polluted and therefore condemned. Repentance like this is a response that is in keeping with our true condition. The truth is, my sin leaves me undone. I cannot save myself. In fact, I cannot add one single thing to my own redemption. I need a Savior who will save me completely. And that is exactly what Christ has done for us on the cross. That brings us to the other side of the coin, which is genuine faith.

B. Genuine Faith is comprised of:

Looking to and trusting in Christ is the other part of conversion. Like genuine repentance, genuine belief has three aspects: understanding, affection and will.

- 1) *A Change of Understanding*: You must understand that Jesus is God in human form, who came to this earth in order to pay in full the just penalty for your sin by taking upon himself the wrath of God when he died on the cross.

If you do not understand what the gospel is, then you will not know what to believe in. There are objective facts concerning the gospel that comprise the essential doctrines of the gospel. The Bible glories and delights in knowledge and propositional truth as the

foundation of true faith. Everybody believes. Everybody has faith. The issue is, what is your faith in and, is your faith, saving faith? The only faith that will save you from your sin is faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ. The second component of genuine faith is a change in affection. A change in affection takes it a step further.

- 2) *A Change of Affection*: Affection is the personalizing of the gospel. Affection is the conviction that the knowledge one has acquired about Christ is indeed factually true and that the provisions of the gospel of Christ correspond exactly to one's actual spiritual needs. (cf. Matthew 21.25,32; John 2.22; 4.50; 5.24, 38, 46, 47; 8.31)

In other words, repentance leaves me undone and without any of my own solutions. Repentance reveals to me how serious my sin is, where as faith reveals to me how perfect and sufficient Christ is. This change in affection is not simply being moved emotionally over how much Christ suffered on the cross, but looks at the price that he paid, it looks at all of the wrath that he absorbed and looks at the Father's satisfaction with his death and in realizing these things says, "That's exactly what I need." The understanding part says, here are the facts of the gospel. This change in affection says, these are not only true, but they are true about me. That sets the stage for the final aspect of saving faith and that is a change of will.

- 3) *A Change of Will*: Personal trust is the complete reliance of one's soul upon Christ as the full and final solution for my sin and a commitment to follow him as Lord.

Without adequate understanding, there cannot be a change in affection. That is why, "*faith comes from hearing and hearing through the Word of Christ.*" (Romans 10.17) Without a change in affection there cannot be a change in the will. If I do not recognize my personal part in Christ's death, then I will not have the basis to really believe him.

So, genuine faith is when we cognitively, affectionately, and volitionally transfer all reliance for pardon, righteousness, and cleansing away from ourselves and our resources in complete and total abandonment to Christ, upon whom we joyfully rest entirely for salvation and whom we joyfully submit as Lord. (Romans 10.14)

Now, before we go to question 2, I want to address for a second why there is such resistance and hesitance to preach the whole counsel of God? Why is there such little emphasis upon repentance? I fear that this is the main reason why so many "sheep" act like goats. I fear that many people who claim to be followers of Christ are not and I fear that much of that has to do with the fact that we do not give proper attention to repentance as part of the gospel – why not? 1) Repentance is not popular and we are afraid that if we preach it that people will not believe and will not come to church. Look, if we don't preach it, then they will not really believe and if they come to church will not in reality be part of his church. So, we had better preach it, explain it and call ourselves to be in alignment with it. 2) We fear that repentance is a "work" that we do that would somehow turn the gospel into a something that we earn instead of receive by faith alone.

Listen carefully. This is very, very important that you grasp this. In Acts 5, Peter is speaking to the religious leaders of Israel and he says (vv.30-31), “*The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him at this right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.*” In Acts 11, Peter is reporting the news that Gentiles are believing the gospel. In v.18, the text says, “*they glorified God saying, Then to the Gentiles also **God has granted repentance that leads to life.***” Put that together with Ephesians 2.8-9 which says, “*For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is **the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.***” Do you see it now? Both repentance and faith are gifts from God. We would not repent if God did not give us the gift of repentance. We would not believe if God did not grant us the gift of faith. This all ties together with Paul’s argument in Romans 10 about the necessity of preaching the gospel, because God uses the preaching of the gospel as the means by which people are given the gift of repentance and faith! So, we must preach. We must witness. We must declare. We must tell. And when we do, God’s Spirit uses his gospel as the means to convict people of sin (repent) and trust in Christ.

