

The Tragedy of Rejecting Full Revelation, Part 2

Scripture: Hebrews 6:1–8

Code: 1613

INTRODUCTION

Hebrews 5:106:12 discusses the issue of spiritual maturity. It contains the third parenthetical warning in the book of Hebrews to Jewish people who were intellectually convinced of the gospel, but who had never made a real commitment to Jesus Christ.

These Hebrews knew the truth, believed it, and were even following some patterns consistent with Christianity. But they were not true Christians. They were warned periodically throughout the book of Hebrews that simply believing things about Christ without a commitment to Him was not sufficient for salvation (cf. James 2:19). They were warned after having heard the gospel and becoming so familiar with it without receiving it that they would find themselves falling away into a hardhearted unbelief. It would then be impossible for them to be saved.

The contrast in Hebrews 5:106:12 is not between a mature Christian and an immature one, but between a true Christian and a false one. The term "babe" in Hebrews 5:13 describes an unbelievera Jewish person who was hanging on to the ABC's of the Old Covenant. The mature person talked about in verse 14 is one who grows up by putting his faith in Jesus Christ and accepting the fuller revelation in the New Testament.

Those who were still hanging on to the Old Covenant were warned that if they continued to neglect true salvation, they were in danger of being lost forever. This passage has special significance to anyone who comes to the edge of salvation. People can go to church for years and hear the gospel over and over again, yet never really make a commitment to obey Jesus Christ.

REVIEW

I. THE WARNING TO NONCHRISTIANS (5:106:8)

A. The Problem (5:1014)

1. Dullness Prevents Understanding (vv. 1011)

a) Understanding the priesthood of Melchizedek

The problem the writer of Hebrews dealt with in verses 1011 was his readers lack of understanding concerning the priesthood of Melchizedek. He says, "Of whom [Melchizedek] we have many things to say, and hard to be uttered, seeing ye are dull of hearing" (v. 11).

b) Understanding the problems with dull hearing

The phrase "dull of hearing" means "slow," "sluggish," or "stupid." The writer was saying that his audience was spiritually immature and therefore, could not comprehend the deeper truths concerning the Melchizedekian Priesthood. They had become neglectful of the truth they had received (2:1), hardened their hearts (3:15), and now had become sluggish in their thinking. They were now in danger of being eternally lost because of their unbelief (6:6).

c) Understanding the cause of dull hearing

2. Dullness Prevents Teaching (v. 12)

a) The time involved

Considering the length of time and the amount of information they had had, these Jewish people could have been teachers of New Covenant truths and yet they themselves needed to be taught. They were still acquainting themselves with the elemental principles of the Old Testament. Like slow seminary students, they needed a good remedial course in Old Testament.

b) The terms involved

The author says they needed to be taught again "the first principles of the oracles of God" (v. 12). He was referring to the law and promises of the Old Testament. They were such a state of spiritual lethargy, the writer could not only not teach them the New Covenant, but he also had to go back and teach them the Old Covenant again so they could discover the accurate meaning of the New.

c) The task involved

d) The truth involved

3. Dullness Prevents Righteousness (vv. 13-14)

a) Understanding the problem

(1) Their lack of experience in righteousness

(2) Their lack of discernment in spiritual matters

b) Understanding the word "babe"

LESSON

B. The Solution (6:18)

1. The need for maturity (v. 1a)

"Therefore, leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection."

Understanding the word "leaving" and the phrase "go on unto perfection" is the crux in interpreting Hebrews 6:18. They are the first step these Jewish people need to make if they are to become spiritually mature. They had to sever once and for all their ties with the Old Covenant Judaism and accept Jesus Christ as Savior. They needed to do it immediately, without further hesitation. If the writer was talking only to Christians who needed to mature spiritually, he wouldn't be able to demand instant spirituality because there is no such thing. He was speaking to Jewish people who needed to gain the maturity that salvation brings with the reception of the New Covenant. He is not talking about the process of sanctification, but the instantaneous miracle of salvation. The maturity talked about here is that of leaving the ABC's of the Old Covenant to come to the full revelation in the New Testament.

a) Separation

The Greek word for "leaving" is aphi[ma]emi which means "to forsake," "put away," "disregard," or "put off." It refers to a total detachment from a previous location or position. It does not mean to build on or add something. It refers to cutting something off or moving away from something. The preposition at the beginning of the word, aph implies separation. The basic idea means separation from an original condition. The Expositor's Greek Testament translates Hebrews 6:1, "Let us abandon [give up] the elementary teaching about Christ" (W. Robertson Nicoll, ed. vol. 4 [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974 reprint], p. 293). Henry Alford comments, "Therefore ... leaving (as behind, and done with; in order to go on to another thing)" (The Greek Testament, vol. 4 [Chicago: Moody, 1958], p. 104).

