

## **“Go on to Maturity” – Keep Pursuing the Lord**

### **Hebrews 6:1-8**

We are in Hebrews chapter 6 where the writer is in the middle of his third of five exhortations or warnings to the Hebrew Christians. A couple weeks ago I got to teach on one of the greatest encouragements to all believers and an encouragement to you and me. Jesus is our perfect High Priest. He was fully human, made like his brethren in every respect. So, He can sympathize with us, yet he lived without sin. He is our PERFECT HIGH PRIEST who passed through the heavens and now sits at the right hand of God.

In **Hebrews 5:11** the writer expresses his frustration saying, “about this” (About his teaching in verse 10 that Jesus is designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek) He says, we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become DULL OF HEARING. He pauses his teaching on Jesus as the high priest. And in chapter 6, he gives a warning to those who have been in the body long enough to be teachers of the Word, but they have not grown in their faith and need to review the basic principles of God’s truth.

Church, this is one of the most common and tragic losses and the message to the Hebrew Christians is a very relevant warning to the church today. Brett expressed the fact that Church leaders and pastors particularly in America have failed to help the church grow in their knowledge of the Scripture and spiritual maturity. He illustrated one example citing Ephesians 6:12,

**Ephesians 6:12** <sup>12</sup>For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

The evangelical church has been effective in providing entertaining worship services and repeatedly teaching the basic gospel message but not teaching about spiritual matters or embracing deeper theological thought. The church has not done a good job teaching the body about the power of the Holy Spirit and equipping the body to do battle with the spiritual forces seeking to tear us from our faith.

For a pastor of the church who is RESPONSIBLE for the spiritual maturity and growth of the body, this is a disappointing and frustrating condition. The writer and PASTOR is addressing this grave concern to those in the Hebrew church. There is no doubt the evil one seeks to distract us from studying God's word and growing in our knowledge and maturity. We are drawn like bugs to a deceptive and deadly light to the concerns of our business, our love for sport, our hobbies and recreation and neglect the health of our souls. The writer is pausing from his teaching on Jesus as the perfect high priest saying to these who are "dull of hearing," WAKE UP! YOU CAN'T HANDLE THE TRUTH! YOU CAN'T HANDLE THE MEATIER TRUTHS OF GOD THAT I WANT TO TEACH YOU – You need to be taught again the basic principles. What you need now is milk, not solid food. You need to first build your foundation on Christ and the basic principles of God. And he goes on to explain the basic principles of the faith encouraging them to grow in spiritual maturity.

### SLIDE CHANGE

**Hebrews 6:1-3** Therefore 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, <sup>2</sup>and of instruction about washings,<sup>[a]</sup> the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. <sup>3</sup>And this we will do if God permits.

What are the basic foundational teachings that the author is telling the Hebrew Christians to nail down and advance beyond.

1. **Repentance from dead works.** – turning away from works-based efforts leading to death and turn to God's grace.
2. **Faith toward God** – Faith in the saving work of Jesus Christ.
3. **Instruction about washings** – Christian Baptism publicly identifies a believer with Christ's death, burial, and resurrection
4. **The laying on of hands** – The symbolic receiving of the Holy Spirit
5. **The resurrection of the dead** – The future bodily resurrection
6. **Eternal judgment** – God's final and just judgment.

The writer is addressing those who have become dull of hearing and are not progressing from the basics of the faith to maturity. These are at risk of falling away from the faith and he gives a strong warning.

ILLUSTRATION: Do you know someone who is a Christian and has walked away from their faith? We all know someone who came to know the Lord, repented, were baptized and received salvation and then fell away from their faith. Some, we can argue never truly came to faith. The passage today is not addressing those who have yet to truly come to faith, but those who came to faith and fell away. As I speak, I am sure you all know people who have fallen away.

I have three specific friends that fell away from their faith in college and lived in unrepentant sin. They started spending late nights together hanging out and watching sports, movies and got into watching pornography. They graduated and all three found their way to NY. They lived in a city with no knowledge of their background, they made new friends, they traveled and pursued every fleshly desire and have fallen away from their faith.

There are many tragic stories of fathers, deacons, worship leaders, or pastors leading large and small churches that have been distracted by the flesh and fallen away from their faith and lived in unrepentant sin. These are the people that the writer is warning. Our main text today is Hebrews 6:4-6.

