

Don't Cross Alone

Hebrews 6:9-12

Hebrews 11.4

TEXT: HEBREWS 6:9-12

9 Though we speak in this way, yet in your case, beloved, we feel sure of better things-- things that belong to salvation.

10 For God is not unjust so as to overlook your work and the love that you have shown for his name in serving the saints, as you still do.

11 And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end,

12 so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises. (Heb 6:9-12 ESV)

4 OBSERVATIONS FROM THE TEXT

1. True Christians look like true Christians (verse 9)

The writer, and the leaders he represents, looks at the believers he is talking to and says, "I know you guys are believers. We are sure of it." That is how it should be. It should not be a mystery to those around you that you are a follower of Jesus.

Your character, the way you speak of God and of others, your respect for what is good and right, all these things display that we are children of God. It has been said, "If none of your friends think you are a Christian, then your friends are probably right."

17 So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. 18 But someone will say, "You have faith and I have works." Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. (Jam 2:17-18 ESV)

People who walk like Christians and talk like Christians likely are Christians. People who don't probably aren't.

2. God keeps an eye on acts of love within the church (verse 10)

One of the most practical questions that is asked by students in schools all over the world is, "Will this be on the test?" What they are really asking is, "Will I be responsible to remember what you are saying right now? What is it that you will be checking?" The Hebrews' writer, in verse 10, indicates one thing that God is checking on:

10 For God is not unjust so as to overlook your work and the love that you have shown for his name in serving the saints, as you still do.

The love that you show in the name of God, serving the saints (fellow believers) is seen by God. The Christian must put a priority on habitually loving and serving other brothers and sisters. This is a great indicator of our faith, as well as a fruit of our faith.

34 A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. 35 By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." (Joh 13:34-35 ESV)

Can there be someone who obeys Jesus but is not known by his continual loving kindness towards other believers? I don't think so. The people of the Hebrew church were known by their love and humility towards one another.

3. Investment in the progress of others is the sign of Christian leaders (verse 11)

When Cain killed Abel, God called on Cain and asked, "Where is your brother?"

Cain's answer was, "Am I my brother's keeper?" He was saying, "That's not my problem, to take care of my brother, to know the he is okay." Now, we don't want to take Cain as our example, do we?

Look how Jesus speaks of Himself:

11 I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. (Joh 10:11 ESV)

and

13 Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. 14 You are my friends if you do what I command you. (Joh 15:13-14 ESV)

Jesus, unlike Cain, took responsibility for His friends. He laid down His life for them. He put Himself between His brothers and harm! Cain did the opposite. He said, "My brother is not my problem!" Even worse, he killed his brother.

Those who are like Jesus see it as their responsibility be concerned with the spiritual well-being of their brothers in the church. Look at this exchange between Jesus and Peter:

15 When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "Feed my lambs." 16 He said to him a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "Tend my sheep." 17 He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" and he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep. (Joh 21:15-17 ESV)

Simon, three times, received the command from Jesus to feed His sheep when he declared his love for Jesus. The same is true today. The one who loves Jesus cares very much about all of His sheep. It is heart breaking to see Christians stray away from the truth or into sin. We are to actively shepherd one another and help one another follow Jesus.

That is what the Hebrews writer is displaying:

And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end, so that you may not be sluggish,

He is urging them on to run the race.

We need others to help us run this race, too!

I have a friend from college who was in line at a convenience store behind another Christian from our church. He later told me that he saw him buy a porn magazine, but he didn't say anything. He said he didn't want to judge him. What my friend thought was high-minded was really to act like Cain. He was watching one of Jesus' sheep wander into harm, and instead of lovingly encouraging him to the path, he said, "Am I my brother's keeper?"

I was recently reminded of a pastor in New Jersey whom I had called because someone in his church was in need of charity. Someone in our church wanted a way to get some money to this church member of his. I told him the name of the person. The pastor said he did not know the person –that he had given up learning the names of people in his congregation long ago. This jaded man should have left the ministry at that point, because he was like Cain, not like Simon. He cared not at all for God's sheep. Christians must not be this way.

4. Christians should make a habit of imitating faithful people (verse 12)

A principle that an old faithful preacher once taught: "People will go wherever they are accepted as they are, AND, they will become like the ones that accept them."

