

The Lord Remembers Your Labors of Love

Hebrews 6:9-12

“But, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak. For God *is* not unrighteous to forget your work and labor of love, which ye have showed toward His name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister. And we desire that every one of you do show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end: That ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises.”

(Hebrews 6:9-12)

Warning

Hebrews 6:4-6 is one of the most difficult passages in all of Scripture to interpret. How should the reader reconcile the phrases, “...have tasted of the heavenly gift and become partakers of the Holy Spirit” with the words about falling away and not being able to be brought back to repentance? In the circles I grew up in, it was taught that you could lose your salvation and regain it again. As a result, after I came to know the Lord, I read 23 different commentaries on this passage (and found that none of them agreed!)

Is this passage describing a true believer who turns away and loses his salvation?ⁱ Is this a true believer who falls away, but remains a believer who loses all his rewards? Or is this a true believer and it is only hypothetically (but not really) possible to lose one’s salvation? Or is this passage describing a professing, but false, believer who falls away? As you can imagine, widely divergent theological systems interpret this passage very differently. All of these interpretations face difficulties. But the strongest view shows that verses 4-6 describe a false, professing believer. This person experiences the convicting power of the Holy Spirit, yet never truly repents. You have probably known people like this. Whether in an emotional decision (described by Jesus in Matthew 13:20-21) or a Judas-like confession with a self-serving turn (Matthew 27:3-4), this person never truly repents. Proverbs 1:22-32 describes this unrepentant person who reaches the point where repentance is impossible. This is terrifying! This person, who is alive on the earth, faces eternal damnation without the possibility of repentance.

The farming illustration in verses 7-8 provides us with a stark contrast between two kinds of people on the same land. The faithful are fruitful and blessed; the faithless are like thorns and thistles that will be burned. Take a moment to evaluate your destiny: blessing or burning?

John Calvin wrote, “The pastor ought to have two voices: one, for gathering the sheep; and another, for warding off and driving away wolves and thieves.”ⁱⁱ Notice how the writer of Hebrews moved from warning to welcoming. Why? To assure them and us that the Lord remembers our labors of love.

In the context of this terrifying warning in verse 4-6, the words of verse 9 supply the true saint of God with a welcome assurance: **“But, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you ...”** The word “but” shows us the strong contrast between verses 4-6 and our text in verses 9-12. Emphasizing this welcoming assurance, this is the only time in Hebrews that the word “beloved” is used. Even though some translations place other words in this verse first, the original language places the words, **“But, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you...”** emphatically as the first words in the verse.

Welcome Assurance

- I. **Beloved saints, we are persuaded of better things about you all. 9-10**

“But, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you ...”

The writer of Hebrews had to voice a harsh warning (as indicated by the words, “... **though we thus speak**”). But now, he desired to fill the faithful reader with confidence. The farming illustration in verses 7-8 highlights the importance of a parable taught by Jesus Christ in Matthew 13:24-29. There Jesus described the wheat and the tares (which is the zizania or darnel weed).ⁱⁱⁱ When the roots of weeds are entangled in the roots of good crops, it is important not to damage the crops by pulling the weeds. So Jesus said that the landowner would wait until harvest to pull up the weeds and burn them. Then the good crops would be gathered in. So it is that many false believers will not be known until the Day of Judgment when they will face the flames of eternal punishment.

Under the inspiration of the Spirit, the writer of Hebrews therefore turns to direct, personal appeals to congregations and individual Christians. Emphasizing the power of God’s saving grace, the writer was **“persuaded better things of you”** (plural). Why? The next phrase explains **“... and things that accompany salvation...”**

Our Lord is our Savior: so we show forth the things associated with genuine salvation, 9

God delivers us because He delights in us (Psalm 18:19; 22:8). Through our Savior’s work, true believers manifest (or demonstrate personal evidence) of the things that accompany salvation. We can think of salvation in terms of essentials and evidences. It is essential that a sinner repent and call upon the name of the Lord to save him from his sin. On the basis of Christ’s death for sin, burial and bodily resurrection, God promised to save those who call upon the name of the Lord (Acts 2:21, Romans 10:13, quoting Joel 2:32). And Jesus is the only way of salvation (John 14:6). Those are essentials. But the writer of Hebrews pointed to the things that accompany salvation – or are the evidences of salvation.

Why is the writer persuaded of better things about these believers? That confidence is based on the nature of saving faith; Paul wrote to the congregation at Philippi as a whole: **“Being confident of this very thing, that He which has begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ”** (Philippians 1:6). **“The LORD will perfect that which concerns me: Thy mercy, O LORD, endures forever: Forsake not the works of thine own hands”** (Psalm 138:8). This is the nature of God’s saving grace: it produces God-honoring works in those who are saved. **“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God has before ordained that we should walk in them”** (Ephesians 2:8-10). The believer’s God-honoring works were preordained by God. One of the wonders of saving faith is that it produces fruitful works. And the Lord remembers our labors of love!

What are **“the things which accompany salvation?”** The best way to answer that question is to study the book of First John. It was written to help you grasp the essentials of salvation and the evidences that accompany salvation. The Book of James will also be very helpful in this way.

Whether individual people or whole congregations, God does an amazing work of turning people to follow Him. In 1930, the Indiana Bell Corporation in Indianapolis needed to expand. But they couldn’t expand the 8 story building as it was situated. Today, a company would simply fork out the money to relocate, or temporarily move while they tear down their headquarters and build another on the same spot. But those were both poor options for Indiana Bell. So, in a remarkable feat of engineering,

Indiana Bell turned its building 90 degrees while all six hundred people continued to work in it! That's right. Between October 20 and November 14, 1930, they turned the 100 x 135 ft., 11,000 ton building by 90 degrees. They raised the building by one quarter of an inch, placed it on rollers, and used flexible cables and pipes to keep everything in working order. They turned the building at a speed of about 15 inches each hour. Then they were able to build the needed expansion.^{iv} But even more amazing is the work that God does in turning Christians and congregations to walk in His ways. This kind of turning is explained in phrases such as **"For it is God who works in you both to will and do of His good pleasure"** (Philippians 2:13). And, on top of that, the Lord remembers your labors of love!

