

Title: Upward I Look  
Text: Hebrews 10.39  
Theme: Perseverance  
Series: Hebrews #34  
Aim: I aim to inform my people of the truths of persevering while warning them of apostasy  
Prop Stmnt: Saving faith looks to Christ for salvation and leads to a life that keeps looking to Christ.

As you can tell from the overwhelming weight of the Scriptures, that we looked at last week, a genuine convert cannot become unconverted. However, the way that this subject is discussed, usually misses the point. So, I am going to attempt to recreate some of the conversations and arguments in order to illustrate this.

### **Position A – Use it or lose it**

This group believes that since you were the one who, all on your own chose, in the first place to believe in the gospel of Christ, that you can certainly chose at any point not to believe and to walk away. They would point to passages like Heb 3.12-14 to support this position.

### **Position B – Eternally Secure**

This group also believes you were the one who chose to believe in the gospel of Christ all on your own, however, even though you believed, now you cannot un-believe. You did it, but you cannot undo it. They would point to passages like John 10.28 to support this position.

There are many arguments that go on between these two positions. Recently I was talking with a man who grew up with position A. He said that about every other Sunday a well-meaning lady in the church would bring her daughters forward at the end of the sermon in order to get saved (again), because they had once again been caught “in sin.” The sin that they were caught in, was reading the comic page of the paper. Now, people (preachers) in position B love to hear stories like that and react by saying, “What does that say about the character of God who is waiting up in heaven for one of his children to read the comics so he can kick them out of the family?” Did Jesus tell Nicodemus that you must be born again and again and again?

On the other hand, those in position B know people who professed at one time to follow Christ, but who now show no evidences of grace, but yet believe that they are “eternally secure” because they “made a decision for Christ”. People (preachers) in position A rightfully point to that abuse and say, “That’s absurd!”

Now, in working through this, it would really be helpful if people brought more honesty, charity and understanding to the table. The gal, who thinks her daughters lost their salvation over reading the comics, is not the poster child of position A, although position

B may like to point those stories out. Even most of the people in position A see that as being wrong. Also, the person who goes out and lives like an unbeliever while claiming to be a believer, is not what most people in position B want to champion either. However, since there are so many examples of people who use the doctrine of eternal security as an excuse to sin and be lazy, it grieves many spiritually minded people who know that what they are doing is just not right! So, they reject the doctrine of eternal security and consider it to be a dangerous doctrine because it gives a license to sin.

Years ago, I heard someone try to mediate between these two positions and said, “Believe like it depends all on Christ and live as if it depends all on you.” At the time it sounded catchy, but the more that I thought about it, the more I realized how absolutely atrocious that really is. If you believe that your salvation really depends upon Christ, then you will live like it. But if you live as if it all depends on you, you will do that because you believe that it does all depend on you. What we really believe is seen in how we live. So, that statement does not help us figure this out at all. Position A has more logic, but Position B has more proof-texts. The problem with both positions is that they are not looking at this issue deep enough and neither side has the correct perspective.

I need to rabbit trail for a bit. Deuteronomy 29.29 says, *“The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.”* Notice the three points of this statement. 1) There are some things that God has not revealed to you. 2) There are some things that God has revealed. 3) What God has revealed is all that you and I need to know in order to live as we should. For example, God tells us that he is working everything according to his plan and that it all fits together. But, He does not tell exactly how everything fits together. He has revealed in the Scriptures many examples that support and illustrate this truth, but we still do not know exactly how our situation right now is being used and will be used in his plan. But the fact that we know that he has a plan and that he is carrying out his plan is all that we need to know in order to live by faith in him. So, what is our job? Our job is NOT to try to figure out all of the secret things. Those are God’s! Our job is to focus on what he has revealed and respond with a faith-driven obedience. From God’s perspective, he sees exactly how it all works out. But we are not responsible to know all of that, we ARE responsible to know that he is working it all out and what is on my plate is to trust him and follow him. He sees what we do not see.