(1) Matthew 13:36 Matthew said, "Then Jesus sent the multitude away, and went into the house; and his disciples came unto him, saying, Explain unto us the parable of the tares of the field." The point to see in the passage is that the same preposition is used as Jesus sent them away from one place to another.

(2) Mark 4:36 Mark said, "When they had sent away the multitude, they took him even as he was in the boat." The same Greek construction is indicated with preposition. He doesn't say to build up something, but leave here and go somewhere else.

(3) 1 Corinthians 7:11 Paul said, "But and if she depart, let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband; and let not the husband put away his wife." The phrase "put away" is the same word in Hebrews 6:1, aphi[ma]emi, which in this context refers to divorce. This passage can have no other meaning than separation. It is wrong to leave a marriage, but it is mandatory to leave Judaism for Christ. The unbelieving Jewish person must separate himself from his old traditions before he can be saved.

(4) Matthew 9:2 Jesus said, "Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven [aphi[ma]emi] thee." He essentially was saying "Thy sins be separated from thee." Aphi[ma]emi is often used in this sense (cf. Rom. 4:7; James 5:15).

(5) Matthew 15:14 Jesus said, "Let them alone; they are blind leaders of the blind." Aphi[ma]emi is used here to speak of separating oneself from false teachers.

(6) Mark 1:20 Mark said, "Straightway he called them; and they left their father, Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants, and went after him." Aphi[ma]emi here refers to James' and John's leaving their father to follow Jesus. As far as their life's work was concerned, they abandoned completely separated themselves their father and his fishing business.

The key in understanding the book of Hebrews is not that these Hebrews are simply adding Jesus to their sinful activity. You need to drop your sinful lifestyle and pursue Christ. Hebrew 6:1 must refer to an unbeliever because at no time does the Word of God ever command Christians to drop the basics of Christianity and go on to something else. In fact, we're clearly told not to do that (cf. Gal. 1:69, 1 Tim. 4:1). It specifically refers to unbelievers who need to drop the Old Covenant and move on to Christ. Our author is commanding the Hebrews to abandon the shadows, types, pictures, and sacrifices of the Old Testament and come to the reality of Jesus Christ in the New Covenant. Hebrews 6:1 can be translated this way: "Therefore, finally moving on from the basics principles behind the teaching of the Messiah, let's go on to maturity." The Greek translation is literally, "Leaving the beginning teaching of Messiah." They were to leave the pictures and types in the Old Testament that pointed to the coming of Messiah because He had already come!

b) Salvation

The writer of Hebrews urges his readers to "go on to perfection." The meaning of the word "perfection" is "maturity." The only way this maturity would come about is through a relationship with Jesus Christ. Hebrews 7:11 says, "If, therefore, perfection were by the Levitical priesthood, what further need was there that another priest should rise after the order of Melchizedek?" The writer is saying that if you could be mature by the Old Covenant, you wouldn't need Christ. The term

"perfection" thus refers to the need to mature from the basics of the Old Covenant to the richness and fullness of the New.

The writer is not asking his Christian readers to grow up. He is asking his Jewish readers to drop the Old Covenant and accept the New. The same idea is seen in Hebrews 7:19: "The law made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope did." That better hope is none other than our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, who is perfection incarnate. Hebrews 10:14 says, "By one offering he hath perfected forever them that are sanctified." The writer is telling his Jewish audience to go on to perfection to the full maturity of a relationship with the Messiah.

2. The need for a new foundation (vv. 1b2)

"Not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgement."

The foundation concerning the Messiah was originally laid with pictures and types, but now, the writer says, the reality is here. He gives six features of the Old Testament covenantal foundation. Many people have assigned these passages to Christians, saying they should rid themselves of these basics of the Christian life and grow up to more mature doctrines. But it could not mean that because he was specifically speaking to Jewish people who would be the only ones who could best understand these Old Testament concepts.

a) "repentance from dead works"

This phrase simply refers to turning away from evil deeds. The writer says in Hebrews 9:13, "If the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?"

