

Hebrews 6 (Part 1) :1-12 • A serious warning and greatly misunderstood passage

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All right. Hebrews chapter 6. Open your Bibles there , please. Hebrews beginning the sixth chapter this morning. We're going to take the first 12 verses. All right. It says this:

“¹Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, ²and of instruction about washings, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. ³And this we will do if God permits. ⁴For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, ⁵and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, ⁶and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt. ⁷For land that has drunk the rain that often falls on it, and produces a crop useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God. ⁸But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed, and its end is to be burned. ⁹Though we speak in this way, yet in your case, beloved, we feel sure of better things—things that belong to salvation. ¹⁰For 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. ¹¹And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end, ¹²so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.” (ESV)

Stop there if you would, please. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, every time we approach the Word, we recognize our great need of the Holy Spirit as teacher, instructor, revealer, illuminator. No less today. Lord, these are hard verses, challenging verses. And frankly, I don't believe that I'm up to the task. But I know that You are. And so we look to You as the teacher in the room here today and we ask You to fill our hearts with insight, wisdom, and understanding. And we pray that You would enlarge our hearts to receive for we ask it in Jesus' precious name, amen. Amen.

I have to be completely honest with you and tell you, I felt like reading this passage and then closing in prayer and just kind of going home. But this is because this is challenging stuff here today, okay?

Over the course of our studies here at Calvary Chapel, we've spoken many times about passages in the Bible that really need their context in order to be understood. And by the same token, I've said, and you've heard me say, those of you that have been around, that there are passages in the Bible that don't require context.

It's not true that every single time a passage must be taken in context. Some must. Some are not necessary to take into context. Let me actually show you on the screen three different passages that don't need their context to be true. For example:

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1 John 4:8 (ESV)

... God is love.

(Hebrews 12:29, we'll get to this later in this study, says)

Hebrews 12:29 (ESV)

... our God is a consuming fire.

(And John 14:6, we have the words of Jesus saying)

John 14:6 (ESV)

Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

I share those with you because those statements are just a few in the Bible that are true regardless of their context.

God is always a God of love. He is always a consuming fire, and Jesus is always only the way, the truth and the life and those things don't change. And so it doesn't really matter in what context they are spoken.

But one thing you'll notice about all of those passages, is that they speak about God or his salvation. And the reason that they don't need context is because God never changes. And His way of reaching people and saving them never changes. Jesus is always only ever going to be the way and God is always going to be a

God of love. He does not change. He is also always going to be a consuming fire, and that speaks of his holiness. God will always be holy. And in so being that consuming fire is always a reality. So those are things that don't change. Regardless of the context, they remain true.

However, there are other statements in the Bible that absolutely need their context in order to make sense. And this today here in Hebrews 6, the first 12 verses is very much one of the passages that needs its context to be understood. Especially as it relates to verses 4 through 6 of this passage.

And by the way, it's, I get asked on a fairly regular basis, "Pastor Paul, what's your interpretation of Hebrews 6, 4 through 6?"

And they'll just write that. What's your interpretation of this passage? Well, may I suggest to you this morning that's the wrong question. The real question that we should be asking about this passage or about those particular verses, verses 4 through 6 are actually a series of questions that are really needful to ask in order to really understand the passage. Let me put them up on the screen for you. They are basically these:

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QUESTIONS

1. What is the Author saying in 6:4-6,
2. What does he mean, and (What does he mean by what he's saying?)
3. What was his reason for making such a statement? (Why did he even say this? What's his reason for saying this in the first place? Why was it necessary for him to make this statement and this statement of great strength and so forth?)

These are the questions we're going to be looking at here this morning. And I trust the Lord will give us satisfying answers. But that's His responsibility.

All right, so we're going to take a look at the first question. What is the author saying? And that's the first thing. Let's read again, beginning in verse 1, He begins by saying,

"Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ"

And he referred to the elementary doctrine in the last chapter. He just referred to it using different words. You'll remember in the last chapter, he called them the

basic principles of the oracles or the word of God. It was also referred to as the “milk”, right? Basic stuff. The milk.

And he talked to these people, you'll remember in a fairly, in-your-face kind of a way in the last chapter as it ended saying “you guys really aren't ready for the meat of the word. You're still on milk because you're still kind of babies.” And so we have to go over that, over and over again.

But now he's saying, so let's leave, let's move on. Now from that, let's go on to stuff. That is going to bring you into a place of maturity. Let's grow beyond the milk of the word. And we made the point last week that the milk of the word, are the basic things. And here in verses 1 and 2, he repeats more of these basic things.