The Scriptures are abundantly clear about the sovereignty of God. Think on this verse. “Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases.” (Psalm 115.3) “Whatever the LORD pleases, he does, in heaven and on earth, in the seas and all deeps.” (Psalm 135.6) Let me show you one more. *“for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose.... I have spoken, and I will bring it to pass; I have purposed, and I will do it.”* Beloved, that is Sovereignty! Do you believe this? Do you believe that God is the Sovereign ruler over all of his creation? Do you believe that God has determined and ordained his plan from eternity past? Do you believe that I am setting you up? (Yes) Do you believe that God is sovereign over the nations? Do you believe that God is sovereign over armies? Do you

believe that God is sovereign over the weather, and elections, and the economy? Do you believe that God is sovereign over animals? Do you believe that God is sovereign over your circumstances? Do you believe that God is sovereign over mankind? Do you believe that God is sovereign over salvation? And yet, the fact that God does everything that he pleases, that we cannot stop the plan of God, and that he has ordained the end from the beginning is not only part of what God has revealed, but in revealing this much to us, he reveals that he has not revealed everything to us.

For example, we are called to believe the gospel. I am called to preach the gospel. We are called to be witnesses of the gospel. We are called to spread the gospel. So, like Paul, we are not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes. We know that the gospel is so powerful, that every single person who truly believes in Christ will be saved. So we talk it, spread it, discuss it and call upon people to believe it. When I look at the gospel from my vantage point, I see my responsibility to believe and now my responsibility to spread this message. But, when I look at the gospel from God's vantage point, I realize that the reason why I believed and the reason why anyone believes is because it is God who has elected them and predestined them and called them and justified them and glorified them. God does not tell us everything about the doctrine of election, but he does tell us enough for us to know that we cannot take credit for our salvation. However, the doctrine of election was never given by God to give us an excuse not to witness. Now, pay attention to this very carefully because this will help you understand not only this issue, but also the issue that Hebrews is addressing regarding perseverance. When you only look at salvation from your vantage point, it is easy to conclude that you were the one who ultimately and individually (all by yourself without any coercion from God) made the decision to trust in Christ. Because that is how it appeared to you. Of course, if that were really the case, then there would be no reason for anyone to pray for someone to get saved since God would have nothing to do with it. But the reason that we pray for people to get saved is because if God did not breathe life into our cold dead spiritual hearts, we would never believe. But when he breathes life into us, we are born again and now we have faith to believe. When God breathes life into our spirits, we are made alive and we believe. Ephesians 2.1-10.

But, when you only look at the passages of Scripture that deal with the Sovereignty of God it is easy for some to adopt a fatalistic view. Is there a way of reconciling the Scriptures teaching on God's sovereignty over salvation and our responsibility to believe and then preach the gospel? Absolutely!! These truths are not in competition with each other. In fact, the Sovereignty of God in drawing people to Christ absolutely rocks my world! This truth gives me such a passionate confidence in God's gospel because I know that ultimately it is not up to me to make you believe. It is up to me to preach the gospel and God has made the gospel so incredibly powerful, that all I have to do, all that you have to do is make it known and God will assault hard hearts and break down walls and bring people to repentance. My job is to preach. His job is to save and he is mighty to save and he able to save and he saves completely all who come to him. And he uses me and he uses you as part of his means to carry out his plan that he ordained from eternity past. It is not my job to figure out who he has chosen. It is my job to believe! It is my job

to preach. I can do my job with great confidence because I know that he is doing his job and his job will not be stopped.

Now, here is the connection. The doctrine of eternal security is looking at the believer's position from God's perspective. God knows those who are his and he will not let them go. We don't know all of those who are his. We only know those who profess to believe in Christ and whose lives support that profession. But, persevering in the faith is looking at the believer's position from our perspective. Our responsibility is to persevere and genuine believers do persevere because it is God who has an eternal hold upon us. What can happen to a person who only looks at the passages that lay out the doctrine of election? That person can look at that doctrine in isolation from the rest of the Scriptures and end up using this glorious truth as an excuse for disobedience, which then distorts the doctrine. The same thing is true about eternal security. If you look at that in isolation from the warning passages in Hebrews and the rest of the NT, if you fail to take to heart the Bible's teaching on perseverance, then you too will likely end up using this glorious truth as an excuse for not dealing with your sin, as an excuse for not repenting, instead of for the encouragement to persevere that it is intended to have. That is what I fear many in Position B have done through the years which people have reacted to (with good reason) in some cases with Position A, which does not square with the Scriptures. That is why we must look at Position C.