The Old Testament taught that a man should repent and turn from his evil works, for they bring about death. Ezekiel 18:4 says, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." The New Testament contains a similar concept: "The wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23). The Old Testament contained only the first half of repentance toward God. All men knew was to turn away from their evil works, and turn toward God. But in the New Testament, repentance toward God is linked with faith in Jesus Christ. When John the Baptist came preaching, and even in Jesus' own early ministry, the message was "Repent for the Kingdom is at hand" (Matt. 3:2; 4:17). Only repentance was preached. The doctrine became more mature and complete in Jesus Christ.

(1) Acts 20:21 Paul said, "Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ." You must not only repent, but also place your faith in Jesus Christ. That is why Jesus said in John 14:6, "No man cometh unto the Father, but by me." Acts 4:12 reiterates the same message: "Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is no other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved."

(2) Acts 26:19-20 Paul said, "O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision, but showed first unto them at Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the borders of Judaea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works fit for repentance." Later in verse 23, Paul said, "That Christ should suffer... and should rise from the dead, and should show light unto the people, and to the Gentiles." In the New Covenant, whenever men were commanded to repent and turn toward God, it was with a view toward faith in Jesus Christ. The doctrine of repentance from dead works is made full by the doctrine of repentance toward God through faith in Christ. A person, no matter how sincerely he seeks, who does not repent of his sins and turns to faith in Jesus Christ, will never reach God. Jesus Christ is the only way God has provided to Himself (cf. John 5:23).

b) "faith toward God"

(1) Acts 2:38 Peter said, "Repent, and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins." Repentance comes by faith in Christ; the two concepts are tied together.

(2) Acts 11:17-18 Peter said, "Forasmuch, then, as God gave them the same gift as he did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, what was I, that I could withstand God? When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life." Repentance only comes through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. The only faith that is acceptable to God is faith in His Son.

The Old Testament taught repentance from dead works and faith toward God. The New Testament teaches repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the only way to God. The Jewish people the writer addresses in this epistle believed in God, but they were not saved. Their repentance from evil deeds and faith toward God no matter how sincere it might have been could not bring them to God without Christ.

c) "the doctrine of baptisms"

This translation from the King James Version is misleading. In Hebrews 9:10, the same Greek word (baptismos) is translated, "washings," so it should be translated the same way here. It is not the usual Greek word for baptism, which is baptiz[ma]o. It may be that the translators of the Authorized Version assumed this passage was addressed to Christians, in which case the word "baptisms" might have been appropriate. The use of baptismos rather than baptiz[ma]o is another strong indication that the passage is not addressed to Christians. The word baptismos means "washings" and it refers to the Old Testament washings (cf. Hebrews 9:10). Every Jewish home had a basin by the entrance for family and visitors to use for their many ceremonial cleansings. The writer of Hebrews is encouraging them to drop their doctrines of ceremonial cleansing and come to true cleansing.

(1) Ezekiel 36:25-26 Through the prophet God said, "I [will] sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean; from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new Spirit will I put within you." God Himself predicted that there would come a day when man would be spiritually cleansed. Cleansings would no longer be physical, symbolic, and temporary. Rather the one final cleansing would be spiritual, real, and permanent.

(2) Titus 3:5 Paul told Titus, "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Spirit." The Jewish people needed to abandon the external washings and pursue the real washing that comes in our hearts by faith in Christ.

(3) John 3:5 Jesus told Nicodemus, "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God." Jesus was talking about salvation. That is the internal cleansing of which Ezekiel spoke. It would be the only frame of reference Nicodemus could have for understanding Christ's statement since he was the preeminent teacher in Israel (cf. John 3:1). He couldn't have understood that phrase to mean Christian baptism at all because there was no such thing as Christian baptism at that time.

d) "laying on of hands"

This laying on of hands has nothing to do with the apostolic practices (e.g. Acts 5:18, 6:6, 8:17; 1 Tim. 4:14). Under the Old Covenant, the person who brought an animal sacrifice had to put his hands on it to signify his identification with that sacrifice (Lev. 1:4; 3:8, 13). The writer of Hebrews is saying to forget about the laying on of hands with animal sacrifices, and instead lay hold of Christ by faith. Our identification with Jesus Christ doesn't come by putting our hands on his physical body, but by being baptized by the Holy Spirit into the spiritual Body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13).

e) "resurrection of the dead"

(1) In the Old Testament

The Old Testament doctrine of resurrection is not clear or complete. We simply learn that men will

live after death, and there will be reward for the good and punishment for evil.

