

The Securities of God's Promise

Scripture: Hebrews 6:13–20

Code: 1615

INTRODUCTION

A. You Can't Trust in Earthly Things

1. Relationships

There used to be a television program called, "Who Can You Trust?" That is a very important question. In our age, we are well on our way to trusting no one. Many have developed a psychosis of distrust, commonly known as the credibility gap. Young people are being taught not to trust anyone but themselves and are learning by first-hand experience that trust is an elusive virtue. Promises are often given that mean little or nothing. A person's word today can seldom be counted on. Lying has become the norm in much of society. The world is full of liars. The Bible says that "the whole world lies in the power of the evil one" (1 John 5:19, NASB). And Jesus says that the evil one--the devil--is "the father of lies" (John 8:44).

2. Religion

In the midst of the confusion that lying and distrust always brings, people are looking for something or someone to trust. They search for something they can bank their lives on. Many put their trust in religious systems. A person might spend their entire life searching for peace in religion only to find that it never produces real purpose or satisfaction. They may spend years praying to a particular saint, only to find out that someone made a mistake because his saint was not really canonized. Some put their trust in self-proclaimed healers. A mother took her young son to one of those so-called healers in the hope of having his crippled legs straightened. She was told to take off her son's braces and never to put them on him again. A few weeks later, after much pain, emergency surgery was done to save the boy's legs from amputation.

Elmer Gantry-style evangelists have always been around to take people's hearts, trust, and money. Not too many years ago a Los Angeles minister conducted a television campaign ostensibly to raise money for missionary work. After raising a considerable sum, he simply left town. People go to churches which claim to teach about Jesus Christ and His glory but in reality teach doctrines that are utterly contrary to what He really did teach. They learn nothing about the Christ of Scripture. False teachers, who are both deceived and deceiving, abound (2 Tim. 3:13). There are preachers with high academic credentials from prestigious seminaries who teach philosophies and theology that are totally unbiblical and heretical. So whom can you trust? Whom can you really believe in?

B. You Can Trust The Lord

Without being pessimistic or cynical, the Christian knows that the only one who can be trusted without reservation is God. Over and over, the Bible tells us to trust in the Lord with all our hearts.

1. Jeremiah trusted the Lord

The prophet Jeremiah said, "Trust not in lying words" (Jer. 7:4). Trusting in the Lord with all your heart is the only real answer in today's trustless world.

2. Solomon trusted the Lord

Proverbs 29:25 says, "Whoso putteth his trust in the Lord shall be safe." The world yearns for safety and security. Scripture says here that only the Lord can provide it.

Proverbs 28:25 says, "He who trusts in the Lord will prosper" (NASB). That doesn't mean we will be always healthy, wealthy, and wise--as many preachers would have us believe today. It means as a person trusts in the Lord, the Lord will guide His steps, wherever that may lead. Note that the apostle Paul said in 1 Timothy 4:10: "We both labor and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God." Based on this verse, could you really trust God? There's a risk involved. Could you place your life in the hands of God and be secure that He would provide for you?

3. David trusted the Lord

Perhaps no statement of this counsel is more beautiful than King David when he said, "Trust in the Lord, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed. Delight thyself also in the Lord, and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart. Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him, and he shall bring it to pass" (Ps. 37:3-5). The Bible says that you can trust God. But only in Him is there no credibility gap.

4. Abraham trusted the Lord

Abraham is the best example of a man who trusted God, especially for those in the Jewish community, as in Hebrews 6:13-20. He is the most outstanding example of faith in the Old Testament and is called "the father of all them that believe" (Rom. 4:11, cf. Gal. 3:7).

The writer is saying to the unbelieving Hebrews, "If it's not enough for you to look at the faithful in your own community (vv. 9-12), look at the example of a man from your own history and see how he trusted God." The writer knew they were beset by persecution from their own Jewish community, so he gave them an illustration of some of their own race who trusted God for everything in the midst of unbelievable adversity. He wanted to show them a man who went to the point of lifting a knife to slay his only son. Abraham was prepared to kill every hope that God had given him (cf. Gen. 22:1-18). That is how much he trusted in God. Abraham then becomes the theme of Hebrews 6:13-20.

a) The courage of Abraham

(1) Romans 4--Paul said, "What saith the Scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness. Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness" (vv. 3-5).

