

Hebrews

The Perils of Immaturity and Falling Away

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INTRODUCTION:

Open your Bible to Hebrews chapter 5. This passage is a warning to someone who knows the truth about Jesus: the truth about His death, the truth about His resurrection, and the truth of the gospel but returns to their worldly ways and falls away. We have all seen people in the church that profess to be believers but are still living a worldly lifestyle. No passage is more dramatic in addressing this issue than the passage before us.

All Stand and Read Scripture

Hebrews 5:11-6:8 (NASB95)

¹¹ Concerning him we have much to say, and *it is* hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. ¹² For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. ¹³ For everyone who partakes *only* of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant. ¹⁴ But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.

⁶ Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, ² of instruction about washings and laying on of hands, and the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment. ³ And this we will do, if God permits. ⁴ For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, ⁵ and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, ⁶ and *then* have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame. ⁷ For ground that drinks the rain which often falls on it and brings forth vegetation useful to those for whose sake it is also tilled, receives a blessing from God; ⁸ but if it yields thorns and thistles, it is worthless and close to being cursed, and it ends up being burned.

Prayer

I. The Problem of Immaturity.

No passage is more dramatic than this in warning the person who is in the church, who has heard the truth, knows the truth and has rejected the Savior. This is the severest of all dangers because if you fall away, you cannot be renewed to repentance.

Hebrews 5:11a (NASB95)

¹¹ Concerning him we have much to say,...

That is concerning the great High Priest, the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ.

A. They Have become Dull of Hearing.

Hebrews 5:11b (NASB95)

... and *it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing.*

What the author is saying is that I am about to reveal the depths of the magnitude of Christ, but it will be very hard to explain to you since you have become dull of hearing. You once responded to the message of the gospel with interest and you understood it. You understood Jesus, the incarnate God coming into the world, living a perfect life, dying a substitutionary death, rising from the dead, and providing salvation by grace through faith. But now you have heard the gospel so many times and you are not embracing it. You lapse into a settled state of dullness. You are no longer interested in the gospel. You are no longer desirous to learn and apply the truth in your life and the small gleam of light goes out.

Hebrews 5:12a (NASB95)

¹² For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God,...

You have been attending church enough times to be a teacher. This is not talking about a one-time visitor. This is not talking about somebody who comes on Easter and Christmas. This is talking about somebody who has been there for a long time and have been exposed to enough truth that they should be teaching it.

B. They Lack Discernment.

Hebrews 5:12b-13 (NASB95)

*...and you have come to need milk and not solid food. ¹³ For everyone who partakes *only* of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant.*

You have put yourself in a position where the small glimmer of light that was there is out and you need somebody to come and take you back to square one with the elementary principles of the Word of God. This is a really frightening thought. When hear the truth and reject it, you lose the ability to discern any longer. You have had full instruction in the gospel, but by indecision and by hard-heartedness, you have become sluggish and dull of hearing, and you require basic teaching all over again. You are like somebody who needs milk and not solid food. You are like a baby.

You see, the characteristic of being an adult is that you have **discernment**. A child has to be protected because they cannot make wise choices. We have to make decisions for them. And the writer of Hebrews is saying you are like that baby. You do not know what to pick and choose in life. You are ignorant, sluggish, dull of hearing, and lazy. You no longer have the desire to learn. You lack discernment. You cannot protect yourself, and you have lost the little glimmer of light that once was there.

C. They are not Able to Distinguish Between Good and Evil.

Hebrews 5:14 (NASB95)

¹⁴ But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.

True believers hear the Word and put it into practice. They have had their senses trained to grow into maturity and with maturity comes discernment. And to the discerning you can present the book of Hebrews. To the discerning you can present the deep truths of the priesthood of Jesus Christ. And they love it. They relish it. They take it in. They embrace it. They glorify God for it. And they apply it in their lives.

II. The Plea to Seek Maturity.

Once the Holy Spirit addresses the problem He makes a plea.

Hebrews 6:1-3 (NASB95)

6 Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, ² of instruction about washings and laying on of hands, and the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment. ³ And this we will do, if God permits.

What is this? He says to these people, look, you have got to get past this elementary stuff. Let us move on to maturity. Let us become adults. Leave the elementary things, separate yourself from the basics and start embracing God's word.

There are six fundamental doctrines mentioned here.

- A. Repentance.** The change of mind that causes one to turn away from sin and/or in the case of the Hebrew recipients, useless rituals.
- B. Faith Toward God.** As faith is turning away from the darkness of sin, it is turning toward the light of God.
- C. Washings.** The baptism of new believers who have received the gospel.
- D. Laying on of Hands.** The baptism of new believers and the laying on of hands of church leaders to proclaim the gospel are fundamental components of church life.
- E. Resurrection of the Dead.** The resurrection of all people in the last days.
- F. Eternal Judgment.** The destiny of those who reject God's saving grace and continue in their sinful ways.

You must get beyond the fundamental doctrines and mature in your faith. You must believe that Jesus Christ has taken the full penalty for your sins and filled you with His righteousness. And live your life to glorify God in all you do and say in appreciation for all He has done for you.

That is his plea.

III. The Warning of Falling Away.

And then comes the warning. This is one of the most familiar and strongest of all the warnings in the book of Hebrews.

Hebrews 6:4-5 (NASB95)

⁴ For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, ⁵ and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come,

This a very difficult passage to interpret. There is a sharp division in the church as to what it means. Some say that people can taste the gift without really having faith. Others

say that those who have tasted are truly believers and must guard against losing their salvation. It is the difference between "once saved always saved" and a true believer falling away from their faith.

So for some verses 4 -5 are referring to people who have heard the gospel but did not have true faith and were never saved.