Look at verses 1 and 2. He says, let's move on. Let's move beyond things like repentance. Let's move beyond things like, faith. Let's move beyond instruction about washings. Your Bible may say the doctrine of baptisms, if you have a different translation. And it's possible that the author here was speaking of ritual cleansings that were our part of the Old Testament law.

He says, let's move beyond “*the laying on of hands*” what that all means and why we do it. Let's move beyond “*the resurrection of the dead.*” The resurrection, although it's an amazing teaching, is a basic one. It's a basic one. Jesus was raised from the dead. He's coming back to raise us. He says, let's move beyond eternal judgment.

Well, boy, some people are fixated, believe me, on eternal judgment. They're just like, you got to go back, “Paul, pastor Paul, can we talk about judgment?” And the reason I find the, well, the biggest reason I find people get fixated on judgment is because they're afraid of it. They're fearful of it, and so they want to talk about it, and they think that maybe by talking more about it, they might not have so much fear about it. And frankly, that usually doesn't help.

I'll be just honest with you. What they need to do is resolve their issues of fear with faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross. We think getting more information is always the answer, and sometimes it just feeds the fear, to be completely honest with you.

So he says, now we need to go beyond these things and we need to move on to maturity. And then he comes to that beginning of that section in verse 4, where he begins this way and he starts with this thing and he just lambasts us. I don't

know if you use that word. My mother used to use that word. “Lambast.” I don't even, it hit hard. He hits us hard with this.

I pick up these things, I say these things that my parents used to say, well still do. But anyway, he hits us hard with this statement “*for it is impossible.*” That statement just removes all doubt that what he's about to say has any gray area. He doesn't say, “It's hard. It's difficult.” He says “*it's impossible.*” Impossible for what?

Well, he goes on to describe it. It's impossible, in the case of those. He starts describing a person, he says, who has once been enlightened, someone who's tasted the heavenly gift, shared in the Holy Spirit. They've tasted the goodness of the word of God, the powers of the age to come and then to have fallen away. He says it's impossible to restore them again to repentance.

That's what he's saying since they are crucifying all over again, the son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt. And you'll notice that in this, beginning in verse 4, he describes this individual or individuals as someone who has been enlightened, tasted the heavenly gift, shared the Holy Spirit, tasted the goodness of the Word of God, finally tasted the powers of the age to come. And again, he says, for such a person to then fall away.

It is impossible for such a person to be restored onto repentance. And then he gives the reason why. But before we ask what the author means by all of this, we need to make the point that what he's doing here is he's sounding (well it's obvious), he's sounding a very serious and a very sobering warning.

I mean, I don't care what your personal belief is as to who he's talking about, it doesn't really matter. What we can all agree on is this is a warning. And the book of Hebrews is largely about warnings. There's a lot of warnings in this book. I mean very in-your-face, sobering, serious warnings. And this is one of them.

So now that we know what he said, let's go to the next question on our list here, and that is:

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What does this warning mean??

And this is where we get into some challenging territory. And I will tell you before I begin to explain to you what I feel it means that there are, I'll just tell

you right now, there are many wonderful and very sincere believers in Jesus who look at this passage, read the very same description that you and I have just read in this passage, and they will tell you that they believe that this does not describe a true believer in Jesus. They will tell you that. Some of them will cite the fact for their belief by pointing to the repetition of the word “taste” or “tasted.”

As kind of their proof text in a sense, and they will explain that what the author is referring to here is someone who has merely tasted or if you will, sampled, these aspects of the word of God, the spirit and so forth. But they've never really consumed them in the sense of taking Jesus in. And therefore, they believe that the author here is referring to a non-believer. Okay? I just needed to get that out there.

And there may be some of you here in this room who'd have that same position, and if you do I want you to know that I respect you for your position, but you need to know that I disagree with you, not because it's all that important that I disagree, but I think that there's something that, some things you need to see.

I cannot subscribe to the interpretation that the author of these descriptions is speaking of an unbeliever for several reasons. And one of the things is the very word that people will point to and that is tasted because the Greek word that is used here for tasted in verses four and five saying that this person has tasted the heavenly gift and tasted the goodness of the word of God is the same word that we saw the author use earlier in this very letter to describe something Jesus did. Let me show it to you on the screen. Hebrews 2:9:

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Hebrews 2:9 (ESV)

...we see him (and we're talking about Jesus) who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

And see, that's the same word. So the argument is, again, that the person described in Hebrews 6:4 through 6 is an unbeliever because they've merely tasted or sampled the things of God, but never consumed them. But if that argument stands, then the same has to be true of Hebrews 2:9, and that means Jesus merely sampled death and didn't really experience it.

