

The Tragedy of Rejecting Full Revelation, Part 3

Scripture: Hebrews 6:9–12

Code: 1614

INTRODUCTION

Hebrews 5:10--6:8 is about spiritual maturity. It is one of the so-called warning passages in Hebrews that relates not to believers, but to unbelievers. Because of the depth and richness of this particular portion of Scripture, it needs to be studied in minute detail. The two previous chapters have dealt with the tragedy of Hebrews who had rejected the full revelation that God had given them concerning Jesus Christ.

REVIEW

I. THE WARNING TO NON-CHRISTIANS (5:10--6:8)

The gospel had been preached to the Jewish community by the apostles and prophets (cf. 2:3) and the writer was actually dealing with a second generation of hearers.

In coming to Christ, the believers had to make a complete break with Judaism. Upon receiving Jesus Christ they were immediately ostracized from Jewish society. The cost was heavy, the pressure was great, and the persecution intense. The book of Hebrews was written primarily to Christians who had made a clean break from Judaism to receive Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

There was a second group of Jewish people addressed in the book of Hebrews and they were in danger of missing salvation because of their desire to hang on to some of the Old Testament patterns without recognizing their fulfillment in the New. The writer of Hebrews says repeatedly, "Let go of Old Testament patterns pointing to Christ and embrace Him instead." As Paul said in Colossians 2:10, "Ye are complete in him." The author then was encouraging them to make a complete break with the patterns of the Old Covenant and come to the New.

Throughout the book of Hebrews are warnings to this group of people. They had been intellectually convinced of the validity of Christianity, but had not made a commitment. They had turned away from Judaism enough to have moved in with the Christian community, and might have even professed to be true Christians. But the fact is they were not. These warnings occur in the following portions of Hebrews: 2:1-4, 3:7--4:13, 5:10--6:8, 10:26-31, and 12:25-29. They were designed for those who had gone through all the stages preliminary to salvation, but had never experienced it. They were in danger of falling away to the point of no return.

A. The Problem (5:10-14)

The Hebrews were spiritually ignorant and were gradually growing harder and more calloused to the things of God. They could no longer discern between good and evil (5:11-14).

B. The Solution (6:1-8)

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

The writer of Hebrews gave the solution to their predicament beginning in verse 1 of chapter 6: "Therefore, leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection." They needed to leave the Old Covenant and come to maturity in the full revelation of the New Covenant.

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

The readers of the epistle are exhorted to go beyond "repentance from dead works," and "faith toward God" (turning to faith in Christ instead), "the doctrine of washings" (ceremonial washings), "laying on of hands" (to identify with a sacrifice), "the resurrection of the dead" (an undefined doctrine in the Old Testament), and "eternal judgment" (not fully developed in the Old Testament). The solution is to leave the basic elements of Judaism and come to Jesus Christ.

3. The need for power (v. 3)

The power to accomplish the task of learning about the New Covenant is in verse 3: "And this will we do, if God permit." The writer was acknowledging that anything we do is accomplished only in the permissive will of God. Divine enablement alone could allow the Hebrews to go on to maturity.

4. The need for remembrance (vv. 4-5)

The heart of the passage is the warning in verses 4-5: "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."

The Hebrews had come to the point of making a decision for Christ with full revelation from God, but were now close to falling away into a state of permanent disbelief. They were enlightened, but not saved; they had tasted, but not eaten; they had partaken of the Holy Spirit, but did not possess Him. Hebrews 6:1-8 should not be confused as referring to Christians. Christians cannot fall away (cf. Jude 24).

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

Anyone who rejects Christ stands with those who put Him on trial. Such a person is passing the guilty verdict and identifying with the crucifiers.

The Unforgivable Sin In Matthew 12 Jesus had healed a paralytic on the Sabbath. Verses 24-28 say, "When the Pharisees heard it, they said, this fellow doth not cast out demons, but by Beelzebub, the prince of demons. And Jesus knew their thoughts, and said unto them, Every kingdom divided

against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand. And if Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself; how shall then his kingdom stand? And if I, by Beelzebub, cast out demons, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore, they shall be your judges. But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you...Wherefore, I say unto you, all manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven men; but the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit shall not be forgiven men."