(a) His faith

The thrust of Romans 4 is that Abraham was saved--justified, counted righteous by God--because of his faith. And he not only was saved by faith before the Old (Mosaic) Covenant was given, but he also was saved even before he was circumcised, which was the mark of the covenant God made

with Abraham (vv. 9- 10). Paul's point is that salvation has never been by obedience to the law or by the performance of any rite, but has always been by faith.

Whenever the New Testament writers spoke to a Jewish audience, they would invariably use Abraham as the basis of faith. They did so because the Jewish mind often assumed that salvation was by keeping the Law, so Abraham was a great way to show that salvation comes by no other means than by faith.

(b) His race

Abraham was of the Jewish race in the sense that God called him to begin it. He himself wasn't born into it. In fact, he was 75 years old and was not circumcised. The Jewish person often based his salvation on the fact that he was of Jewish decent and circumcised on the eighth day (cf. Phil. 3:4-6). But Abraham wasn't. He was righteous because he believed God. Verse 13 sums it up by saying, "For the promise that he should be the heir of the world was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith."

(c) His age

God told Abraham that at ninety years of age, his wife, Sarah, was going to have a son. According to verses 20-22: "He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strong in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully persuaded that, what he and promised, he was able to perform. And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness."

(2) James 2:23--James carried the same idea when he said, "The Scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness; and he was called the friend of God." Righteousness for Abraham came from believing God. Salvation, even in the Old Testament, was not by law but by faith.

b) The character of Abraham

What sort of faith did Abraham have? Why was it so significant, so exemplary, that he would be called the father of the faithful? Because Abraham believed God as far as one could humanly believe.

(1) He turned from false gods

Abraham, whose original name was Abram, was raised a pagan. He was a descendant of Shem, one of Noah's three sons. But apparently for many generations, his family had worshiped false gods. He grew up in Ur, an ancient Chaldean city of Mesopotamia.

(2) He obeyed God's commands

(a) He was willing to go to Canaan

God spoke to Abram and commanded him to go to Canaan. Hebrews 11:8 says, "By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing where he went." With no guarantee but God's Word that he would get there, Abraham believed God and went. The Lord promised Abraham that He would give Canaan to him and his descendants and that through Abraham all the families of the earth would be blessed (Gen. 12:1- 3). The reiteration of that promise to Abraham is also found in Genesis 13:15-17, 15:5-6, 17:1-8, 18:18, and 22:18.

(b) He was willing to sacrifice Isaac

After Isaac, the promised son, was finally born and had become a teenager, God commanded Abraham to sacrifice him. Having no idea of the Lord's reasons or what would happen, Abraham obeyed. He obeyed because he believed God. Had not God miraculously intervened and provided a substitute sacrifice, Abraham would have slain Isaac on Mount Moriah. Yet Abraham's faith was not blind. He could not see the consequences of his obedience, but he could see God's character. Abraham had guilt-edged security. When the Lord makes a promise, He puts his integrity on the line. Every promise of God is secured by His character.

Although Abraham is highlighted in Hebrews 6:13-20, the overriding theme behind these verses is the person and character of God. Can we trust our lives to God? Can we take Him at His word? Can

He keep us from falling? Can He finish the work He has begun in us? Will He lose hold of us at some point along the line? In short, is there really salvation and security with God? Abraham believed there was. The Bible says there is. Hebrews 6:13-20 give four unchanging guarantees on why we can and trust God: His person, His purpose, His pledge, and His priest.

LESSON

I. GOD'S PERSON (vv. 13-15)

"When God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he swore by himself, saying, Surely, blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee. And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise."

A. He Cannot Lie (v. 13)

No one in the universe is greater than God. Because God is who He is, He cannot lie. And the reason that God cannot lie is that He invented truth. By definition of His very nature, whatever God says is absolute truth. It is absolutely impossible for God to lie (v. 18). He has no ability to contradict Himself. His promises, then, are secured by His person. That is why God's promise to Abraham (v. 13) was as good as done (v. 15).

1. His Word

God is the source of truth. Whatever He does is right and whatever He says is truth. Jesus said in His high-priestly prayer, "Sanctify them through thy truth; thy word is truth" (John 17:17). Every word that comes out of the mouth of God is absolute truth.

2. His promise

If God makes a promise, He will keep it. Second Peter 3:9 says, "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise." The word "slack" means that there is no gap between God's promise and the fulfillment. As He says it, it happens. It is true because of His nature. The writer of Hebrews was telling his unsaved Jewish readers that they could trust God concerning the Messiah because He cannot lie.