(a) Job 19:25-27 Job said, "I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth; and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God, whom I shall see for myself ... though my heart be consumed within me." He knew he would have a restored body.

(b) Daniel 12:2 An angel told Daniel, "Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life and some to shame and everlasting contempt."

(2) In the New Testament

However, the full doctrine concerning the subject of resurrection blooms in the New Testament.

(a) John 11:25 Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life." In its fullness, the doctrine of resurrection finds itself in the person of Jesus Christ.

(b) 1 Corinthians 15 An entire chapter is devoted to specific details about the resurrection of our bodies.

(c) 1 John 3:2 "It doth not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is."

Why should anyone be content with trying to understand the resurrection from the limited and vague teachings of the Old Testament? The writer of Hebrews is saying that the Jewish people need to come to the full revelation about resurrection truth in the New Testament.

f) "eternal judgement"

(1) In the Old Testament

Ecclesiastes 12:14 says, "God shall bring every work into judgement, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil." We can learn little more than that concerning final judgement in the Old Testament. But in the New Testament, we are told a great deal about eternal judgement.

(2) In the New Testament

(a) Romans 8:1 Paul said, "There is, therefore, now no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus." Believers will not be condemned in the final judgement.

(b) 1 Corinthians 3:12-15 Paul also said, "Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble Every man's work shall be made manifest; for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall test every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built upon it, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved, yet as by fire." We will stand before the Lord and have our work judged for reward or for the lack of them but we ourselves will not be judged.

(c) Matthew 25:46 Matthew said, "These [goats] shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal." We also know what is going to happen to unbelievers in the judgment of sheep and goats.

(d) Revelation 20:11-12 John said, "I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away, and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God, and the books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works." This is the judgement of the great white throne.

(e) John 5:22 Jesus said, "The father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgement unto the Son." We know this and much more about judgement from the New Testament.

The point of Hebrews 6:12 is that unbelieving Jewish people should go beyond the elementary principles of the Old Covenant and grasp the mature and perfect reality of the New. The Holy Spirit is calling them to leave the ABC's of repentance from dead works for the New Testament teaching of repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. They're to leave the ABC's of faith toward God for faith in the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ. They're to leave the ABC's of ceremonial

washings for the cleansing of the soul by the Word. They're to leave the ABC's of laying hands on the sacrifice for laying hold of the lamb of God by faith, to leave the ABC's of the resurrection of the dead for the full and glorious resurrection unto life. And, they're to leave the ABC's of eternal judgment for the full truth of judgment and rewards as revealed in the New Covenant.

The Old Testament is incomplete. It is true, it is of God, and it was a necessary part of His revelation and His plan of salvation, but it is partial revelation only and is not sufficient. Judaism is no longer a valid expression of worship or of obedience to God. It must be abandoned.

3. The need for power (v. 3)

"This will we do, if God permit."

Interpreting this verse is difficult, despite its brevity. It can be seen from two different angles.

a) The writer's perspective

Some interpreters believe the word "we" refers to the writer of Hebrews himself as if he were saying, "I will go on and teach you what you need to know if God permits me."

b) The Lord's perspective

Other interpreters believe the writer is simply identify himself with those to whom he writes, as if to say, "You will go on to maturity if God permits."

I believe both interpretations could be correct. They are not mutually exclusive and are consistent with the rest of Hebrews. Both service (the writer going on to teach) and salvation (the readers going on to maturity in Christ) must be energized by the Holy Spirit if they are to be effective and fruitful.

The need for divine enablement is the point of verse 3.

Paul said in 2 Corinthians 3:5, "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves, but our sufficiency is of God." Perhaps in a similar vein of humility the writer of Hebrews was acknowledging that he really had no right to teach spiritual maturity to the Hebrews unless God directed him to. James said, "Come now, ye that say, Today or tomorrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain; whereas ye know not what shall be on the next day. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. For ye ought to say, if the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that" (James 4:13-15).