Do you know what it means to blaspheme the Holy Spirit? To actually see the works of Christ--to have that full revelation--yet attribute them to Satan. It is seeing all there is to see and still walking away, saying the very opposite of what is true. For that, there is no forgiveness. Jesus said in verse 32, "Whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him; but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this age, neither in the age to come." The blasphemy of the Holy Spirit is a sin that is isolated to the period when Jesus was on the earth, because that was the only time when men could physically see His works and attribute them to Satan. It will be possible for this sin to be committed when Christ is present on earth during the millennial kingdom.

In the meantime, men can commit a sin that is similar, and that is receiving full revelation from God, yet turning their backs on Him forever. By so doing, they have sentenced themselves to eternal doom.

6. The need for an illustration (vv. 7-8)

The writer of Hebrews gives an illustration in verses 7-8 that shows the difference between those who profess Christ and those who actually possess Him: "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." The writer is saying that the grace of God rains upon the earth--the earth representing all types of men. Some men hear the gospel, believe the message and bring forth fruit, but some men bring forth nothing but thorns and briers that are cast in the fire and burned. The distinction is this: The Hebrews had heard and seen the full revelation of God. Some believed and brought forth fruit while others did not and brought forth thorns and briers.

The thorns and briers are not necessarily evil deeds, but the works of self-righteousness. He is contrasting two kinds of religion: the religion of divine accomplishment which is based on all that God has done it all in Christ, and the religion of human achievement, which is based on what man does to secure his own salvation. The only way man will ever bring forth fruit that God accepts is to abide in Christ (cf. John 15:5).

LESSON

II. THE WORD TO CHRISTIANS (vv. 9-12)

"But, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak. For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labor of love, which ye have shown toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister. And we desire that

every one of you do show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end; that ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises."

After the writer of Hebrews gives the severest of warnings, he proceeds in verses 9-12 to give the most loving of appeals. He was hoping earnestly that the unbelievers he so forcefully had been warning would not fall away. His approach was to encourage them to be imitators of the true Christians in their midst. That is a consistent pattern in Scripture. The apostle Paul said to the Corinthians, "Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1, NASB). He also said this to Timothy: "Let no man despise thy youth, but be thou an example [to] the believers, in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity" (1 Tim. 4:12).

To those who were sluggish and in danger of falling away the writer of Hebrews says, "Let me introduce you to the Christians in your midst. Look at their lives and pattern yourselves after them. Follow those who through faith and patience inherit the promises." In contrast to the non-Christians who have been the object of the writer's message in 5:10--6:8, he shows them the true believers in verses 9-12 who stand as an example of what the unbelievers ought to be.

Both readers had the same Jewish background. They had come to the same point of repentance. They both had the very same revelation from God. The difference is only one group had gone a step further by totally committing themselves to Jesus Christ. That is a profound difference. My dad is fond of saying, "The same sun that hardens the clay, melts the wax." When we come to verses 9-12, the writer's perspective changes: he has been addressing non-Christians, but now addresses Christians.

A. The Evaluation (v. 9)

"But, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak."

The writer here gives a brief word to the believers who are to be imitated. We know that because he says "beloved," a term that is never used in Scripture to refer to unbelievers. Note the pronoun used to refer to the unbelievers in verse 4: "It is impossible for those [to be renewed unto repentance]" (emphasis added). In verse 9, however, the pronoun used is you, indicating that the writer is addressing a different group of people. Here is the final proof that those in Hebrews 5:10--6:8 were not true Christians. The bearers of thorns and briers in verses 7-8 were rejected, but the beloved of verse 9 were not.

Those addressed here are like those in Hebrews 10:39: "But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition, but of them that believe to the saving of the soul." Both groups came to the point of decision, but one group drew back into perdition while the other believed and their souls were saved. The believers mentioned in verses 9-12 are said to have love in verse 10, hope in verse 11, and faith in verse 12. This forms the triad of Christians virtues that Paul mentioned in 1 Corinthians 13:13. Faith, hope, and love characterize a true believer.