**Position C – Genuine believers will not persevere in sin but will persevere in the faith.**

Whereas Position B regards everyone whoever professed faith in Christ as a genuine believer no matter what, Position C says that a genuine believer while certainly not perfect, and will have many ups and downs, and may for a time drift away, but a genuine believer cannot stay away.

Illustration – Luke 22.31-34

Now we are ready for question #3.

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

Let's look at some of them. Hebrews 2.1-4 (notice the emphasis upon "we"); 3.7-19 (notice that this is given to "holy brothers" – v.1). You see the same thing in 6.4-8 and the one we recently looked at in 10.26-31. These warnings are given to professing believers. At the time a person professes faith in Christ, no one really knows if they truly repenting of sin, trusting in Christ and surrendering the rule of their hearts to him, or using him to get a better life, a better marriage, to please parents or friends. We have in our church people who are cultural Christians. Beloved, listen carefully. God wants you to know the truth about your spiritual condition. He is gracious to warn you about the dangers of not persevering. One who does not persevere by faith, in the faith, may not be in the faith. Times of testing, times of pressure, times of discouragement, times of doubt, times of temptation, times of difficulty are designed by God to help you see what is on

the inside. Anyone can believe in God when things are going well. That is the entire point of the warning passage in Hebrews 3. It was easy to “follow God” when he leads you out of slavery in Egypt, and leads you across the sea on dry ground and drowns your enemies. It is easy to follow God when he provides a job, and health insurance, and some vacation time and people in your life who take an interest in you. But how do you respond when there is not water for 3 days, or you have to eat the same manna day after day, or when the car breaks down, when your cancer returns, when refrigerator breaks, when your kid gets sick or spouse loses a job. If you only follow God for the goodies, then you do not really follow God. God will lead you through tough times to test the authenticity of your faith. When in the midst of those tough times, you respond by sinning, because now you have an excuse, you are revealing a heart of unbelief. And the more that you go down that road, the more evidence you are demonstrating that you are not a believer. That is the heart of these warning passages. When life does not go the way that you thought it would and you find yourself in a situation that you did not ever want to be in, what is it now that you are going to believe? Do you think that since some injustice has happened to you that you now have a legitimate reason to walk away from the gospel and deny the message of Christ and the cross? If so, then you are saying that you did not believe the gospel for the sake of the gospel, but you only believed the gospel for what you could get from it. That is what these passages are warning against. These Hebrew believers were tired of the pressure, tired of the persecution and tired of going through the trials. And the AH points out that these are all helping them to go beneath the water line and really examine if they have a credible faith or just a convenient faith.

A convenient faith will make you feel good as long as life is smooth, but when the bottom drops out, you must have a credible faith because nothing else will do. I believe that the best way to take these warning passages is to see them as being written to professing believers, most of whom were the real deal. A true believer will hear these warnings, and like a sign on the side of the road warning about the curve in the road, will take the caution to heart and avoid the danger. As life goes on, they will be able to say that through many dangers, toils and snares, I have already come, tis grace has brought me safe thus far and grace will lead me home. (3.14) But, I also believe that there were probably some who were professing believers, but who were not the real deal and even though they knew the gospel intellectually and hung around other believers, they really did not believe. This is particularly dangerous for the person who has been clearly exposed to the truth and chooses to walk away. This is called apostasy.

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

Apostasy is the informed, deliberate and final rejection of the gospel that a person at one claimed to believe. It is crossing a line where a person who at one time claimed to believe Christ, but now wants nothing to do with it and essentially tells God (and usually everyone else) to leave me alone. The crossing of that line is when God answers that prayer. That person will no longer hear the voice of the Spirit calling him to believe. The consequences of this are eternal and they, as you can see are so very serious.

Apostasy starts in the heart. (3.8, 10b, 12, 15) This person becomes hardened to the voice of God because they are not getting what they think God owes them. If left unchecked it then grows into a complaining, murmuring and a generally dissatisfied spirit. Nothing is ever good enough. (3.8, 16) This murmuring leads to rebellion that is open and cold. This person (3.17) flaunts their sin in the face of God daring him to judge him and laughing at the fools who still believe.