### **SLIDE CHANGE**

**Hebrews 6:4-6** For 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, <sup>5</sup> and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, <sup>6</sup> and 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.

He starts off with “For.” Connecting us with the charge in verses 1-3. For or Since we are challenged to grow from our elementary understanding of Christ

to go on to maturity. It is IMPOSSIBLE for those...and he goes on to explain the basic experiences of salvation.

**“in the case of those who have once been enlightened”** – When we are exposed to the gospel and come to understand, “the light goes on”, and the truth is illuminated in your heart. “EUREKA! I have found it.” This is the first experience as we come to salvation. We are brought into the light and have come to understand.

### **SLIDE CHANGE**

**John 8:12** <sup>12</sup> Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, “I am the **light of the world**. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”

**John 12:46** <sup>46</sup> I have come into the world as light, so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness.

**“Who have tasted the heavenly gift”** - These experiences are in sequence. First, we are enlightened, realizing the truth of Jesus. Then we TASTE the heavenly gift.

**What is the heavenly gift?**

- The heavenly gift is GRACE.

### **SLIDE CHANGE**

**Ephesians 2:8-9** For by GRACE you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the GIFT of God,

As we come to salvation and begin to grow in our faith, we only Taste the abundant grace we have been given. As we journey to mature in our faith we will forever continue to grow in our understanding of the gift of grace freely bestowed to us.

**“And shared in the Holy Spirit”** At the moment our hearts are illuminated and the light goes on, we share in the Holy Spirit.

**What does it mean to “Share in the Holy Spirit?”** We could spend the rest of the year on this and still not scratch the surface. I will only give a few highlights.

1. The Holy Spirit will illuminate your heart and bear witness to the truth of Jesus.

### **SLIDE CHANGE**

**John 15:26** <sup>26</sup> “But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me.

2. The Holy Spirit will convict you of your sins. Jesus saying to His disciples regarding the Spirit,

**John 16:8** But if I go, I will send Him, the Helper/ the Spirit to you. <sup>8</sup> And when He comes, He will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment:

3. The Holy Spirit will expose you to the power and presence of God and the hope of the resurrection

**Romans 8:11** <sup>11</sup> If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you. - The Holy Spirit will expose you to the power and presence of God and the hope of the resurrection

4. The Holy Spirit will give us spiritual gifts to be used for the kingdom.

**1 Corinthians 12:7** <sup>7</sup> To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. – these are the spiritual gifts.

And now we conclude the experiences of salvation with verse 5.

### **SLIDE CHANGE**

**Hebrews 6:5** <sup>5</sup> and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come’

## **What does it mean to taste the goodness of the Word of God and the powers of the age to come?**

As we come to faith in Christ and receive salvation, our hearts are illuminated, we taste the heavenly gift of grace, we share in the power of the Spirit and THEN we begin to taste the goodness of the Word of God. Again, we can only TASTE the Word of God. We cannot consume the Word of God as it is unfathomable.

### **SLIDE CHANGE**

**Hebrews 4:12** <sup>12</sup>For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

Paul, writing to the Christians in Colossae says, **Colossians 2:2-3** <sup>2</sup>that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ, <sup>3</sup>**in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.** – God's Word contains all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

We can study the same book or the same verse over and over and never come to the end of the full amount of treasure and wisdom that is revealed. As we come to salvation and begin to grow in our faith, we can only Taste the abundant grace and wisdom and understanding that is contained in God's Word.

## **What does it mean the that the believers have tasted the age to come?**

- The writer is referring to the kingdom age. By faith we have only tasted what the kingdom age will be like.
- We have the Spirit and the hope of the resurrection, but these things are only but a taste of what is to come for us.

We live in between the **Already**: the current time where Christ reigns; the Spirit is given and the power of the Spirit is present and the **Not yet**: The age to

come where we will have resurrection bodies enter into the final rest with God and where Jesus our Christ will forever reign.

The author tells us the basics of the faith and now the experiences of salvation. There is no doubt that the people the writer is addressing are Christians. They know and have faith in the basic foundational principles of God and have shared in the Grace of God and the experiences of salvation. But now, in verse six the pastor describes their position and condition.

“It is impossible for those who have experienced salvation...”verse 6.

## **SLIDE CHANGE**

**Hebrews 6:6** and then have fallen away, to restore them to repentance since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt.

Their position. They have “fallen away” and are in a perilous condition.