1. Defining the terms for the brethren

The Greek word for "beloved" (agapetoi) expresses the highest form of love in a relationship. It is

used 61 times in the New Testament. The first 9 times it is used, it is used of God the Father in speaking of Christ, His beloved Son. In the rest of the New Testament, whether referring to Jews or Gentiles, it is used primarily to refer to believers. Agape love is the beautiful and unique bond of fellowship with believers. Commentator Arthur Pink observed, "I cannot really love a brother with the Gospel-love, which is required of me, unless I have a well-grounded persuasion that he is a brother" (An Exposition of Hebrews, vol. 1 [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1954], p. 325). The writer of Hebrews refers to unbelieving Jews as "brethren" in a racial sense, but never "beloved." Agape love that is reserved for those who know Christ personally.

2. Delineating the truth about salvation

The writer says, "We are persuaded" (v. 9). The phrase is used in a legal sense to refer to someone who examined a case, gathered all the evidence, and then said, "I'm convinced." The writer is saying, "I have considered the evidence and have come to the settled conclusion that you are for real." The evidence was their faith, hope, and love--the traits that accompany salvation.

The New Testament is rich in its use of the terms for salvation. The word "salvation" itself and its derivatives are used some fifty times in the New Testament. It speaks of our deliverance from danger, death, hell, Satan, and sin. What are the things that accompany salvation according to the writer of Hebrews?

- a) Hebrews 5:11--Salvation is not infancy but maturity.
 - b) Hebrews 5:12--Salvation is not milk but solid food.
 - c) Hebrews 5:13--Salvation is not inexperience in righteousness but perfect righteousness.
 - d) Hebrews 6:1--Salvation is not repentance from dead works but repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.
 - e) Hebrews 6:1--Salvation is not faith in God apart from Christ but faith in Christ as God.
 - f) Hebrews 6:2--Salvation is not external ceremonial religion but internal regeneration and transformation.
 - g) Hebrews 6:2--Salvation is not repeated identification with sacrifices but a once-for-all identification with Jesus Christ.
 - h) Hebrews 6:2--Salvation is not unclear definitions of resurrection and eternal judgement but the full revelation of our blessed hope (Titus 2:13).
 - i) Hebrews 6:4--Salvation is not simply being enlightened but made new creatures in Christ.
 - j) Hebrews 6:4--Salvation is not simply tasting salvation but feasting on it completely.
 - k) Hebrews 6:4--Salvation is not simply partaking of the Holy Spirit but being indwelt by Him in all His fullness.
 - l) Hebrews 6:5--Salvation is not simply tasting God's word but drinking it up.
 - m) Hebrews 6:5--Salvation is not simply seeing a miracle but being one.
- Those are the characteristics that accompany salvation. The "better things" the writer speaks of in verse 9 are set in contrast to the traits characterizing the unbelievers.

The writer ends verse 9 by saying, "though thus we speak." This is something of an apology to the Christian reader who had been reading through the awful warning passage, encouraging them not to lose heart. To the Christian, the writer says, "Don't think my warning to the unbelievers refers to you. I put it here because I know they're in your midst." Only Jesus Christ knows who is for real and who isn't, and He will reveal that in the last day (Matt. 13:24-30). The writer however wouldn't be able to pick them all out by name.

B. The Examination (v. 10)

"God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labor of love, which ye have shown toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister."

God knows who are really His and who are faithful. He will not forget His own or their work for Him. Our names are securely in His book of life. Our salvation is not lost and our rewards will not be forgotten.

Many Christians today are shaken when they hear God's message of judgment. They experience times of anguish and doubt, fearing they might lose their salvation. They do not know what it is to rest in the finished work of Christ and in their positional standing in Christ.

After Malachi had given his severe warning of judgement, many of the faithful believers apparently were worried that it applied to them. The prophet said, "They that feared the Lord spoke often one to another; and the Lord hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name. And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts" (3:16). Later in chapter 4 the Lord said, "The day cometh, that shall burn like an oven, and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble; and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch. But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings" (vv. 1- 2). God always knows His faithful. The sovereignty of God secures us.