See, that's a problem. You can't have it both ways. The word doesn't mean just sampled. So what are we talking about here?

Well, there's another reason to me that it doesn't make sense that the person described in chapter six is an unbeliever. Look at the wording in verse 6 with me. Look again in your Bible. He says here that after describing this person, he says, “*if this person has fallen away.*” I have a question for you. If this is an unbeliever, how can they fall away? How can an unbeliever fall away? They have to be there first to fall away.

In fact, then he goes on to say it's impossible to restore them to repentance again. So this person has already repented. They've come to Christ, and then he says if they fall away, they can't repent again.

And why? He gives the reason because they're crucifying, once again, the son of God to their own harm. But it shows, you know, that they've already repented, they've embraced the crucifixion of the Son of God, embraced it personally. So I have to tell you when I read the description that is given here in Hebrews chapter 6, I see a believer. I see a true, honest, born-again believer in Jesus Christ. So what are these verses saying? They're saying that it is impossible for a true believer to return to the Lord through repentance if they fall away. But here's the real question we have to ask. What does he mean by fall away?

That's, see, that's where it really all comes down to that. It's absolutely critical that we define and understand what the author is saying here. Well, let me just tell you what he's not saying, okay? When the author uses the term “fall away” here or “fallen away”, he's not talking about a Christian falling into sin. Okay? It's not what he's talking about.

Because repentance, we know, is possible for people who fall into sin. We know that by the sheer magnitude of the times the New Testament tells people to repent. I mean, it's absolutely huge. Did you know that of the five letters that Jesus dictated to the churches in Asia Minor that are recorded for us in the book of Revelation, excuse me did I say five, of the seven letters, five of them tell the people there to repent. Of the seven, five. Let me show you first couple Smyrna in Revelation 2:5:

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Revelation 2:5 (Smyrna)

Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you

did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place unless you repent.

Revelation 2:16 (Pergamum)

Therefore repent. If not, I will come to you soon and war against them with the sword of my mouth.

(We move on here to Thyatira)

Revelation 2:22 (Thyatira)

Behold, I will throw her onto a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her I will throw into great tribulation, unless they repent of her works,

Revelation 3:3 (Sardis)

Remember, then, what you received and heard. Keep it, and repent. If you will not wake up, I will come like a thief and you will not know at what hour I will come against you.

(And then finally, you know, the backslidden Church of Laodicea)

Revelation 3:19 (Laodicea)

Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent.

Okay. What's the point I'm trying to make? I'm making the point that repentance is possible when a believer backslides and falls into sin. Obviously.

So we know that's not what the author of Hebrews is referring to when he speaks of a believer who has fallen away. That's it's, we're not talking about backsliding. All right? It's very important.

So what does fallen away mean in verse 6? Well, this is where we come to context. This is it right here, guys. You can't get past context and so that's what you've got to apply. Which brings us to the final question that we're going to look at.

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What was the Author's reason for making this statement?

Guys, it's the context of the letter. That's why he said what he said. We've been saying since we started the study in the book of Hebrews, now, and you guys

could probably repeat this verbatim, you've heard it so many times. The letter is written to Jewish Christians who are being tempted to abandon faith alone in Jesus Christ and begin to take on elements of the Mosaic law so as to deflect persecution and public pressure. And this letter was being written to those Jewish Hebrew believers. Encouraging them, challenging them, and warning them about that exact thing.

And we saw last week, we talked last week about compromise. What it is to compromise the gospel. And again, they're being tempted to compromise by once again, rejoining some of these elements of Judaism, part of the Mosaic law. And as a means of being saved.

And that's a serious thing because they're saying the cross is great, but we're going to add in these other elements like circumcision, and Sabbath keeping and food laws and feast observances. Got to do that too, okay? Cross is great, but you've got to do these other things too. And that's a compromise.

And the author is saying, listen, the author is saying in this letter over and over again that for someone to do an about face, as it relates to the gospel and the cross being the only means of our salvation, he is saying for some person, for such a person to do that kind of an about face and to say that the cross of Christ is no longer sufficient in and of itself to save us. He is saying, for such a person there is no recourse, and that repentance is no longer possible.

All right. That's challenging, isn't it? That's challenging stuff to hear. Now let me just tell you that in my 48 years of being a believer, my 38 years of being a serious believer and my roughly 35 years of being a Pastor, I've never met such a person.