They tasted the heavenly gift of salvation by being surrounded by true believers.

They have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit by association. They did not possess the holy spirit but they experienced the work of the Holy Spirit. They were fellowshiping with Spirit-filled believers.

They tasted the good word of God. They had a taste of what it was like but did not consume it.

They heard of the power of the ages to come but did not position themselves for it.

The second group of people believe that this refers to true believers who experienced all these things and fell away and lost their salvation.

Hebrews 6:6a (NASB95)

⁶ and then have fallen away,...

So what does it mean to "fall away"? Does it mean that they were never saved to begin with or were they a true believer that fell away from their faith and lost their salvation?

On the one hand no teacher wants to leave the impression that obedience does not matter. On the other hand we do not want to leave the impression that salvation is dependent on perfect obedience.

That is why this question causes considerable division in the body of Christ. We all know of people who professed Christ in their younger years but have not remained faithful. Even more importantly we are all fully aware of our own transgressions since accepting Jesus as our Savior. When the Bible warns there will be some on judgment day who cry, "**Lord, Lord**" but who don't enter the kingdom of heaven, could he be talking about us?

The Bible says God is Sovereign and knows the future. But the Scripture also warns the saved person against falling away.

2 Peter 2:20-21 (NASB95)

²⁰ For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world by the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and are overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. ²¹ For it would be better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn away from the holy commandment handed on to them.

Some would say that they were not saved to begin with. Others say that this is a person that was saved but lost his salvation because he became entangled once again with the ways of the world. No matter which position one takes, both sides would agree that a person who once believed but has fallen away is not saved.

A key passage that helps clarify the issue for me is found in II Timothy.

2 Timothy 2:12-13 (NASB95)

¹² If we **endure**, we will also reign with Him; If we deny Him, He also will deny us; ¹³ If we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself.

The word endure suggests that we are a believer. If we stumble and fall into sin God will still be faithful to His promise to save us. But since we are saved by faith in Christ if we sin to the point of saying, "I no longer believe in Christ; I disown Him," He will disown us. In a very real sense that person has renounced his own salvation.

Because of the Scriptures mentioned above and others warning the saved person against falling away, I believe it is possible for a person to lose his or her salvation through willful sinning. Salvation is the free gift of God, available to all who trust Christ. And God desires that all be saved. Every individual has the choice to accept or reject God's offer of forgiveness. Once a person is saved, that salvation cannot be lost through one sin, or even a series of sins. But, as Hebrews 10:26 says,

Hebrews 10:26 (NASB95)

²⁶ For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins,

If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, we may get to a point where our hearts are so hard that we reject Christ and want no part of his salvation any more. Then there will be no sacrifice for sins remaining.

Once you put your faith and trust in Jesus Christ, your salvation is secure. If you are a sincere believer, then questioning your salvation shows a lack of faith in the promise of God to save you. It is often a sign that you question whether God is big enough or gracious enough to forgive your sins. If you trust in the substitutionary death of Christ on the cross and you have an active faith, then you should have assurance of your salvation.

1 John 5:13 (NASB95)

¹³ These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.

If you have wandered from the Lord, then you should repent and return to Christ lest you harden your heart, reject him, and lose your salvation. Peter warned us to be on guard lest we be carried away by evil men and "**fall from our steadfastness**".

2 Peter 3:17 (NASB95)

¹⁷ You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, be on your guard so that you are not carried away by the error of unprincipled men and fall from your own steadfastness,

Rest assured, your salvation is secure, as long as you remain in faith. Your God is big enough to forgive your sins.

This issue of "eternal security" is not one Christians should make a test of fellowship. This is a good area to practice the slogan, "In doctrine, unity; in opinion liberty; in all things, charity." Let us humbly admit that there are mysteries in Scripture which will not be fully understood until the return of Christ, and let us renew our commitment to practice love and tolerance toward fellow believers who do not agree with us on secondary doctrines.

Then the Holy Spirit warns us of the consequences of falling away.

Hebrews 6:6b (NASB95)

...it is impossible to renew them again to repentance,...

What a statement! That is the warning. Why is it impossible? Because you cannot have any more revelation. If you have sat there long enough to be a teacher and you have experienced all of these things and you turn and walk away, you will not be saved. Why? Because there is no more opportunity. You have heard it. You have seen it. You have experienced it. You have heard it for so long that you should be able to teach it. There is nothing left to say to you. You turn, you walk away, it is impossible to renew such a person again to repentance.

Hebrews 6:6c (NASB95)

...since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame.

They have decided to stand with the crucifiers and put Jesus to open shame. You are affirming that Jesus was not the Savior, you are standing with the crucifiers who said, “We will not have this man reign over us.” You are saying, “Go ahead and kill Him. I want nothing to do with Him.” You "put Him to open shame". By walking away, you openly declare that Jesus was guilty as charged and deserved to die. This is the verdict of any person who rejects the full revelation of Christ. And if you would dare to do this, you will not be saved. This is the warning.

CONCLUSION:

Then this warning is reinforced by a closing illustration.

Hebrews 6:7-8 (NASB95)

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

The rain falls. What is the rain? The rain is the gospel. It falls and it lands on ground that brings forth vegetation. And that is the blessing of God. That is the gospel falling on people who respond. But the same gospel falls on others and it brings thorns and thistles. It is worthless, cursed, and burned. What a great tragedy of all tragedies.

So why did you come to church this morning? Was it because you feel that attending church saves you? Was it for social reasons? Was it because you felt that it would draw you closer to God in some way? Or did you come to soak in the word of God and embrace it in your life? If you are a true believer, you will produce good fruit. You will have an active faith intent on learning "solid food" from God's word.

But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.

What A Day That Will Be.