

**HEBREWS 6:1-12**  
The Real Danger of Falling Away

Intro:

Burger King Principle – Richard Pratt – **if you try to say everything about a subject each time you say anything, you end up saying nothing at all.**

I will not be saying everything about perseverance etc this morning

**In the heart of Christianity is a huge EITHER / OR  
– lost or saved, dead or alive; child of God or child of wrath.**

But once inside there is a strong reality that the Christian life is a process, a journey. In that journey though you are either moving forward or you are moving backward- there is no stagnation. That message has come through several times in the first 5 chapters of this sermon letter.

A BRIEF REVIEW

As we have said, Hebrews 1 and 2 emphasize that Jesus is superior to the angels. In Hebrews 3, after warning us against an unbelieving heart, the author reminds us that Jesus is superior even to Moses.

In Hebrews 4, especially beginning in verse 14, the author of Hebrews reminds us that Jesus is superior to even the great high priests of the Old Testament in the line of Aaron. He is a Great High Priest.

We come to that great crescendo in Hebrews 5:10. He is a High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek. And as we said last time as we were studying this passage, when you get to Hebrews 5:11, you are expecting him to give you a little explanation of what it means for Jesus to be a priest according to the order of Melchizedek. But the author of Hebrews surprises you. He surprises you with a warning and with an exhortation.

He is concerned that some of his hearers in that local congregation may be dull of hearing and may not be getting the spiritual message that he is trying to drive home. May I remind you that these are Jewish Christians to whom he is writing. Some of these Jewish Christians are being tempted to go back to their old religion, to go back to some form of Judaism, to underestimate the importance of Jesus Christ in living relationship with God.

Most likely, they are experiencing peer pressure from the broader culture to downplay the “Jesus thing.” Sound familiar?

So, they are tempted to marginalize the significance in their spiritual experience. They are attempting to retain fellowship with God, but somehow to exclude Jesus Christ from that process. You see, there is a danger in this congregation that some may turn away from Christ. So, the author wants them to understand that he is not telling them all these incredible things about the person of Christ for their interest. He is telling them because they are vitally important to where they are spiritually. And then he encourages them. Now we come to one of the most shocking and sobering passages of scripture.

Heb 6:1-12 – A WARNING AGAINST the Danger of Falling Away - Apostasy

**1 Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, 2 of instruction about washings and laying on of hands, and the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment. 3 And this we will do, if God permits. 4 For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, 5 and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, 6 and *then* have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame.**

7 For ground that drinks the rain which often falls on it and brings forth vegetation useful to those for whose sake it is also tilled, receives a blessing from God; 8 but if it yields thorns and thistles, it is worthless and close to being cursed, and it ends up being burned.

9 But, beloved, we are convinced of better things concerning you, and things that accompany salvation, though we are speaking in this way. 10 For God is not unjust so as to forget your work and the love which you have shown toward His name, in having ministered and in still ministering to the saints. 11 And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end, 12 so that you will not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

The author, in this passage sounds like he is both warning and encouraging the audience. We must take both of those seriously. Don't decouple them. Give each their due weight. The warning is a warning – a loving warning, but a warning. It should cause us to do self-reflection, but that reflection should lead us back to Christ, our great savior.

When you read this, “it sure sounds like he’s talking about folks who lost their salvation.” It is sobering.

EX: The Last Battle – “I thought there were 4 who ruled?” ASLAN: “Susan is no longer a friend of Naria” <https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2009/02/whatever-happened-to-susan-pevensie>

What a shocking thing to include in the book. Why?

Because it conforms to reality. Not every story has a happy ending

EX: King Saul

EX: Judas – an apostle who did miracles in Jesus’ name. Full

access to the person and work of Jesus, yet he walked away.

This passage addresses the issue of apostasy, not a word often used. It means a clear turning away from a certain belief, a renunciation, particularly of religious faith.

To understand this passage, you need to start with the end and work back (v.9-12) The author sees good things from their past and expects good things in the future, but knows they need to be encouraged and exhorted to hold firm. I won't BURY THE LEAD...

Note the picture here is not of a field that was fruitful then became thorns; it is a picture of two different fields. BOTH got the rain (partakers of common grace), but there were different results.

The original audience was struggling with pressure from the culture to abandon this new faith in Jesus as the Messiah. By continuing, they would be opposing family and friends and the cultural values as a whole. SOUND FAMILIAR?