1. The fruit determines the reality of salvation

Many have said Hebrews 6:10 says you must work for your salvation. (They point out it says God won't forget our works, not our faith.) But if that were true, it would contradict what other Scriptures teach (eg. Eph. 2:8-9; and Titus 3:5). The writer is saying that in a congregation with wheat and tares who are all claiming to have faith, the only way to tell the difference is by their good works. A Christian's works are not what saved him or what keeps him saved, but they do give evidence of his salvation. As James tells us, "Faith without works is dead" (James 2:18, 26). You demonstrate your faith by your works and I'll believe your faith is real, for Paul said, "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation" (2 Cor. 5:17). God is not so unfair and insensitive that He fails to see the works of love His beloved children perform on His behalf. He clearly sees the fruit of our righteousness.

In the statement "labor of love," the term "labor" doesn't appear in the best manuscripts, so the verse could be read this way: "God is not unrighteous to forget your work of love."

a) 1 Thessalonians 1:3--Paul said, "Remembering without ceasing your work of faith and labor of love." The reason Paul knew the Thessalonian Christians were for real was that he could look at their lives and see the fruits of genuine salvation.

b) Galatians 5:6--Although in a different context, Paul said, "In Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, but faith which worketh by love." Do you know how you can tell if your faith is real? If genuine love is the result of your faith.

2. The fruit determines the reason for service

Service to the brethren is also evidence of salvation. But an even more significant evidence is love "toward his name" (Heb. 6:10). God knows when our service is truly for His glory by whether it is

done out of love for His name--for who He is. Do you know how to express your love for God? Serve the saints. The writer says the Hebrew Christians "ministered to the saints, and do minister" (v. 10). They ministered not primarily because they loved the saints but because they loved God. The key to real service is a burning love for the Lord.

a) 2 Corinthians 5:14--Paul said, "The love of Christ constraineth us." People are not always that lovable, but we love them because we love God (cf. 1 John 5:2).

b) Romans 1:5--Paul said, "By whom we have received grace and apostleship, for obedience to the faith among all nations, for his name." What does the name of God mean? It means all that He is. To love God's name means to have a passionate love for all that He is.

c) 3 John 7--John said, "Because for his name's sake they went forth." The church in view here ministered because they loved God.

d) John 21:17--Jesus first asked Peter, "Simon, son of Jonah, lovest thou me? Then He said, "Feed my sheep." Jesus didn't ask Peter, if he loved men; He asked if he loved Him.

Your service to Jesus Christ must be based on an overwhelming love for Him. You will never properly love men until you properly love Him. Loving the name of the Lord is proof positive that your faith is the real thing. The faithful believers to whom Hebrews was primarily addressed loved the name of the Lord. And they were ministering to each other because they loved their Lord. We hear a great deal about loving and ministering to the Body of Christ, but the genuineness and effectiveness of the ministry we do have is directly related to the love we have for Christ. The more we love God, the more we will want to do His will. We shouldn't be concerned with trying to invent love for people; but it should be an overflow from our love for God.

3. The fruit determines the resource for service

a) The motive

Keeping God as our focus and resource gives us the desire and ability to love others. Verse 10 says, "ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister." Their ministry kept going and going. They were not resting on the laurels of past ministry, for it kept on going. The word "minister" is the same Greek word from which we get the word "deacon." It simply means to serve. The believers were serving each other through their spiritual gifts (cf. Rom. 12:3-8, 1 Cor. 12:8-11, and 1 Pet. 4:10-11). Whether your gift is counseling, showing mercy, helping, or teaching, it should be used because you love Him.

b) The methods

Our ministry to one another involves praying for one another (Eph. 6:18), rebuking each other when we sin and seeking to restore the sinning brother in love, confessing our sins to one another (James 5:16), forgiving one another (Eph. 4:32, bearing one another's burdens (Gal. 6:2), caring for the weaker brother (1 Thess. 5:14), and giving to meet the needs of the saints (Rom. 12:13). All those things must be generated by our love for Jesus Christ. The Christian life can be boiled down to one thing and that is the measure of your love for the Lord. How preoccupied are you with His name? Do you have a lofty, exalted view of who He is and an overwhelming and passionate love for Him? When we love our Lord like that, then we'll be able to love each other as we should.

c) The ministers

The writer refers to the believers as saints in verse 10. All true Christians are saints (Gk. hagios), meaning "holy ones" (cf. 1 Cor. 1:2). The writer is speaking of our identity in Christ. We are righteous before God because of our standing in Jesus Christ. Being a saint has nothing to do with one's degree of spiritual maturity or rank. It refers to any person who is saved--set apart by God for Himself in His Son Jesus Christ.

