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The Warnings of Hebrews

Hebrews 5:11-6:20

A Central Image In Hebrews: The Christian Life Is Like a Race

I. Overview of Hebrews 5:11-6:12 and the Situation of the Readers

- A. A Rebuke: They are growing sluggish (Heb. 5:11-14)
- B. A Warning: They are warned against falling away from Jesus (6:1-8)
- C. An Encouragement and Exhortation (6:9-12)
- D. An Assurance for those who continue to trust Jesus (6:13-20)

Summary of the central concern in Hebrews: They are starting to drift; Jesus isn't as astonishing as he once was to them. His main goal is to convince them that Jesus is true and beautiful. Jesus is becoming blurry, fuzzy, and not as amazing to them. They need to consider him in order to hold fast to him.

II. General Observations About the warnings

- A. There are five warning passages (2.1-4; 3.12-4.13; 5.11-6.12; 10.26-39; 12.25-29)
- B. Each warning is part of an exhortations, and each exhortation flows from a point of instruction
- C. Each warning has a unique emphasis in its own context.
- D. The warnings increase in severity.
- E. The warnings should be read with the others.

III. The Nature of the Warnings: what are they all about?

- A. The Audience: The warnings are primarily addressed to believers

- B. The Concern: The warnings address one, fundamental concern: apostasy (leaving Jesus).

- C. The Consequence: The end-result of abandoning Jesus is eternal judgment

- D. Therefore, perseverance in the faith is necessary

IV. Understanding the Function of the Warnings: Why Are They Here?

- A. The author does not assume, or even think, that these people will actually fall away from Christ.

- B. The Warnings Extend the Implications of the Call to Faith In Christ

The warnings also fit right into the argument of the book. The book holds up Christ as the object of our faith, and then exhorts us to trust him (and keep trusting him). The warnings press this message home by demonstrating the *necessity* of trusting Christ.

In light of this, the warnings are ultimately implications of the instruction about the gospel. They are the necessary implications of the gospel. Here are a couple ways to summarize their point when taken together:
“If Christ is the true priest and his death is the only true sacrifice, then there is no other way to God. Therefore, if you leave Jesus, you leave the only sacrifice for sins.”

“There is salvation in no other name than Jesus. Therefore, you can’t leave him and be saved.”

“Only believers will be saved, therefore, we need to *believe* this and keep believing!”

The gospel says, “If you believe, you will be saved in the end.” The gospel says, “salvation is *only* for those who believe in Jesus.”

C. The Warnings Are God's Means to Persevere His People In The Gospel

"Conditional warnings in themselves do not function to indicate anything about possible failure or fulfillment. Instead, the conditional warnings appeal to our minds to conceive or imagine the invariable consequences that come to all who pursue a course of apostasy from Christ" (Schreiner and Canaday, *TRSBUE*, 199)

"Hebrews does not call on us to doubt our inheritance of God's sworn promise in order to heed God's urgent warning against falling away and perishing without hope of renewed repentance. God uses warning and consolation or threat and promise together to secure us in the way of salvation" (*TRSBUE*, 203).

Spurgeon: "God preserves his children from falling away; but he keeps them by the use of means... There is a deep precipice; what is the best way to keep any one from going down there? Why, to tell him that if he did he would inevitably be dashed to pieces. In some old castle, there is a deep cellar, where there is a vast amount of fixed air and gas, which would kill anybody who went down. What does the guide say? "If you go down you will never come up alive." Who thinks of going down? The very fact of the guide telling us what the consequences would be, keeps us from it. Our friend puts away from us a cup of arsenic; he does not want us to drink it, but he says, 'if you drink it, it will kill you.' Does he suppose for a moment that we should drink it? No; he tells us the consequences, and he is sure we will not do it." (Quoted in *Schreiner and Canaday, TRSBUE*, 203).

Examples

1. Poison
2. A Race
3. The Storm at the Sea In Acts 27

Summary: The means of perseverance view

4. Who is the author addressing? Believers
5. What is he warning against? Apostasy (drifting and turning away from Christ)
6. What is the consequence? No salvation in the end (not just loss of rewards)
7. The key message of the warnings: The promised salvation will only come to those who persevere in the faith to the end.

V. The importance of the New Covenant for Understanding the Warnings

A. The problem of the Old Covenant and the need for a new covenant

B. How the New Covenant answers the problems of the Old Covenant

1. Hebrews 8:8-12 (quoting Jeremiah 31:31-34)

2. New Covenant Members have the law on their hearts (8:10a)

a. Ezekiel 11:19 And I will give them one heart, and a new spirit I will put within them. I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, 20 that they may walk in my statutes and keep my rules and obey them. And they shall be my people, and I will be their God.”

b. Ezekiel 36:26 “And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. 27 And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. 28 You shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers, and you shall be my people, and I will be your God.”

c. Jeremiah 32:38 “And they shall be my people, and I will be their God. 39 I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear me forever, for their own good and the good of their children after them. 40 I will make with them an everlasting covenant, that I will not turn away from doing good to them. And I will put the fear of me in their hearts, that they may not turn from me. 41 I will rejoice in doing them good, and I will plant them in this land in faithfulness, with all my heart and all my soul.”

d. Hebrew 13:20-21: “Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ.”

3. New Covenant members all truly know God (8:10b-11)

4. New Covenant members are final and fully forgiven (8:12)

IV. Implications of the New Covenant for Understanding Hebrews

- A. The author is confident that all true members of the New Covenant *will* persevere in the faith. This is because God promises that those in the New covenant will do this.
- B. The author recognizes that all true believers also *must* persevere in the faith.
- C. The author has confidence that they are in the New Covenant because of their past obedience.
- D. His confidence from their past that they are members of the New Covenant, gives him confidence in the future that they will persevere.
- E. None of this means that the author can be passive about their perseverance. In fact, it gives him great *hope* that his warnings will be heeded. He gives his warnings, trusting that they are *the means* God uses to persevere his New Covenant people in the faith.
- F. This is all greatly encouraging

Resources for Further Study

- J.D. Greear, *Stop Asking Jesus Into Your Heart: How to Know for Sure You Are Saved*
- Thomas Schreiner, *Run To Win the Prize: Perseverance In the New Testament*
- John Piper, *Finally Alive: What Happens When We Are Born Again*