In his opening statement to Titus, Paul said, "In hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised before the world began" (v. 2). Long ago God promised eternal life for those who come to Him, and He cannot lie.

3. His gift

James 1:17 says, "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." He never deviates from His will or His promises. And throughout the New Testament, God promises again and again that if men come to Jesus Christ, they will have salvation because He cannot lie. The apostle John said, "As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the children of God, even to them that believe on his name" (John 1:12).

B. He Cannot Lose (vv. 14-15)

Just as surely as God kept His promise to Abraham, He will keep His promise to those who trust in His Son. His basic promise to Abraham was, "Surely, blessing I will bless thee and multiplying I will multiply thee" (v. 14). And that's what happened (v. 15). God was saying to Abraham, "I'm going to bless you and multiply your descendants." Did God keep His promise to Abraham? Indeed. Today there are several million physical descendants of Abraham. Not only that, but many more millions around the world are his spiritual descendants.

1. Abraham's doubt

God has never failed, and He never will. He told Abraham, "Look now toward heaven, and count the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be" (Gen. 15:5). Abraham tried to help God along when he fathered a son, Ishmael, with Sarah's maid Hagar but God simply used that as a punishment to him. Ishmael fathered the Arab race, which has been quarreling with the Jewish race ever since (cf. Gen. 16:12).

2. Abraham's devotion

Ultimately though, Abraham believed God and was faithful to His promise. The writer of Hebrews says, "After he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise" (v. 15). As Abraham was continuing to be a faithful servant for God, God continued to give him the assurance of His divine plan. It must have looked like a complete impossibility in light of Sarah's age, but as Abraham trusted God, he saw God fulfill His promise. After Isaac was born, it must have been unthinkable for Abraham to be commanded to use him as a sacrifice. If Isaac died, it would appear that God had failed to keep His promise. Yet Abraham did not question God at all. He took Isaac to Mount Moriah and raised his hand to slay his only son, but God stayed his hand (Gen. 22:1-14). Abraham went that far because that's how much he believed God.

The stunning illustration of Abraham and Isaac can give us the confidence to trust God as well, even in the midst of severe trials. As Abraham and Isaac were walking up the mountain to worship, he assured his son that God would provide an acceptable sacrifice. We also can trust God as we're walking into seemingly insurmountable obstacles. God has asked us to present our bodies as a "living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service" (Rom. 12:1). When Abraham was about to sacrifice his son, his eye landed on the ram in the thicket that God had already provided as the acceptable sacrifice. So too, God has provided a sacrifice for us in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. His thicket was a crown of thorns on His head (Matt. 27:29). God has not nor ever will back out of His promises. You can trust God will never fail you. He has no capacity for failure because of who He is. Deuteronomy 31:8 says, "The Lord, he it is who doth go before thee; he will be with thee, he will not fail thee, neither forsake thee; fear not, neither be dismayed."

II. GOD'S PURPOSE (v. 14)

"[God was] saying, surely, blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee."

Abraham was secure not only because of God's Person, but also because of God's purpose. God did not move Abraham from his homeland and make him a promise on some divine whim. God had a purpose for Abraham and for the world through him. It was not Abraham's idea, but God's. His call of Abraham was entirely of His own doing.

A. God's Unfolding Plan for the World

The Abrahamic covenant--the promise from God to Abraham--was an unconditional covenant. God did not tell Abraham that he would be blessed if he met certain conditions. He did command things of Abraham and Abraham was obedient. But God's blessing was apart from Abraham; he was but a mere spectator--watching what God was doing for him and through him. God had a predetermined plan and purpose and He also determined that Abraham was the key man in that purpose.

1. After the fall of man

Not long after God created Adam and Eve and put them in His beautiful garden, where every one of their needs were met, they decided to do the one thing He had told them not to do. They ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and fell, as did the rest of creation with them. As a result, the whole earth was cursed. Our first parents lost their fellowship with God and were exiled from Eden. Soon after that, the first murder was committed, and things went downhill from their. Gen. 4).