I can tell you that, in all honesty, I have not personally met someone who came to Christ, at least I don't think I have. It's pretty tough to know, but I don't think I've ever met anyone who put their faith in Jesus, walked in the power of the Spirit and sampled the power of God, and then did an about face on that, coming to a place of unbelief.

But my experience does not interpret the Bible. You with me? I'm just one guy, and I've got a fairly limited experience in my life. My experience, the Bible interprets my experience, not the other way around. But even though I've never met such a person, the author of Hebrews tells me it's possible. That it is possible. That's why he wrote the letter.

And so I'm assuming it to be not just for Hebrews, but because of other testimony in the word of God, I'm assuming the reason these authors gave these kinds of warnings is because it is possible.

Now I will also tell you that even though I've never met personally a person who's done this sort of turnaround from faith to unbelief, I have heard of such a person.

Some of you may have heard or know of a man by the name of Charles Templeton. He was a close friend of Billy Graham, and like Graham was a powerful and very anointed evangelist. Templeton and Graham worked together at times during the fifties. They were probably the two most successful pioneers of mass evangelism in North America.

Templeton would speak in front of groups of 30,000 plus, sharing the gospel. Many people, just like Billy Graham, many people came to faith in Jesus Christ through his powerful messages. But over time, Charles Templeton began to entertain doubts about the word of God. He particularly had troubles with the Old Testament. And eventually, after a period of time, Charles Templeton came to a place where he rejected the faith that he once so powerfully shared with others. In fact, he even wrote a book. The book is entitled, Farewell to God. My Reasons for Rejecting the Christian Faith. You can still buy it, although I wouldn't recommend it. But I found out it's still available. I never met the man, but his story is well documented.

You need to know that there are those who claim that Charles Templeton could not possibly have been a believer. And they say that because they personally believe that what Charles Templeton did or claimed to do is an impossibility.

But if it is an impossibility, I have to ask why the letter of Hebrews was written. That's my question to their statement, because the author of this letter is presenting an argument so that what happened to Charles Templeton would not happen to the people who are the recipients of this letter. And frankly, it's not just the book of Hebrews.

We've mentioned previously that we also have the letter that Paul wrote to the churches in Galatia. I've mentioned it in the past. In fact, even last week, you'll remember the believers in Galatia were also being tempted. Even though they were Gentiles, they were being tempted to embrace aspects of Judaism, particularly circumcision, by adding it to the cross of Christ as a necessary means of being saved.

Paul gave them a very serious warning too. Let me show it to you, Galatians 5:2:

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Galatians 5:2 (ESV)

Look: I, Paul, say to you that if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you.

That's a strong word to give to believers. Let me show it to you in the New King James:

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Galatians 5:2 (NKJV)

Indeed I, Paul, say to you that if you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing.

Again, strong words made to believers.

Years ago, a number of years ago, I asked a brother who did not believe that a person could turn their back and go the other way. I brought up this passage. I showed him Galatians 5:2 and I said, how do you explain this? What was Paul saying when he said, "*Christ will be of no value to you?*"

He said, well, he meant that they would lose their reward. They would lose their eternal reward.

I said, "But you're saying that they're still saved?"

He said, "Oh yes, absolutely."

And my response was, "If they're still saved, then Christ is of some advantage to them, isn't He?"

I mean, if I find my way to heaven and yet there are no rewards given out for me in this life, Jesus was still a pretty big advantage in my life because I got, I'm saved for eternity. Maybe I got nothing to show for it, but I'm saved. I am with Him. I am. You get me? Can we go back to those verses?

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Galatians 5:2 (ESV)

*Look: I, Paul, say to you that if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of **no advantage** to you.*

Galatians 5:2 (NKJV)

*Indeed I, Paul, say to you that if you become circumcised, Christ will **profit you nothing**.*

No advantage. Profit you nothing. See, that's the strength of the argument that it seems to me that some people are just not truly embracing or understanding. Paul said, if you're going to compromise the cross, as the only means of salvation, you are going to render Christ of no advantage to you or of no profit.

So, we come back to this whole conversation “once saved, always saved” or the question, “can a person lose their salvation?” You've heard me talk about that in the past, and for the record, I'll say it again. I do not believe that a born again Christian can lose their salvation due to sin. I don't believe they can.