Over and over I have stated that the gospel is at once the most glorious and the most devastating truth that there is. To believe it is the soul's greatest delight, but to reject it is the soul's worst nightmare. There is no middle ground. The one who, like Judas Iscariot is given incredible opportunities of exposure to the truth, but who does not respond to that exposure with saving faith, but instead abuses the access to the truth by using it for one's own advancement is playing with fire.

If you know the truth and have even professed to believe it and to some degree, particularly by virtue of your involvement in the community of the believers experience some of the benefits of the gospel by seeing lives changed, by seeing the effects of the Word in people's lives, by seeing relationships restored and even perhaps being a teacher of these things and involved in leadership; if you knowing all of these things and experiencing all of these things, and going along with all of these things, but not doing it by faith, but simply playing a game, you are bringing greater and greater judgment upon yourself. You see, the more that you handle the Word, the more that you are exposed to the truth the more responsible before God you are. If you do not respond to the Word with faith-driven obedience then the Word will have a hardening effect upon you instead of a softening effect.

If, when you hear the Word, or even when you teach the Word, if you do not place yourself under the authority of the Word, then you are playing a game. You are pretending that this is good for others but that you do not need it. This is particularly dangerous for preachers and teachers and leaders, who think that they are successful because people are blessed, or influenced by their ministry.

Question #5 - **What should I do if (when) I have doubts?**

1) Take that seriously.

Do not automatically assume that it is the devil trying to distract you. It may be the Spirit of God making you aware that you have a defective faith.

2) Ask yourself the tough questions:

a. "Am I trusting in Christ right now for my salvation?"

So much attention is given to whether or not you prayed the right prayer, with the right words in the right order, as if the quality of your prayer is what saves you. Your prayer does not save you; Christ is the one who saves you. Prayer can be an expression of your

trust in Christ, but the bottom line is you need to trust in Christ completely without holding anything back.

b. “Am I unwilling to give up any sin for Christ?”

If you are trying to hold on to some sin and are trying to find a way to justify it and are unwilling to come clean with it, then of course you are going to have doubts because at this moment, you are acting like an unbeliever. If you are a true believer, you will not be able to continue in sin. Recently a believer said to another professing believer who is living in unrepentant sin, “I am praying that you are miserable.” That is a very loving thing to pray because if the person in sin is miserable then it may be an indication of true faith and they will not be able to continue in it. If, however the person is in sin and has no heart conviction, then they will more than likely continue down that road.

c. “Am I demonstrating fruit that is consistent with saving faith?”

Is there evidence of the Spirit’s work in your life? Do you long for holiness? Do you fight against sin? Does sin bother you? Is your life characterized by love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control? (Gal. 5.22-23) Is your life marked by ongoing repentance and ongoing belief? Is there spiritual growth? Has your appetite for Christ and the Word and the true health of the church increased over time?

3) Recognize that no one believes perfectly.

4) Run to Christ!!

When you repent of your sin and trust in Christ, you are a believer. A believer is one whose life is marked by ongoing repentance and ongoing belief.

I love to tell couples at their wedding that as much as they love each other now, they will love each other so much more in the years to come. That “for better or for worse” thing becomes more than tradition and words on a page. Those words will one day have stories of disease, disappointments, valleys and victories. Now, the same thing is true when you come to faith in Christ. When you first repent and believe, you will not know how sinful your heart really is. As time goes on and your heart is made more and more sensitive to these matters it can be overwhelming to see the reality of our sin. That is when we must run to Christ. Even when Satan tempts me to despair and tells me of the guilt within, upward I look and see him there who made an end of all my guilt. When you come to Christ neither will you know how incredibly magnificent his grace really is. But the more you grow the more your sin will be revealed and the more his mercy will be revealed and the more amazing his grace will be and the more overwhelmed you will be by his love. You will one day say with Paul “I am the world’s worst sinner” and really believe it and at the same time be ecstatic with confidence in the power of God to save you and keep you. The gospel is the power of God that is strong enough to save and if it is strong enough to save, it is strong enough to keep you. Look at Christ again. Believing that, banking on that, anchored to that, we press on Pilgrims. By faith, we press on.