2. After the flood on the earth

Corruption, violence, polygamy, incest, lying, stealing, adultery, idolatry, and every other kind of sin became common and increasingly worse. Mankind became so terribly debauched that God destroyed all people, except for the eight in Noah's family. In the generations after the Flood, man continued to depart from the Lord even though God tried to reach people through mediating His rule--first through Noah, who preached while he was building the ark, but no one would listen or change. Men were not responding to God's rule and it became evident that God had to react in His wrath again.

3. After the fall of the tower

The sinfulness of man reached a climax when, with the tower of Babel, men literally tried to take heaven by storm (Gen. 11:1- 9). God thwarted their scheme by causing them to speak different languages and then scattering them across the world.

B. God's Unconditional Promise to Abraham

But God did not give up on man. It was in His eternal plan that those whom He had created in His own image would worship and serve Him. It was as if there was once a flowing river that had been hit with a great landslide that now blocked it. But God began to cut a fresh channel. He picked out a certain people and used them as His channel of blessing against the landslide of sin that had inundated the world.

1. The channel

The first new channel for God's redemptive plan was Abraham, the father of this chosen people. From Abraham's loins was to come the nation of Israel which would bring the salvation of the world through the Jewish Messiah. That is why Jesus said, "Salvation is of the Jews" (John 4:22). He did not mean that the Jews were the only ones who could be saved, but that they were the channel through which salvation is secured. The Messiah--Jesus Himself--was a Jew, the truest Jew of all.

2. The choosing

God predetermined the life of Abraham apart from Abraham choosing God. Abraham was really only a spectator to the plan of God. It was a matter of divine choice. Abraham was saved because of his faith, but he wasn't chosen because of his faith. It was purely out of the sovereign will of God. Deuteronomy 7:7-8 says of Israel in general, "The Lord did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any of the peoples, for you were the fewest of all the peoples, but because the Lord loved you and kept the oath which He swore to your forefathers" (NASB).

Many have been confused about how God chose Abraham apart from his faith. They say it seems as though God is simply using us as puppets in His plan. Genesis 18:18-19 helps to explain this concept. It says "Seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? For I know him." The phrase "for I know him" means that God had predetermined to love and choose Abraham. He set His love upon Abraham to be the one through whom the channel would be cut. Abraham was not chosen because of any merit, quality, or virtue. The phrase does not mean that God looked down for a faithful man--Abraham--and then subsequently chose him because of his faithfulness. That would make man sovereign, not God. But Abraham was chosen purely out of the sovereign will of God and not vice versa.

3. The covenant

When the Lord made the actual covenant with Abraham, He did it again apart from Abraham's ability to keep his part of the covenant. God told Abraham in Genesis 15:9-18: "Take me an heifer of three years old, and a shegoat of three years old, and a ram of three years old, and a turtledove, and a young pigeon. And he took unto him all these, and divided them in the midst, and laid each piece one against another: but the birds divided he not. And when the fowls came down upon the carcasses, Abram drove them away. And when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and, lo, an horror of great darkness fell upon him. And he said unto Abram, Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a sojourner in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years; and also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge: and afterward shall they come out with great substance. And thou shalt go to thy fathers in peace; thou shalt be buried in a good old age. But in the fourth generation they shall come here again; for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full. And it came to pass that, when the sun went down, and it was dark, behold a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp that passed between those pieces. In the same day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates."

God made Abraham cut some specified animals in half and set the halves opposite each other. After God caused Abraham to fall into a deep sleep, the Lord spoke to him about his promise and then, in the form of a smoking oven and a flaming torch, passed between the halves Himself. Ordinarily, when such a covenant was made, both parties would walk between the pieces to symbolize their mutual obligations to fulfill the conditions agreed upon. But Abraham had no part in determining the

conditions of this covenant or in the ceremony that sealed it. The fact that only God walked between the pieces signified that the total responsibility for fulfilling the covenant was His. Abraham was not a party to the covenant; only a recipient of it and a vehicle for its fulfillment. The covenant was with Abraham in the sense that, humanly speaking, it revolved around him. But the conditions and obligations were God's alone. The covenant was made between God and Himself.

C. God's Unfolding Purpose for Israel

The nation of Israel was supposed to be a channel of blessing, but in what way? What were they supposed to do--for Him and by Him--in helping fulfill His purpose of redeeming a lost world? To cut through the landslide of sin that blocked the human stream, the channel of Israel was given seven purposes.