I don't believe that's possible because their faith is in Jesus, you see, for the forgiveness of sins. And that's a perpetual cleansing. The Bible tells us that the blood of Christ keeps on cleansing us from sin. People, these warnings that I shared with you here from Hebrews and also in Galatians, these are not meant for tenderhearted people who lack assurance.

If you're one of those people, and I talk to a lot of them, who struggle with the area of assurance, these verses are not meant to upset you or to get you to a place of saying, “I don't even think I'm, I wonder if I'm even saved.” That's not the author's intent because when people say that to me, there is always, and only one reason they say it. Because they are personally aware of their sin. That's why they doubt.

If they doubt, that's why they doubt. I'll say, “Why? Why do you doubt your salvation?”

“Well, because I'm such a jerk. I'm such a sinner.”

I go, “Yeah, see I hear you. The enemy has done an effective job accusing you because he's the accuser of the brethren and he accuses you and he says, ‘You think you are saved?’”

Good grief. All you need. Yeah. I get it. I get it. You got your eyes on yourself. Get them off yourself. Get them onto Jesus. You got your eyes on the problem.

Get them onto the solution. You got your eyes on the sinner. Get them on the Savior. That's the solution to your problem. Those of you who have an assurance issue, get over yourself.

Get your eyes on Jesus Christ and what he did on the cross. Stop looking at your sin. Start looking at the Savior. Keep your eyes there. Don't let the enemy turn you back to looking at you. You keep your eyes on Him, you'll be okay. This warning is not for you, okay? This isn't for sinners. In that sense, remember what the Apostle Paul said? He said, here's a trustworthy saying,

“Jesus Christ came to save sinners of who I am the worst” (1 Timothy 1:15).

He said that. Present tense, the Apostle Paul, present tense. I am the chief sinner, but am I saved? You bet. Because you see, Jesus is bigger than my sin. Praise the Lord, right? And we're all like, yeah, thank you, Lord.

This warning is for people just like the Hebrews that are the recipients of this letter, just like the believers in Galatia, who are mixing and matching the cross of Christ with some other means of salvation. Doesn't matter what it is, doesn't matter if it's water, baptism, doesn't matter if it's the first time you take communion. Doesn't matter if it's Sabbath keeping, doesn't matter. You mix the cross with something else, you dilute the cross.

It is Jesus Christ and Him alone who saves us. Period. Exclamation point. Right. That's it. Oh, I'm so glad to hear that. I really am. Every time I say it, I encourage myself, because I know what an idiot I am. I know the tendency I have in my own life to mess up. Oh Jesus. Thank you that you love me and nothing can separate me from your love.

However, I do believe that according to what we've seen here today in Hebrews, what I've shown you also in Galatians, I believe that it is possible for a born again Christian to walk away from their salvation by embracing unbelief where faith once existed.

And the fruit of faith versus the fruit of unbelief is described by the author in verses 7 and 8. Look with me in your Bible verses 7 and 8:

“For land that has drunk the rain that often falls on it and produces a crop useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God.” (ESV) Result of faith.

The result of unbelief, *“But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed and its end is to be burned.”*

Yikes. But then after giving, you know, what is a very stern statement there, the author says this in verse 9, *“though we speak in this way. Yet in your case, beloved, we feel sure of better things.”*

In other words, we're confident about better things in your case, things that belong to salvation. And why? Well, because there was fruit in their lives. Look at verse 10. This is interesting. He says, *“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.”*

And this showed that the spirit was moving in their hearts and lives. And so he says in verse 11, *“and we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness, to have the full assurance of hope until the end, ¹²so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who, through faith and patients inherit the promises.”*

So these are kind of, some, these final statements are like coach encouraging the team and he's saying, “We got better thoughts for you guys than what we're talking about. I know that gave you a hard warning, but we think better about you guys.” And he says “I want you to just keep doing what you're doing so that you would have the full assurance of faith.”

Now that's important that you guys see that, especially those of you who maybe struggle with your assurance. The author knows, and he, that's what he's saying here, that when you see the fruit, that comes through your life, when the Lord uses you, it lends itself to giving you a greater assurance of your salvation.

Guys, I what I just told you, I'm not even sure how that works. I'm really not. I don't really know how that works. All I know is that it does. If you serve the Lord and you see the Lord working through you, it encourages you. And it helps give you an assurance of your faith. So, if you're one of those people again, like we've talked about, that struggles with your assurance, get busy serving others, right?

So, get your eyes off yourself, get them onto Jesus, and serve others. Serve other people because as you do, you're going to find that it just has a wonderful way of settling your heart with a sense of your real identity in Christ.