Our God is Righteous: He will remember and reward our service, performed in His name. 10

"For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labor of love, which ye have showed toward His name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister." (v. 10)

The true and living God is righteous; He is just. One of the things that means is that He will not forget your work, your labors of love. (By the way, at least one of the things that this means is that a believer does not lose his salvation. Neither does the believer lose all of his or her rewards.) God will not forget nor overlook all of those works you have done for the sake of His name. (The Apostle John applied this to ministries to beloved brethren and to strangers, 3 John 7-8.) God will even remember what you have forgotten. According to Malachi 3:16-17, the Lord is presently compiling a Book of Remembrance to commemorate your God-honoring responses.^v God remembers the long hours that you have labored to be a blessing to God's people. He remembers what you have done and what you are doing. So press on with your labors of love, your ministries of mercy and the use of your spiritual gifts, both speaking and serving (1 Peter 4:11). The Lord remembers your labors of love.

In verse 9, the writer was persuaded about all the believers, drawing on the power of God's saving grace. But in verses 11-12, the author of Hebrews makes the applications personal and individual.

II. We desire that each one of you demonstrate the same diligence characterized by salvation and the saints of old. (v. 11-12)

"And we desire that every one of you do show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end: That ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises." (Hebrews 6:11-12).

God is vigilant; He remembers; therefore you must be diligent and responsive. Do you wrestle with the full assurance that you really are a child of God? Verse 11 prescribes diligence. Consistency, tenacity, and tireless attentiveness, following the Lord, will bring you to the place of full assurance. As Peter expressed it, God's divine power has given us everything that pertains to life and godliness. His exceedingly great and precious promises are "the holy handles" that we can hang on to. So Peter wrote, **"And beside this, giving all diligence..."** (2 Peter 1:3-5). Diligence, persistence and dogged perseverance is the key. Because, Peter warns, **"He that lacks these things is blind and cannot see afar off and has forgotten that he was purged from his old sins"** (2 Peter 1:9). God doesn't forget. But verse 9 tells you that a believer's mind can be so crowded with that which is earthly, sensual and devilish that he forgets – that he was purged from his old sins! Why should you be lazy and languishing when the Lord remembers your labors of love? But, in closing, consider the blessed benefits of diligence:

1. To have full assurance of your salvation

What would it be worth to you to have full assurance of your salvation? This is the great reward – the blessed benefit of – diligence. This is why Peter wrote, **“Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall”** (2 Peter 1:10). We know that God calls, God elects. But will you now diligently “apprehend that for which you have been apprehended;” press on, making it your own (Philippians 3:12)? Dearly beloved, time spent finding out it time well spent. Be diligent and take hold of the full assurance of your salvation.

2. To persevere until the end

It’s one thing to have full assurance; it’s another thing to know that you can be faithful to the end. What severe trials will you face? Have you not suffered through frightening tests that have caused you to want to abandon God and His grace? This is the second blessed benefit of diligence: hope (or confident expectation) to the end. Until the end of this earthly life, or until we see our Savior face to face at His coming, we can know that we will persevere to the end.

3. To follow those who through faith and patience inherit God’s promised rewards

As verse 12 reminds us, being diligent is the opposite of being slothful. But it also reminds us that through faith and patience, we can be like the faithful saints of God in the Scriptures. We can persevere knowing that there is a great reward ahead: we shall inherit those exceedingly great and precious promises from God.

The Lord remembers your labors of love. Even now they are being recorded in His Book of Remembrance. Knowing the life-changing power of His grace, follow His promises and the saints of old to make your calling and election sure.

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<https://www.cbcbfindlay.org/the-lord-remembers-your-labors-of-love/>



ⁱ For an excellent analysis of verses 4-6, see R. Bruce Compton, “Persevering and Falling Away: A Reexamination of Hebrews 6:4-6” Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal, Spring 1996, 135-167, accessed at <http://www.obinfont.ro/docs/tyndale/tyndrex/heb/hebs-pdf/heb6-compton.pdf>

ⁱⁱ John Calvin and William Pringle, *Commentaries on the Epistles to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 296.

ⁱⁱⁱ See J. R. C. Cousland, “Toxic Tares: The Poisonous Weeds (ζιζάνια [zizania]) in Matthew’s Parable of the Tares (Matthew 13:24–30, 36–43),” Cambridge University Press, June 24, 2015 accessed at <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/new-testament-studies/article/abs/toxic-tares-the-poisonous-weeds-in-matthews-parable-of-the-tares-matthew-132430-3643/14F6FEE37B827FEB8DF8A868EE19AB77>

^{iv} For more on this story, see “When the Indiana Bell Building Was Rotated 90° While Everyone Worked Inside in 1930 (by Kurt Vonnegut’s Architect Dad)” Open Culture, April 1, 2021, accessed at [When the Indiana Bell Building Was Rotated 90° While Everyone Worked Inside in 1930 \(by Kurt Vonnegut’s Architect Dad\) | Open Culture](https://www.open-culture.org/exhibits/object-detail/when-the-indiana-bell-building-was-rotated-90-degrees-while-everyone-worked-inside-in-1930-by-kurt-vonnegut-s-architect-dad/)

^v See “What Did You Say?” accessed at <https://www.cbcbfindlay.org/what-did-you-say/>