## **What does it mean that these Christians have fallen away?**

They made choices in their life. They could have just been stagnant in their infancy.

- They came to faith and experienced salvation, but clearly have not chosen to study the Word, tend to their souls, and grow in their spiritual maturity. The author does not tell us what other pursuits they chose, but I am sure they are common to the temptations that we all face. There are so many temptations to draw us away from the study of the Word. For the Hebrew Christians, it may have been maintaining their land and their crops, it may have been improving their homes, doing their daily chores or addressing family concerns. For us, we also are pulled to working in our business, caring for our homes, supporting our kids in sports, pursuing hobbies, fitness, travel and recreation. We drift away and fall away from our faith.
- These also are at risk to all away to disobedience and sins of the flesh. Unfortunately, we also fall away through choices that are directly disobedient. The Hebrew Christians made choices and we all make choices. Maybe not all bad choices, but choices not to tend to our

souls and grow in knowledge and maturity in our faith. In either condition, we have fallen away.

- This process of falling away almost always begins with neglecting the Word of God. The writer began his warning by saying they had not progressed to the meat of Gods Word. They never progressed beyond the milk. They knew John 3:16 but did not see the treasure they were overlooking.

Warren Wiersbe – Well known Bible commentator says, “One of the first symptoms of spiritual regression, or backsliding, is a dullness toward the Bible. Sunday School class is dull, the pastor’s teaching is dull, everything spiritual is dull. The problem is usually not with the Sunday School teacher or the pastor, but with the believer himself.”

## **SLIDE CHANGE**

**Paul, in all of his letters, is consistently urging his disciples to grow in their spiritual maturity.**

**Philippians 1:9-11** <sup>9</sup>And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, <sup>10</sup>so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, <sup>11</sup>filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God. – We are called to abound with knowledge and discernment. To be pure and bear the fruit of righteousness.

**1 Timothy 4:7-8** <sup>7</sup>Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. Rather train yourself for godliness; <sup>8</sup>for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come. – We are called to train ourselves for godliness.

**2 Timothy 3:16-17** <sup>16</sup>All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, <sup>17</sup>that the man of God<sup>[b]</sup> may be complete, equipped for every good work. – We are called to study the Word of God so that we may be complete and equipped for every good work.

Let’s pick back up with our text.



## SLIDE CHANGE

**Hebrews 6:4-6** For it is **impossible**...for those who are Christians...**to restore them again to repentance,**

**Did you get that?** For it is IMPOSSIBLE for a Christian who has fallen away to restore them to repentance. Let me address the word “Impossible.” The Greek word used here is (uh-DIN-uh-ton)Adynaton. The literal translation for Adynaton is “without power to be done.” “Incapable” or “Absolute impossibility.” In the same way as:

“without faith it is *impossible* to please God.”

“It is *impossible* for God to lie”

“It is *impossible* for the blood of goats to take away sin.”

It is ABSOLUTELY IMPOSSIBLE, THERE IS NOT CHANCE in our own power to return to repentance. It is only by the saving power of the Spirit.

**Matthew 19:26** says, “With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.” Only by the grace and power of the Holy Spirit can we again come to repentance.

Don’t misunderstand the good form of repentance we experience every day. Repentance in Scripture is referred to in two ways.

1. Repentance leading to salvation – This is the first time the Spirit of God brought you to repentance.
2. Repentance following our salvation as we turn from ongoing sin in our lives and seek to grow to maturity.

Some have used this verse to argue that a Christian believer can lose their salvation. This is NOT saying that a Christian can fall away and lose their salvation. For Scripture is clear that

## SLIDE CHANGE

**2 Corinthians 5:17** <sup>17</sup>Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.<sup>[c]</sup> The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. <sup>18</sup>All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation;

**Romans 8:1** There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

**Romans 5:20** but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more,

I relate it to the parable of the Prodigal Son. It did not matter that the son rejected the father, left the country, and lived in sin. There is nothing that could change the fact that the Prodigal son was the son of the father. There was no sin or nothing he could do that could change his DNA. In the same way when we receive salvation, we become a new creation. We become one with the Spirit. We are a new creation, the old has passed away and the new has come. We have a renewed Holy Spirit DNA and nothing can separate us. There is no sin that is greater than the cross and the grace given to those who believe. Therefore, no one who through faith and the power of the Spirit received salvation can lose their salvation.