1. To proclaim the true God

Their job in the midst of idolatry, polytheism, and polydemonism, animism, was to proclaim the true God. Their duty was summarized in Isaiah 43:21: "This people have I formed for myself; they will show forth my praise." They were not to be involved with any other god for Scripture says, "The Lord our God is one Lord" (Deut. 6:4).

2. To reveal the Messiah

The Jewish people were designed by God to reveal the Anointed One, who would be the great Savior of the world. Jesus was to be of Judaistic heritage. Just as surely as the prophets and psalmists were to proclaim His coming, so was the whole nation (cf. Ps. 110, Isa. 42; 53; and Zech. 6:12-13).

3. To be a nation of priests

As the Mosaic covenant was being given to Israel at Mount Sinai, Israel was told by God, "If ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people; for all the earth is mine: and ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel." The nation of Israel was to represent God to the world. They were designed by Him to dispense His truth.

4. To preserve and transmit Scripture

Israel was also to be God's agents in depositing His Word to the world. In Deuteronomy 6:6-9 God instructed them by saying, "These words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart; and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates." The Israelites were the transmitters of Scripture. All of the Old Testament and practically all of the New was written by Jewish people (cf. Rom. 9:4).

5. To show the faithfulness of God

The Israelites were also designed to be a living illustration of God's faithfulness to His people. Over

and over again they failed God, but He always showed His faithfulness to them. Anyone who wanted to find out if God was faithful needed only to look at Israel. Even if Israel had always been faithful, their faithfulness could never have matched His. God is still not through in His dealings with Israel. The apostle Paul said that in the future, "All Israel shall be saved" (Rom. 11:26). The reason is given in verse 29: "The gifts and calling of God are without repentance." Those who say God has forsaken Israel and from now on deals only in the Church malign God's Word and His faithfulness. Israel has been, still is, and will yet be a living illustration of His faithfulness.

6. To show the blessedness of serving God

The psalmist said, "Happy is that people, who God is the Lord" (Ps. 144:15). The Israelites not only were to be a channel of His blessing but also an illustration of it.

7. To show God's grace in dealing with sin

The sacrificial system was God's gracious provision for dealing with sin. Although the sacrifices could not in themselves remove sin, they were a beautiful portrayal of how God Himself would remove it--through the blood of the perfect sacrifice of His own Son, Jesus Christ (cf. Heb. 9:11-14).

D. God's Unalterable Program for Mankind

God's purpose for Israel was to reveal His word to mankind. And God will never change His purposes because they are unalterable. Abraham was just as secure as the eternal plan of God. Jeremiah said, "Every purpose of the Lord shall be performed" (Jer. 51:29). God designed a channel--Israel--that through it, the world would be blessed. Isaiah said, "The Lord of hosts hath sworn, saying, Surely as I have thought, so shall it come to pass; and as I have purposed, so shall it stand" (Isa. 14:24).

1. The security of Israel

The promise to Abraham and the promise to everyone who trusts in Christ are as secure as God Himself. The Psalmist says, "The purpose of God stands forever" (Ps. 33:11, NASB). As a Christian, you are as secure as Abraham because God purposed before the world began to conform you to the image of Jesus Christ. If He erred on that promise, He would have broken His eternal purpose for the nation of Israel. Romans 9:8-20 shows the security of the promise that God gave to Abraham: "They who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as the seed." Paul was saying that it is not just the Jewish people who are God's chosen people, but also those to whom God has given a promise.

Romans 9:11 says, "The children, [Esau and Jacob] being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth" (v. 11). Of the two sons of Isaac, God chose Jacob. He did not choose them because they were good or evil. He chose them because it was His purpose to elect them. God had purposed to work through Jacob. Jacob was secure in the purpose of God before he was ever born. The obvious argument to this choosing is, "What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God" (v. 14)? Paul's answer in verse 14 is, "God forbid." God is not unjust. He says, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion" (v. 15). It all depends on God's purpose. Someone might respond then, "Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will" (v. 19)? Paul is saying, "How could God blame me if I am a sinner? How could he find fault

with me if I resists His will?" Paul again answers, "Who art thou that resist against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, why hast thou made me thus" (v. 20)?

Nothing is said about man's part--his work, faithfulness, or obedience. This passage explains the sovereign side of God's plan and is alone the basis of man's security. God has purposed to love His own and nothing can violate that plan. When God designs His purposes, He carries them out. God's plan for Israel might have been set aside for a time, but He will again regather His people because His plans never fail (cf. Rom. 11:26).