Applying this perhaps to the unbeliever, James was saying that whatever you do is subject to the sovereignty of God. By teacher and seeker alike, God's sovereignty should be recognized (John 6:44).

4. The need for remembrance (vv. 45)

"For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the age to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance, seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame."

That is a very serious warning. You had better come to Christ, for if you fall away, after having been exposed to the truth, it will be impossible for you to be saved. Some have used this passage to prove that you can lose your salvation. But it is not even addressed to Christians. Those who believe you can lose your salvation have problems with this passage because if it teaches that, then it also teaches that you can't get it back again. Another problem with that view is the multiplicity of other passages in the New Testament that teach the security of salvation (e.g. John 10:27-29, Rom. 5:11, Rom. 8:35-38, Phil. 1:6, and 1 Pet. 1:3). The writer of Hebrews is speaking to those on the verge of making a commitment to Christ.

The gospel was preached to the Hebrew readers by the apostles. Chapter 2:4 that says they saw the signs, wonders, miracles, and gifts of the Spirit. The Hebrew audience had accepted the gospel intellectually, but were close to walking away and returning to Judaism. They were therefore close to being eternally lost because there is other alternative: You either go on to full knowledge in Christ, or you are lost forever. Hebrews 6:45 is a classic definition of apostasy.

Because of the seriousness of this passage, many have tried to change the wording to read, it is difficult to repent. But the word is not difficult; it is "impossible" (Gk. adunaton) The same word occurs in 6:18, 10:4, and 11:6 which all require the translation "impossible." When you come to the point of being convinced about who Christ is maybe even being a faithful church member without making the commitment to Him, you are in danger of falling away. And if that is true of you, it is impossible for you to be saved. That is the teaching of the Word of God.

The Hebrews who were being addressed here had five great advantages. They are summarized in verses 45:

a) They had been enlightened

To understand what the passage is saying, you must understand what it is not saying. It makes no reference whatsoever to salvation. There is no mention of justification, sanctification, the new birth, regeneration, or being born again. None of the normal terminology for salvation is used in this passage. And no term used in this passage is used elsewhere in the New Testament to refer to salvation.

The term "once enlightened" means "to have come to an intellectual perception of truth." It is used in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament) to refer to someone who has been given light by knowledge or teaching. It simply means to be mentally aware or to have been instructed in something. It carries no connotation of acceptance or rejection, belief or disbelief.

(1) Matthew 4:16 "The people who sat in darkness saw great light." Jesus fulfilled the prophecy in Isaiah 42:67. It does not mean that all the people of Galilee were saved. They were enlightened by having seen Christ and His miracles, but as we know the gospel records, everyone did not believe as a result. The light of the glorious gospel had broken in on their darkness, and their lives could never be the same again. The same thing had happened to those whom the author of Hebrews addresses.

(2) John 1:9 John said Christ "was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world." Not all who saw and heard that light were saved. Seeing God's light and accepting it are not the same. Many men have factual information concerning Christ, but not all believe. The lives of all who saw Jesus were permanently affected by the indelible impression He made on them, yet most did not believe in Him (cf. John 12:37-40).

(3) 2 Peter 2:20 Peter said, "For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in it, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning." It is better for you know nothing, than to know the gospel, ignore it, and then finally walk away after having been enlightened.

The same thing had happened to the Jews being addressed in Hebrews 6:18. They were enlightened but not saved. They were in danger of losing all opportunity of being saved. They were in danger of becoming apostates because of their continual unbelief. The light that was given to save them could easily become a judgment against them.

b) They had tasted the heavenly gift

There are several things this particular phrase could refer to. The Holy Spirit is spoken of in Scripture as a heavenly gift, but since He is mentioned in the next verse, that is probably not a reference to Him. Another heavenly gift mentioned in Scripture is salvation (Eph. 2:8). Christ Himself is called the unspeakable gift in 2 Corinthians 9:15. Neither, however was yet received by the Hebrew audience in

view in verse 4. It does not say they feasted on the heavenly gift, lived by it, or ate it. They merely tasted it.