Question #2 – Can a genuine convert become unconverted? (I.e. lose his/her salvation)

1. Jesus is the author and finisher of the faith. Hebrews 12:2
2. Believers were chosen before the foundation of the world. Eph 1:4
3. Salvation is ultimately based upon the plan of God and not the believer.
Romans 9:16
4. The believer’s names were written in the book of life from the creation of the world. Revelation 17:8
5. God’s gifts and calls are irrevocable. – Romans 11:29
6. Saving Faith is a gift from God. – Ephesians 2:1-10
7. We love him because He first loved us. 1 John 4:19
8. All of those whom the Father gives to the Son, will come to the Son and whoever comes will NEVER be cast out. John 6:37
9. Jesus will never drive away those who come to him. John 6:37
10. Jesus will never lose any of his own. John 6:39
11. Jesus will resurrect all of his own. John 6:39, 44; Romans 6:5
12. Jesus knows his sheep by name. His sheep listen to his voice and they follow him.
John 10:3-4, 27
13. Jesus said that his sheep shall never perish. John 10:28
14. Jesus said no one can take the believer out of the Father’s hand. John 10:29
15. Jesus guards the salvation of the believer. 2 Timothy 1:12
16. The Holy Spirit seals the believer. Ephesians 1:13
17. The Holy Spirit is a deposit guaranteeing the believer’s complete salvation.
Ephesians 1:14
18. Believers are united in Christ. Romans 6:5
19. Jesus loves his own to the very end. John 13:1
20. Jesus gives ETERNAL life – John 3:16; Romans 6:22; 1 Timothy 1:16

21. God finishes what He starts. Philippians 1:6
22. The believer is declared righteous - Romans 5:1
23. The believer is at peace with God - Romans 5:1
24. The believer is reconciled - Romans 5:10
25. Genuine salvation produces perseverance. Romans 5:3,4
26. The believer died to sin. Romans 6:1 (Paul's challenge in this verse makes no sense if the believer could lose his salvation. In fact, in this verse, if a believer could lose his salvation, Paul would have used that as the warning!)
27. We are a new creation. 2 Corinthians 5:17
28. There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. (Romans 8.1) If you could lose your salvation then a believer could still be condemned.
29. The promise in Romans 8.28 of working all things for the believer's good is totally invalidated if glorification is in doubt (vs. 28-30). The entire argument that Paul makes is based on the unbreakable chain of foreknowledge, predestination, calling, justification and glorification. Everyone that God chose, he predestined. Everyone he predestined he called. Everyone he called he justified. Everyone he justified is glorified. That, my friend is the gospel the way God defined it.
30. The 5 big questions and affirmations in Romans 8.31-39 are a big lie if the believer can lose his salvation.
31. The Father answers the prayers of the Son. John 17.15
32. I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. Ps. 23

So, can one who has been genuine converted become unconverted? No! Absolutely, unequivocally no! So, if this is true, then what is to prevent one from saying that since I cannot be separated from God, and I am free from eternal consequences, then, why not sin? That is a great question, and the answer is incredibly obvious.

The person who has been genuinely converted is the person whose heart has been made aware of the seriousness and odiousness of sin. Sin is not a game. Sin is not tolerated. Sin is not excused nor taken lightly. The person whose view of and treatment of sin is superficial and arrogant has not repented! When you look at all of these reasons why a genuine convert cannot become unconverted, there are two possible responses. The person who looks at these and says, "Hey I can sin and get away with it," is revealing a heart of unbelief. But, the person who looks at this and says, "I am so grateful for his mercy. I am so grateful for his power. I am so grateful for his promise to keep me and sustain me and carry me across the finish line is revealing a heart of belief. A heart of unbelief sees this as a license to sin and the heart of genuine belief sees this as a reason to persevere with an enduring boldness.

Look, if it quacks like a duck, waddles like a duck, flies like a duck, and swims like a duck, then it is a duck, even if it claims to be a dog. If it's a dog, it will bark! Now, this sermon is not done. I will finish it next week by answering the final three questions:

Question #3: How are we to understand these warning passages in Hebrews?

Question #4: What is apostasy and why is it so serious?

Question #5: What should I do if I have doubts?