This assurance of our salvation does not mean we cannot still join those who crucified Christ. Those who stripped Him naked, nailed Him to the cross, and brought great suffering and shame. The great irony is that Christ endured that shame for those who were mocking Him, hammering the nails, cursing Him and piercing His side. Likewise, when a believer neglects the gift of grace given at salvation and abuses that gift by FALLING AWAY to sin and ungodliness, they are crucifying Him once again. Disregarding His sacrifice and His grace.

STAY WITH ME. The author now gives us a short parable to apply the truth he just explained. He gives us an illustration of a believer who neglects the grace of God by falling away and living a disobedient life.

## **SLIDE CHANGE**

**Hebrews 6:7-8** <sup>7</sup>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. <sup>8</sup> But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed, and its end is to be burned.

- The land represents the people of God, believers in Christ who have “drunk the rain” or received the grace of God that has fallen on them. They are the Christians. Those that receive God’s grace, studied God’s Word, and grew to maturity, and produce fruits. These receive a blessing from God.
- But those who received God’s grace, neglected God’s Word and FELL AWAY to a sinful life bearing useless thorns and thistles, they are worthless and NEAR TO BEING CURSED and, in its end is to be burned.
- Note that they are NOT cursed. They do NOT lose God’s grace. They are NOT positionally “near” to losing their salvation. But they ARE “near” in the sense that their lives look no different than the unbelievers who are cursed.
- Their lives do not produce fruit. Like unbelievers their lives produce nothing of value to God, and like thorns and thistles the works of their life are to be burned.

This parable is a parallel illustration of what Brett also refers to as the “**smoldering Butt theory**.” He mentioned this verse last week saying we must lay our foundation on Jesus Christ and build upon it with ALL of God’s Word. Not just the basic principles, the milk of the gospel, but grow in all wisdom and knowledge of God’s Word to be mature believers.

## SLIDE CHANGE

**1 Corinthians 3:11-15** <sup>11</sup> For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. <sup>12</sup> Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw— <sup>13</sup> each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. <sup>14</sup> If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. <sup>15</sup> If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, **though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.**

People often associate fire with Hell, but the most common picture is one of purification or judgment for the believer. In this passage and our passage in

Hebrews they are speaking about useless works are burned up and will not receive rewards.

So, the warning for the Hebrews and for the church today is to be careful. *Those who receive God's grace of salvation and neglect to nurture their faith and grow in maturity are subject to great risk of FALLING AWAY. Once they have fallen way, the author says it is IMPOSSIBLE TO RESTORE THEM TO REPENTANCE AGAIN. It is impossible to restore them to a place where they can grow, mature and produce fruit for the kingdom.*

Many we know, and maybe even some of you have at one time fallen away from their faith. But by God's grace returned, repented, and have grown to great maturity and are producing many fruits.

My three friends who moved to NY have still not returned to their faith. One has died of AIDS and the others are successful people living fun lives and would even call themselves Christians, but have no fruit and have left a trail of destruction and broken relationships in their lives. We could all name several people. We could all name several leaders of churches that have fallen from their faith and have not, or may not ever come back to repentance. This is the warning. We once responded to an irresistible call to the Lord and were saved, but once we fall away there is no guarantee that God will not just leave us to our sinful choices. Once we join the pursuits of the flesh it is impossible to restore us back to repentance. Tragically, the works of many that we know will be burned away and there will be no fruit remaining.

I watched as many of my friends and others think they could play in the gray areas and temptation would not overcome them. They could enjoy a wild weekend with their buddies. They could watch pornography with friends. They could experiment with those drugs. But then, they were drawn away from the Word. They became "dull to the Word." They quit fellowshiping with believers, they fell prey to the temptations of the world, and they fell away from their faith. Never think you are above temptation, but hear the writer's WARNING. Don't test your faith and risk falling away. Do not bet that the Lord will rescue you again but go beyond the elementary doctrines of your faith and GO on to maturity.

**SLIDE CHANGE**

## **Go on to Maturity**

The Hebrew Christians knew the basic doctrines of their faith and they experienced salvation. They are warned:

**Go on to maturity for if you fall away, it is impossible for you to be restored to repentance again.**

For we are incapable on our own without the power of the Spirit to be restored to repentance again and risk, not salvation, but a blessing from God as the works of our life will be purified by fire.