2. The security of the believer

Not only has God secured Israel's place in His future plans, but the same is for everyone who embraces the Lord Jesus Christ as well. God's plan for the believer is to conform him to the image of His Son.

a) Ephesians 1:3-5--Paul said, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ, according as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him, in love having predestinated us unto the adoption of sons by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will." Nothing is said at all in those verses to indicate that the believer has done anything to secure his own salvation. God, according to His own purpose, is the One who secures salvation for the believer. And if man cannot secure his own salvation, he also cannot keep his own salvation. God will both save the believer and keep the believer saved.

b) Romans 8:28-30--Paul said, "We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. For whom he did foreknow he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the first-born among many brethren. Moreover, whom he did predestinate, them he also called; and whom he called, them he also justified; and whom he justified, them he also glorified." The promise is so certain that Paul puts it in the past tense--even for future believers. Everyone that God foreordained, He also predestined to be conformed to Jesus Christ. That means everyone who comes to salvation will be conformed to Jesus Christ. No one is lost in the middle. Paul goes on in the rest of the chapter to explain that there is no other authority that can dispute God's claim on the believer. That is why Jesus could say at the end of His earthly ministry, "While I was with them in the world, I kept them in my name; those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost" (John 17:12).

III. GOD'S PLEDGE (vv. 13b; 16-18)

"Because he could swear by no greater, he swore by himself For men verily swear by the greater, and an oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife. Wherein God, willing more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath, that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us."

A. Man's Custom (v. 16)

It was common in New Testament times for a person to make an oath on something or someone greater than himself. That is the meaning of verse 16. Men would usually swear by the altar, the high

priest, or even God. Once such an oath is made, the argument was over. It would be assumed that if someone made such an oath, he was fully determined to keep it.

B. God's Concession (v. 17)

God, of course, does not need to make such an oath. His Word is every bit as good without an oath--as ours ought to be (cf. Matt. 5:33-37). But to accommodate the weak faith of men, God swore His promise to Abraham on Himself: "God, willing more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath" (v. 17). Since there is nothing greater than God, He swore by Himself (v. 13). That pledge did not make God's promise any more secure. He gave it nonetheless as further assurance to those who are slow to believe. The bare Word of God is guarantee enough, but God gave an oath just to show that He meant what He said.

1. The pledge of the Holy Spirit

The pledge of God's oath to the believer is the presence of the Holy Spirit. Three times Paul referred to the Holy Spirit as God's pledge to believers (2 Cor. 1:22, 5:5). Ephesians 1:14 talks about the "earnest [Gk. arrabon, "pledge"] of the Spirit." In modern Greek, arrabon is used to refer to an engagement ring, a pledge of marriage. Because of God's gracious pledge, my salvation is secured by the Holy Spirit.

2. The promise of the Holy Spirit

The writer of Hebrews also speaks about the recipients of God's promises. He says, "God, willing more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel confirmed it by an oath" (v. 17). God did not simply give His promise to Abraham but to all his spiritual heirs of the promise--all those who have put their faith in God throughout the ages. God's oath to Abraham stands as a testimony of God's faithfulness for all time. God's swearing by Himself was not only that Abraham might be fully persuaded, but that all the heirs of Abraham's promise throughout the ages might know that God keeps His Word.

C. God's Character (v. 18)

The writer goes on to say, "By two immutable [Gk. ametatheton] things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us" (v. 18). The two immutable or unchangeable things spoken of here refer to God's promise and His pledge. Ametatheton was used in relation to wills. Once properly made, a will was unchangeable by anyone but the maker. God has declared His promise and His pledge to be unchangeable, even by Himself. His will cannot be switched, transposed, or altered.

1. The encouragement He gives

The writer goes on to say "It was impossible for God to lie" and "we might have a strong consolation." The phrase "strong consolation" comes from the Greek word parakleo which means a "strong encouragement" or "strong confidence." The writer adds, "Who have fled for refuge." In the Septuagint, the Greek word for "refuge" is used for the cities God provided for those who sought protection from avengers for an accidental killing (cf. Num. 35; Deut. 19; Josh. 20). We will never know whether God can hold on to us until in desperation we run to Him for refuge.