The proof that the Hebrews addressed in 6:9-12 were true believers was their loving, faithful, and continuing ministry to fellow believers. The greatest gift you can give God is your love and service to

fellow believers. Don't say you love God and have no use for a fellow Christian. That is why the apostle John says, "He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness" (1 John 2:9).

C. The Emulation (vv. 11-12)

"And we desire that every one of you do show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end; that ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises."

Having determined that these are the true believers, the writer then uses them as an example to the unbelievers. He says, "Look at the beloved and follow the kind of pattern they're setting. We want you all to come to the same full assurance of hope to the end. We don't want you to fall away and have no hope."

The only people who really have hope are those who have a relationship with Jesus Christ (Rom. 12:10-12). There is no hope apart from Jesus Christ. The writer says, "We desire that every one of you do show the same diligence" (v. 11). "Diligence" is the Greek word spoude, which means "speed" or "haste." He's saying that the unbelievers needed to be speedy in coming to the full assurance of hope. Salvation is an instantaneous experience, and it should not be postponed (2 Cor. 6:2). Spoude can also refer to terror stricken speed. The writer is saying, "If you don't quickly come to Jesus Christ, you're going to fall away in ultimate disaster."

The writer then says, "Be not slothful" (v. 12). The King James Version does not translate this phrase correctly because "slothful" is the same word translated "dull" in 5:11. And so it should be here. He goes through the whole cycle of the argument and comes back to warning them not to be dull of hearing.

The Greek word for "followers" is mimetai, from which we get the English word "mimic." The writer is saying to the unbelievers, "Be mimics of those who through faith and patient endurance of persecution inherit the promises."

Conclusion If you have come to the point of decision regarding Jesus Christ, yet are putting it off, you are in a dangerous position. You will find that the longer you reject, the harder your heart will become. You are in danger of falling away forever. Because you've rejected the full revelation that God has given, He can't give you any more revelation. If you are not a Christian, I pray that you'll not reject the Lord Jesus Christ a moment longer.

Focusing on the Facts

1. What warning does the writer of Hebrews give?
2. What was the situation surrounding the first generation of Jewish believers in this community?
3. What are the major groups addressed in Hebrews?

4. Where do the warning passages occur in Hebrews and what do they warn unbelievers about?
5. What is the unforgivable sin? Can the unforgivable sin be committed today? Explain.
6. The only way man will ever bring forth fruit that God accepts is to _____ in _____ (John 15:5).
7. Whom is the writer of Hebrews addressing in verses 9-12?
8. What was the main difference between the two groups the writer addresses in Hebrews?
9. What is the triad of Christians virtues and how does it relate to Hebrews 6:10-12 (1 Cor. 13:13)?
10. What is the difference between the terms "brethren" and "beloved"?
11. Can a Christian lose his salvation? Must a Christian work to keep his salvation? Support your answer with Scripture.
12. What is more significant than love for your fellow man?
13. What is your responsibility in ministering to the Body of Christ?
14. The Christian life can be boiled down to one thing and that is the measure of your _____ for the Lord.
15. Are all Christians saints or is that description reserved for super- Christians? Explain.
16. Give proof that Hebrews 6:9-10 is directed to believers?
17. True or False: The only people who really have hope are those who have a _____ with _____ .
18. What kind of diligence was the writer of Hebrews calling for in verse 10?
19. What is the writer's final command in verse 12 to the unbelievers?

Pondering the Principles

1. The issue in Hebrews 5:10--6:12 is spiritual maturity. But before you can mature spiritually, you must start by beginning a relationship with Jesus Christ. Note how salvation is illustrated by the contrasts listed on page 6. Study the illustrations and over the next two weeks, take each of these 13

contrasts and examine yourself to see whether your salvation is genuine (2 Cor. 13:5). Ask God to confirm your salvation based on the consistency of these traits in your life.

2. Hebrews 6:10 talked about the believers' love for the saints. The writer was encouraged by their continuing ministry of love and faithfulness because of their love for Jesus Christ. Does a genuine love for the Lord motivate your love for fellow believers? Study 1 John 2:9-11 and 5:2-3 and ask God to love others through you.

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