\*\* I am struck by the relevance of this text and book. The message is more relevant today than it was 17 weeks ago when I started. It seems like we are getting regular doses of opposition to a public display of faith values, especially those values rooted in an orthodox historic expression of biblical Christianity.

<https://www.premier.org.uk/News/UK/Christian-peer-fears-proclaiming-Christianity-could-be-a-hate-crime>

6:1-3 Let us be carried on to maturity

WE NEVER GET BEYOND THE NEED FOR BASIC NUTRITION, but we grow in our ability to eat and digest solid food.

A part of spiritual maturity is a willingness to grapple with hard issues; you must be willing to think and study.

It implies to a corporate aspect – 1st person plural

Dan Doriani

“So chapter 6:1 says, “Let us be carried on to maturity and get beyond these basics.”

The list of the “foundational” items could seem baffling, but he’ll address most of these later on in this letter, and most of these have a connection with the OT.

He wants to go on, but he is still concerned about these people who are not really ready to go with him. Verse three says, “God permitting, we will do so,” but he does not feel quite free to do that. He still wants to say another word to the people who are listening, specifically to those in a third group. The first group consists of those who stray in ignorance, and the second group consists of those who are lethargic (dull of hearing- sluggish).

The third group contains those who are really considering apostasy, who look like they may abandon the faith. This is very, very different from a sin of ignorance. You cannot abandon the faith by accident. It is a deliberate act.”

#### 6:4-8

**Golden rule of scripture interpretation – Let scripture interpret scripture.** If this were the ONLY text on perseverance, then it would be very sobering. BUT IT’S NOT.

In the PCA, WE BELIEVE in “once saved, always saved.” Does this text undermine that? It seems to, but, it’s not the only text on the subject. There are many but I’ll mention two:

John 10:27-29

**27My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; 28and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand.29My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand.**

Heb 7

**25Therefore He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.**

This topic must be viewed in light of v. 9ff where the author offers a vision of a positive response and spiritual future of the audience. The future is positive if they heed the warning of v. 4-9. It must be viewed in light of other texts such as 1 Jn 2:19...

It is fair, of course, to say that, appearances notwithstanding, people who apostatize were never genuinely Christians at all. John makes that point explicitly in discussing apostasy in his first letter: **“They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us.” [1 John 2:19]**

Once SAVED, always saved. NOT “once exposed to or even enjoying the benefits of the saved community, always saved.” Not “once moved by the person of Jesus or once walking the aisle or even praying a prayer.” But Once SAVED.

PRINCIPLES:

- 1) God graciously warns us that we could drift away and be lost; and that he does this precisely in order to strengthen our assurance that we will not drift away and be lost.**

THIS text raises questions about “can one be saved then lost?”

For that to happen, someone would have to snatch you out of the Father’s hand, and we’ve already seen that Jesus says that it won’t happen.

For someone saved to become lost, a whole sequence of divine actions, planned from all eternity would have to be reversed. – Rom 8 – those foreknown by God, predestined, called, justified, and glorified would have to become unknown, unpredestined, uncalled, unjustified and unglorified. Those born again would have to become dead again. The forgiven would become Unforgiven.

There is simply no teaching in scripture that the eternal plan of God’s salvation is reversed by human decisions. Rom 8:38ff – For I am convinced... nothing is able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. (not even ourselves).

All sides of the discussion find this passage sobering and troubling. I hope that we'll see the warning and hope that comes from it.

The issue isn't trying to guess where a person will end up, but where you are right now. Are you growing? Are you listening, or are you dull of hearing?  
Does your life yield fruit or thistles? V. 7-9

Note the picture here is not of a field that was fruitful then became thorns; it is a picture of two different fields. BOTH got the rain (partakers of common grace), but there were different results.

Note that the focus is on FRUIT, not gifts or a skill set. The evidence of spiritual life is spiritual fruit.

**2. There is a form of religiosity that often looks real but isn't.** Jesus taught about this in relation to prayer, giving and fasting. There are two forms of religious life and they look alike from the outside, but the heart is different. Matt 6

- IT IS POSSIBLE TO LOOK LIKE YOU'RE SAVED, BUT SHOW THAT IT WAS NOT THE CASE
  - o - EX: Judas - "one of you will betray me"; the disciples said, "who?". NO one said, "it's got to be Judas". There was nothing obvious about him; he seemed as into Jesus as the rest of the guys.
  - o EX: "many will say, but we did miracles in your name".. "I never knew you."