2. The hope He gives

The writer ends verse 18 by saying, "To lay hold upon the hope set before us." What is the hope that is set before us? Jesus Himself, and the gospel He brought.

a) 1 Timothy 1:1--Paul said, "The Lord Jesus Christ... is our hope."

b) Colossians 1:5--Paul also said, "The hope which is laid up for you in heaven, of which ye heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel." If you are ever going to have a strong confidence and a steadfast hope, you must flee to God as a refuge and embrace Jesus Christ, who is your only hope of salvation.

IV. GOD'S PRIEST (vv. 19-20)

"Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the veil, where the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek."

A. The Anchor (v. 19)

In the New Covenant God added yet another security: Jesus Christ. As our High Priest, Jesus serves as the anchor of our souls, the One who will forever keep us from drifting away from God. The believer is anchored to God by His relationship with Christ and can be confident because it is "within the veil" (v. 19). In the Old Testament, the most sacred place in the Temple was the Holy of Holies, which is the sacrifice of atonement was made. Inside the Holy of Holies was the Ark of the Covenant, which signified the glory of God. Only once a year on the day of atonement, the high priest would make atonement for the sins of the children of Israel. But under the New Covenant, atonement has been made once for all time by Christ's sacrifice on the cross. Our soul is, in God's mind, already secured within the veil--His eternal sanctuary.

B. The Assurance (v. 20)

When Jesus entered the heavenly Holy of Holies, he did not leave after words, as did the Aaronic high priests. Rather, "He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high" (Heb. 1:3). And Jesus remains there forever as the Guardian of our souls. Such absolute security is almost incomprehensible. Not only are our souls anchored within the impregnable, inviolable heavenly sanctuary, but our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, stands guard over them as well! How can the Christian's security be described as anything but eternal? Truly we can trust God and His Savior with our souls. That is good cause to get off the fence and come all the way to salvation.

Focusing on the Facts

1. Why is there such a distrust of people in the world?

2. _____ in the _____ with all your heart is the only real answer in today's _____ world.

3. Who is the father of faith? Support your answer with Scripture.

4. What was the writer of Hebrews urging the Jewish community to do?

5. What is the theme of Hebrews 6:13-20?

6. True or False: Abraham is a wonderful example of faith because he trusted God against all odds.

7. Why do the New Testament writers often use Abraham as the basis of faith?

8. Abraham was not circumcised before God called him to lead the Jewish race. Why is that so important?

9. True or False: Salvation in the Old Testament was by keeping the Law of God.

10. What is the overriding security in Hebrews 6:13-20?

11. Did God keep His promise to Abraham? Explain?

12. What kind of illustration can Abraham and Isaac provide for someone today?

13. What were the three main problems that arose in the unfolding plan of God? How did God deal with those situations?

14. What was Abraham's role in the plan of God? Did Abraham have to remain absolutely obedient if God's plan was to succeed?

15. What was different about God's covenant with Abraham?

16. What were some of the ways in which Israel was to be God's channel of blessing to the rest of the world?

17. What was the apostle Paul's response to those who say man has no say in God's choosing process (Rom. 9:20)?

18. God's plan for the believer is to conform him to the image of _____ .

19. What is meant by the pledge of the Spirit?

20. What is the hope that is set before us and why is it important (Heb. 6:18)?

21. What is the significance of the priesthood as discussed in verses 19- 20?

22. Discuss the Old Testament form for atonement and explain Christ's death on the cross in the New Testament in relation to it.

Pondering the Principles

1.The theme of Hebrews 6:13-20 is the security of God's promises. Several things stand out in the passage but most importantly, Abraham's faith and God's faithfulness. Do you believe that God will supply all you need to live the Christian life? Read the following verses and ask God to strengthen your faith in Him: Num. 23:19, 2 Tim. 2:13, Titus 1:2, and Heb. 6:18.

2.Israel was designed by God to be His channel of blessing to the world in seven ways (see pp. 10-11). It could also be said in a secondary sense that the church has the same responsibilities. Match the following passages from the New Testament to the purposes that follow:

- | | |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------|
| a) Proclaiming God | a) Ephesians 1:3 |
| b) Revealing the Messiah | b) Ephesians 2:8-9 |
| c) Being a nation of priests | c) 1 Thessalonians 5:24 |
| d) Preserving Scripture | d) Jude 3 |
| e) Showing God's faithfulness | e) Acts 2:36 |
| f) Showing God's blessing | f) 1 Peter 2:9 |
| g) Showing God's grace | g) John 1:1, 14 |

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