(1) John 4:10 Speaking to the woman at the well, "Jesus answered, and said unto her, If thou knewest the gift of God [salvation], and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink, thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water." He went on to say that all those who drink living water are truly saved. Tasting is not drinking. Tasting is simply receiving a small portion of something to decide whether you want to drink it. If it does not taste good, you do not continue to drink. But drinking in living water committing yourself after your first taste that is salvation.

(2) John 6:32, 53 In talking to the Pharisees "Jesus said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Moses gave you not that bread from heaven; but my Father giveth you the true bread from heaven.... Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you." Jesus was saying that eternal life comes from eating not simply tasting God's gift of salvation in Christ.

One of the presalvation ministries of the Holy Spirit is to enable the unsaved to have a taste of the blessings of salvation. But tasting is not the same as eating. The Holy Spirit will give us a taste, but He will not make us eat. The Spirit of God placed the blessing of salvation on the lips of the Hebrews, but they had not yet eaten. The tasting had come from what they saw and heard, as many today have seen the transforming power of Christ and heard the gospel.

c) They were partakers of the Holy Spirit

The Greek word for "partakers" is metochous, which refers to an association. It does not mean these Hebrews possessed the Holy Spirit; it simply means they were around when the Holy Spirit was at work. The same word is used to speak of fellow fishermen in Luke 5:7 and of Christ in relation to the angels in Hebrews 1:9. It refers to a common sharing in certain activities or events.

The term can refer to Christians, as in Hebrews 3:1, but it can also refer to non-Christians. It is possible to have an association with the Holy Spirit to have a share in what He does and not be saved. The Hebrews heard the Word of God, with God bearing witness with diverse miracles and gifts of the Holy Spirit (Heb. 2:4). They actually took part in what the Holy Spirit was doing. However, the Bible never speaks of Christians being associated with the Holy Spirit. It speaks of the Holy Spirit being within them.

This is seen in the Old Testament economy, for at that time the Holy Spirit worked through a person without permanently indwelling the believer. Like perhaps most of the multitudes that Jesus miraculously healed and fed, the Hebrews partook of the Holy Spirit's power and blessings, but they did not have His indwelling. They did not possess the Holy Spirit, nor did the Holy Spirit possess them.

You Cannot Buy the Holy Spirit

Many people would like to benefit from the blessings and miracles of the Holy Spirit without making a commitment to Him. A man named Simon Magus in Acts 8:9-25 wanted to buy the Holy Spirit. He wanted the power of the Holy Spirit but was not saved. The text says, "There was a certain man, called Simon, who previously in the same city used sorcery, and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one, to whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, this man is the great power of God. And to him they had regard, because that for a long time he had bewitched them with sorceries. But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. Then Simon himself believed also; and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and was amazed, beholding the miracles and signs which were done" (vv. 9-13). Verses 18-20 say, "When Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Spirit was given, he offered them money, saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy

Spirit. But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money."

Revival had happened in Samaria and this sorcerer had "believed" the kind of belief akin to Jesus' so-called disciples in John 6:66 which says, "From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him." John 8:31 says, "Then said Jesus to those Jews who believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed." Believing is only the beginning. Simon believed in Christ intellectually, but only to buy the Holy Spirit's power for his own ends. He was even baptized by the disciples as a believer, but was not saved. Peter didn't rebuke him as a fellow Christian for he said, "Repent, therefore, of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee; for I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity." Simon was partaking in what the Holy Spirit was doing but he was not for real. You cannot buy the Holy Spirit's power; you must commit your life in obedience to God and allow the Holy Spirit to work through you.

d) They had tasted the good word of God

The Hebrews even had the opportunity to taste the words (Gk. rh[ma]loma) of God. logos, not rh[ma]loma is most often used to refer to God's Word, but rh[ma]loma best fits the context of the passage. The Hebrews had actually heard and been taught the very speeches (rh[ma]loma) concerning God and Christ. They were regular attenders in the assembly of the church. As with His heavenly gifts, they had heard God's utterances and sampled them, tasted them, without actually eating or obeying its truths. They could not say with the prophet Jeremiah, "Thy words were found, and I did eat them, and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of my heart" (Jer. 15:16). They never let the words of God become an actual part of their lives.