HOW MANY OF YOU know someone who was helpful to your spiritual life who has now left the faith? The text refers to those who "tasted" or had some enlightenment by the things of Christ, but he does not refer to them as having believed. This text doesn't deal with true believers who are ceasing to believe. It deals with people who make a profession to be a believer, but the profession turns out to be false. It is possible to sit in the midst of a Christian community, hear the Word, be moved and participate and not really have faith in Christ.

This text is sobering, and if you are sobered by it, then it is most likely an indication that you are NOT the person being described in v. 4-6. If the warnings of 4-6 don't sober you, then that is a bad sign.

People who commit this sin have given up the notions that Christ alone can save sinners or that only by God's grace can sinners be made right with God, if they have not also given up the very idea of a divine judgment of human beings.

If you rest complacent with some idea that "oh, I'll turn around later", you're in a bad place.

The best indicator of your spiritual health is not where you think you'll be "later" but where you are right now - learning, growing, maturing or DULL and stagnant / drifting away.

**3. Functional APOSTASY is not simply a rejecting of doctrine (as important as that is) -**

This book shows us that "falling away" is as much a practical thing as a doctrinal thing. The warning is against being a "functional apostate", not simply a "doctrinal apostate". It is the dullness and hardness of heart and deceitfulness of sin that makes it impossible to repent - there is no desire to repent. While there is a natural ability to repent there is not moral / spiritual ability - "I could, but I won't"

WHEN you live as if there is no real hope, no sympathetic high priest, no access to the throne of grace, no community to connect with, then you are a functional non-believer; if you live that way after having tasted those things, then you are an apostate, even if you hold to a lot of good theology.

Remember, the devil has some right theology – James 2:19

Note that it is an issue of one who has at one time professed Christ, thought of herself or himself as a Christian, was viewed by others as a Christian. A non-believer cannot fall away in this fashion.

It is an issue of one who in some way had been “enlightened, shared in the Holy Spirit and tasted the goodness of the Word of God.” This is a mystery but indicates that one can come close enough to be considered a partaker without really knowing and being known by Christ.

This NOT an issue of “backsliding” as a believer. There is repentance and forgiveness for that. A case in point is Ps 51 – David, or Peter, after his denials of Christ.

IMPOSSIBLE TO RENEW TO REPENTANCE - This is making a mockery of Christ and putting him to open shame. The rejection of the person and work of Christ is the core of apostasy. The idea that we can have God while rejecting Jesus as Savior puts one in the place of deception and ultimately of eternal peril. There are gray areas where people of faith can disagree, but the centrality of Christ is not one of them.

\*\*\*Practically, our view of Christ usually flows from our view of scripture. Realistically, our view of scripture can be shaped by our experience and feelings rather than by adherence to Christ. When a clear teaching of scripture bumps up against something that we want to do or against the practice of people we know, then there is a temptation to set aside the teaching of scripture at that point. Then it becomes easier to set aside scripture at other points, even to the point of setting aside what scripture says about Christ. Himself.

“It won’t happen to me” is the mindset of most people who drift into routine sinful activity and spiritual drifting. This sort of drifting is often a prelude to falling away. Few people wake up one day and say, “I don’t believe anymore. I repudiate Jesus.” It happens slowly- small steps spiritually and morally in the wrong direction.

So what do we do? Continue to consider and treasure Jesus; see to it that we’re not dull of hearing.

### **6: 9-13**

But he is convinced and he has good hope for them with regard to their salvation. The ground of his hope is that God is incapable of misjudging the heart and doing an injustice with regard to salvation. But he is also hopeful because he has seen these people minister to one another. He has seen their love. And because he has seen their love, he is hopeful that the reason that they love one another is that the love of God has been shed abroad in their hearts. And so, he woos them by that compliment away from defecting from Christ and back into the arms of Christ.

Words of hope – personal and encouraging. It’s a different tone from v. 6-8

Hope is living life now in light of a future certainty – Habig

The OT hope is that God will wash us white as snow and separate our sin from us, as far as the east is from the west.

That is what this TABLE means.

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