

Warning Signs

Hebrews 5:11-6:12

This is one of the most controversial passages in the New Testament, because people debate some of the implications of what the writer says. But the writer isn't writing it to debate: he's writing it because he's concerned for his friends.

Danger Ahead

The writer has lots to tell them about Jesus being the great High Priest. Before he can do so he has to deal with their spiritual immaturity. He is concerned that they will drift away from Jesus, and back to a dead religion. So he gives them this stark warning in v4-6: if someone falls away from the faith there comes a point of no return.

He says it is possible to know and experience the power of God in the gospel, and turn away from it. And that turning away can have dire consequences. If people side with the Jewish religious leaders and the Romans, who crucified Jesus, it is as if they are crucifying Jesus all over again. Such people can't be brought back to repentance, because Jesus is the only way to be saved, and if they reject him, there is no other way.

So participation in the community of God's people is not the same as having your life transformed. The evidence for real transformation is fruitfulness.

But why do people fall away in the first place?

No U-turns

The people he was writing to were considering turning away because their lives were at risk. How you respond to the challenge of standing up for Jesus depends on whose voice you are listening to: to those around you or to God's.

But they were also considering turning away because it seemed as if God was unjust: they were trying to live good lives, but were suffering for it. If we think we are saved by good works, or that God owes us because of our good works, but then trouble comes, we can think God is not keeping his side of the deal. But if we recognize that salvation is by God's grace in Jesus, and we are underserving, but he lavishes his grace on us anyway, we will see things very differently, and cling to him in times of trial

Don't go near the cliff edge

Warning signs on a cliff edge are to keep us from going over the edge. This warning in Hebrews becomes the very thing God uses to keep you on the path, and keep you from going over the edge. It is like a safety rail that God uses to keep his children from throwing themselves off cliff tops.

Running for the finishing line

Whilst the writer's concerned for his friends, he's also confident. He can see the fruit of their lives that says God is at work in them, and will finish that work. So his desire for them is that they keep running for the finish line. Rather than drift away or check out, he wants them to keep trusting God, and living for the applause of the only one who really matters: God.