Herod Antipas was much like these Hebrews. He enjoyed hearing John the Baptist preach, which included accusations directly against him (Mark 6:20). Herod was perplexed but fascinated by that dynamic preacher. He liked to sample the message of God. But when it came time for a decision, he forsook God's man and God's message. Although reluctantly, he agreed to have John beheaded. His taste of God's Word only brought him greater guilt.

The Hebrews had tasted the good Word of God. Every man must taste the Word of God before he accepts it. King David himself said, "O taste and see that the Lord is good (Ps. 34:8, NASB). The problem is stopping with the tasting. At first to the Hebrews, the first preaching of the gospel was sweet, and tasted so good. But as it lingered in their mouth, they grew dull and became sluggish and indifferent. They did not chew or swallow it, much less digest it. Their spiritual taste buds became insensitive and unresponsive.

e) They had tasted the powers of the age to come

The age to come is the future kingdom of God. The Hebrews had been exposed to the same miraculous power that will come when Jesus brings in His earthly kingdom. They had tasted it, witnessing signs, wonders, and miracles. The more they saw, the more their guilt increased. They were like those who saw Jesus Himself perform miracles. It is hard to understand the hatred and unbelief of those who saw Lazarus risen from the dead (John 11:144), and the blind, deaf, and dumb healed (Matt. 4:23). They will all stand guilty before God at the great white throne judgment because they saw but did not believe.

The author of Hebrews is saying "You have had the whole Old Testament revelation with all its basic elements. And in this age, you've been enlightened, tasted of the gift of salvation, partook of what the Spirit was doing in your midst, tasted the good speeches and utterances concerning God and saw

miracle upon miracle. But you're in danger if you don't repent."

5. The need for a response (v. 6)

"If they shall fall away, [it is impossible] to renew them again unto repentance."

a) The apostasy

The Greek word for "fall away" is parapesontas and is only used here in the New Testament. Summarized, the warning is: "You had better come to Christ now, for if you fall, away it will be impossible for you to come again to the point of repentance." The Hebrews were at the best possible point of repentancefull knowledge. To fall back from that would be fatal. That class of people is defined in Hebrews 3:12 as those who "[depart] from the living God" (cf. 2 Pet. 2:20-22).

b) The attitude

Many who say this warning passage is dealing with Christians base their assumptions on the word "renew" in verse 6. The word means "to restore" or "to bring back to an original condition." What was the Hebrews' original condition? They had heard the gospel and were excited about it. They had moved away from Judaism right to the edge of Christianity. They had even moved toward repentance, but had turned back to their old ways. There was nothing else God could do. If they fell away now, they did so with an evil heart of unbelief in spite of full revelation. They would be departing from the living God and there was no hope they would ever be restored to the place where repentance would be a natural response.

c) The action

What kept the Hebrews from being repentant? They had crucified "to themselves the Son of God afresh and put Him to an open shame" (v. 6). They couldn't repent because as far as they were concerned, the Son of God deserved to be crucified. Regardless of what they might have professed openly and publicly, they took their stand with the crucifiers. The word translated "afresh" simply means "to lift up in crucifixion." The Hebrews were lifting up Jesus Christ for crucifixion. With all the evidence possible, they decided that Christ was not the true Messiah. They had turned and gone back to Judaism. To them Jesus was an impostor and deceiver who got exactly what was coming to Him. By putting Him "to an open shame," they were declaring openly that Jesus was guilty as charged.

Salvation to an apostate becomes impossible, for when he rejects full revelation, he is incurably antiGod and deserves the hottest of hell. He takes his place with Judas, who walked and talked with God incarnate, yet finally rejected Him. Hebrews 10:29 says, "How much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, with which he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?"

It is dangerously selfdeceptive for a person to think he is safe by staying on the sidelines or by thinking himself tolerant of the gospel simply because he does not outwardly oppose it. If you don't come to Jesus Christ, you eventually will go away from Him. It may not be, and often is not, a conscious decision against Christ. But it is a decision and it is against Christ. And when you finally reject Christ, you again place Him on the cross and put the Lord forever out of your reach.