We are a people who imitate one another. It is human to do so. Even if the person you imitate is someone from a movie, we all imitate someone. Often we imitate people from our past, and sometimes from our present. Young people are known by their similar hairstyles, clothing brands, verbal expressions, etc. The same is true of older people.

Since it is true that we will copy someone, the writer of Hebrews is encouraging us to become those who copy faithful people.

... so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises

Choose people who live patiently through the trials of life, trusting in the promises of God Himself. Christian biographies are of great value for this reason. When I was a young adult, I read *The Hiding Place*, the story of Corrie ten Boom. The example of Corrie, her sister Betsie, their father and brother became etched in my mind as people who knew suffering and knew what it meant to believe God in a hopeful manner.

Do not be deceived: "Bad company ruins good morals." Wake up from your drunken stupor, as is right, and do not go on sinning. For some have no knowledge of God. I say this to your shame. (1Co 15:33-34 ESV)

Step one in not being fooled: don't hang out with people you don't want to be like. Look at Psalm 1:

Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; (Psa 1:1 ESV)

But do choose people, living and dead, who live godly lives, and be like them. Gain courage from their examples. This life can be tough. We must have good role models –and we choose these for ourselves.

MAIN POINT OF THE SERMON: Lifetime perseverance in the faith marks the life of a believer.

The Christian faith is not meant to be for just a little while. God never stops being right, so following Him never goes out of style. God doesn't sign people up like the army, saying it is for a two year stint. He signs people up for life.

All four of the verses in our text imply an ongoing effort at living out the life of a believer. We are saved by faith, by believing, but do not make the mistake of thinking that salvation is merely an intellectual undertaking. I memorized my times-tables when I was young. I also learned to spell many words. But if I do not write properly, and do use numbers in my daily life, then what I have done is merely an intellectual exercise. I also once learned the names of all 206 bones in the human body. For that, I received a 100% on a science test. But after that, I did nothing with it. I don't think I remember more than 4 or 5 today. What good was that? Don't think faith is like that. If someone says, "Hey, aren't you a Christian?" you shouldn't say, "Sure, I believe all that stuff."

Christianity begins with belief, but it is a life-long journey. Jesus said:

For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.' (Luk 14:28-30 ESV)

There are many who begin who don't have true faith. True faith understands that it is a life-long commitment, that effort must be put forward every day, and that it is and will be worth it. True faith understands that God calls for no less than all.

The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations, (Rev 2:26 ESV)

I had a Christian friend in college that I ran into several years later. He asked about Lorrie and I and I told him what we were doing. He said, "I knew you were one of the Christians who would stick with it." I remember thinking how odd his words were. I thought we were all supposed to stick with it. I thought that was the deal. Did God stop being true and good and right? If Jesus is my Lord, when does that go out of style?

The faith that saves us understands that we have given our entire lives to Jesus, and that means all of our remaining time on the planet.

APPLICATION: Finish the course of faith well, and strengthen others to do the same!

Paul wrote these words to Timothy near the end of his own life:

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 race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth 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. (2Ti 4:6-8 ESV)

Paul knew his time to die was near, but he faced it with confidence, knowing that he had not left the faith he was given. He had carried on in the work of God until the end.

I want this to be me. Do you want it to be you?

I want to be able to say at the end, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course.” But don’t think this is a goal only for old Christians. It is for all ages. Why? Because we never know when we will die. Therefore, we must be faithful at all times.

There are many older Christians, and to you I say, finish well. If God has given you length of days, it is not so that you can spend your last days in selfish pursuit of pleasure. It is so that you will continue to advance the Gospel, to grow the church, until your very last day. If you are young, don’t think you have time –you don’t know how long you have. You must strive daily to accomplish the purpose of God in your life.

To any caught in sin, throw it off, for it will slow you down as you strain towards the goal of Christ.

And finally, don’t finish the race alone. You have brothers and sisters on your right and your left. How are they doing in their efforts for Jesus? Do you think you shouldn’t care? Don’t say as Cain did, “Am I my brother’s keeper?”

For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him. Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing. (1Th 5:9-11 ESV)

We have a destiny, and it is not wrath. It is not punishment. It is not hell. Our destiny is to live with Jesus, who died for us, so that even when we die we will be with Him. Because we are saved, we must build one another up. We must feel the responsibility to help our brothers and sisters cross the line of victory!