6. The need for an illustration (vv. 78)

The writer closes the passage with an illustration describing those who ultimately reject the Messiah: "The earth, which drinketh in the rain that cometh often upon it, and bringeth forth herbs fit for them by whom it is tilled, receiveth blessing from God; but that which beareth thorns and briers is rejected, and is near unto cursing, whose end is to be burned" (vv. 78). This illustration shows that verses 16 are directed toward unbelievers. The writer is saying that all who hear the gospel are like the earth. The gospel seed is planted and some of the growth is beautiful, good, and productive. That

represents the goodness and blessings of God. At other times though, with the same message, some growth is false, spurious, and unproductive (v. 8). It has come from the same ground and the same water, but has become worthless. Thorns and briars are the result. It has rejected the life offered it and becomes good only for burning. The picture shows that as God's gracious gospel falls on men, it brings forth fruit with some, but with others, it brings forth thorns. I pray to God that when the rain of the gospel of Jesus Christ falls on you, it brings forth fruit so that you may truly be saved.

Focusing on the Facts

1. What were the Jewish people warned about repeatedly in the book of Hebrews?
2. The term _____ in Hebrews 5:13 describes _____ .
3. True or false: People can go to church for years and hear the gospel over and over again, even being faithful church members, and never really make a commitment to Jesus Christ.
4. What is the progression for those who ultimately reject salvation?
5. Understanding the word _____ and the phrase _____ is the crux in interpreting Hebrews 6:18?
6. What is the key issue in Hebrews 6:1?
7. What is the writer of Hebrews commanding the Jewish people to do?
8. What did the writer mean when he asked his readers to "go on to perfection"?
9. What does the "repentance from dead works" refer to? How does it differ from the concept of repentance in the New Testament? Support your answer with Scripture.
10. What is the second Old Testament doctrine that the writer speaks of and how does it differ from the New Testament doctrine?
11. Explain the difference between baptisms and washings.
12. How is the term "laying on of hands" in Hebrews 6:2 different from the apostolic practice?
13. How does the Old Testament describe the resurrection of the dead? Explain how the New Testament helps to clarify the doctrine of resurrection.
14. What does the Old Testament tell us about eternal judgement? What light does the New Testament shed on the subject?

15. The point of Hebrews 6:12 is that _____ Jewish people should completely let go of the elementary symbols of the Old Covenant and take hold of the _____ and perfect reality of the _____.
16. True or False: The Old Testament is complete. The New Testament is simply an added feature of the Old Testament saying basically the same thing.
17. From what two perspectives can verse 3 be taken? Explain them.
18. Can a person, lose his salvation? Support your answer with Scripture.
19. Hebrews 6:45 is a classic definition of _____.
20. Explain what it means to be enlightened about the gospel, giving examples from Scripture.
21. What does it mean to have "tasted of the heavenly gift?" Explain your answer with biblical examples.
22. Must someone who is a "partaker of the Holy Spirit" be a Christian? Explain.
23. What do the phrases, "tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come" refer to?
24. What does the word "renew" signify in verse 6?
25. By neglecting to respond to Christ, what were the Hebrews in actuality doing (Heb. 6:6)?
26. What is the point of the illustration in verses 78?

Pondering the Principles

1. Maturity is something everyone should desire. It is not option for the Christian. There is no such thing as remaining static in the Christian life. You are either progressing or regressing. Are you maturing in your Christian life? Are you in a state of progression or regression? The apostle Paul called us to examine ourselves in 2 Corinthians 13:5. Study the following lists to see if they describe the pattern of your life: 1 Cor. 6:9-10, Gal. 5:19-21, and Rev. 21:8. If they do, confess your sin to God and ask for His forgiveness.
2. Many people do not understand what repentance means. After having read the lesson, describe in your own words what repentance means. Explain how the Old Testament concept differs from that in the New. After you have come up with a good working definition, look up 2 Corinthians 7:9-10 and describe the difference between sorrow or guilt and true repentance. Then ask yourself this: Am I truly repentant over my sinfulness or am I just sorrowful? If you said you were sorrowful, repent right now to God over your sinfulness. Ask Him to give you a new heart and make you the kind of person

He wants you to be.

3. One of the most sorrowful passages in the Bible is Hebrews 6:46. It describes those who had been given full revelation from God, yet still continued to reject Him. Do you know someone who knows the reality of the gospel of Christ, yet continues to reject it by failing to make a definite commitment to Christ? Share Hebrews 6:46 with him explaining the seriousness of what he is doing. Share with him that unless he acts soon, it may be impossible for him to come to Christ and he will therefore be forever damned.

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