

Lets open our Bibles this morning to Hebrews chapter 6, our text for this morning is Hebrews 6:1-12, and while your turning there or pulling that up on your device let me read you what one scholar said about verses, 4-6, "*Hebrews 6:4–6 is considered by many to be the most difficult interpretative passage in all the book of Hebrews, and some would say in the entire New Testament.*"¹ With that in mind I want to extend my deepest gratitude to David for dodging this bullet, so that I could take one for the team...

The truth is, I asked for this assignment. David was more than willing to preach these verses, but he has shown a great deal of faith in me, first in allowing me to preach regularly, and second to entrust a difficult passage to me to preach. I am grateful for his trust and yours dear church and with the Lord's help I think today we will leave with greater understanding and even greater confidence in the saving power of our God.

So lets read Hebrews 6:1-12...

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, ² and of instruction about washings, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. ³ And this we will do if God permits.

⁴ 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, ⁵ and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, ⁶ 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. ⁷ 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. ⁸ But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed, and its end is to be burned.

⁹ Though we speak in this way, yet in your case, beloved, we feel sure of better things—things that belong to salvation. ¹⁰ For God is not unjust so as to overlook your work and the love that you have shown for his name in serving the saints, as you still do. ¹¹ And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end, ¹² so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises. ²

This is the Word of the Lord...Thanks be to God!

Can a Christian lose their salvation? Is it possible for someone to be genuinely converted to Christ, and then fall away to face God's eternal judgment in Hell? Can you really be confident that you'll make it to heaven?

¹ David L. Allen, [Hebrews](#), The New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing Group, 2010), 339.

² [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Heb 6.

In the Baptist Faith and Message, our church's confession of faith we read this sentence in Article 5, "*All true believers endure to the end. Those whom God has accepted in Christ, and sanctified by His Spirit, will never fall away from the state of grace, but shall persevere to the end.*"³ It is our doctrinal belief that no true Christian can lose salvation. This doctrine is usually called the Perseverance of the Saints.

There are some Christians who read the verses we just read and conclude that Christians can lose salvation. In essence, their claim, based on these verses, is that no such doctrine as the perseverance of the saints is true – so they conclude that genuinely converted Christians can fall away.

Is that what this text teaches? Is your eternal salvation secure or not? Do you have any basis for assurance of salvation?

I believe the answer is "no" – in fact, I think if you'll hang with me today, you'll see that far from teaching that you can lose your salvation I think these verses actually serve to assure you that if you are in Christ, you can never lose the salvation God has given you. These verses can deepen our assurance that nothing can separate us from the love of God for us in Christ Jesus. The text breaks pretty naturally into three sections, vs.1-3 deal with maturity, vs.4-8 deal with apostasy, and then vs. 9-12 deal with assurance so that's how we'll divide out time this morning, with the most attention going to the second point, but...

First – Maturity

Ch. 6 opens building upon what the author was arguing at the end of ch. 5, that the Christians need to be progressing in their faith, not retreating to former ways of life, or standing still as mere infant Christians. Imagine standing behind a guy in his 30's at the grocery store buying a cart full of baby formula and you ask him, "how old is your little one" and he responded to you, "what are you talking about? – well I notice you have a lot of baby formula, and I wondered how old your infant was who you're buying all this for – and he responded – This formula is for me, I love the stuff, it's all I've ever eaten" – What would you say? Would you think him wise? Or would you feel sorry that no one ever showed him the glories of smoked meats and fruit pie? I seriously doubt you'd find it cute, or health, in fact you would inherently know something is wrong...that's where the problem is with many Christians, and their inability to understand and grow as Christians is a sign of immaturity and the author opens this chapter by pointing to these Christians, who were going through real persecution and pain I would remind you and saying to them – you know your problem is your immaturity.

That sounds hard, it may even seem uncaring to their situation, but the author knows that commiserating or coddling these believers is not the real help they need. In order to

³ <https://bfm.sbc.net/bfm2000/#iv> accessed 6/7/2023

endure their suffering they needed to press further into their faith in Jesus, not simply stay still.

This is what he intends to communicate when he says, *“let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity,”*⁴ – he certainly doesn’t mean to abandon Christ, but rather that the foundation of the gospel had already been laid, and so they needed to build on that solid foundation and swim on the ocean of God’s glorious grace for them in Christ Jesus.

He even lays out the things they already knew in order to say to them, these things you already know, now lets build on that knowledge and go deeper into our knowledge of the God who saved us.

Notice what he says they need to go on from: Depending on your counting he lists 5 or 6 doctrines or practices I say 5, but I’m sympathetic to you sixers out there:

First, repentance from dead works and of faith toward God – This is the sinner’s response to the gospel. This is the truth that these former Jewish people had recognized that by the works of the law no one is saved. This is the truth that you cannot earn your salvation by your good deeds. When we turn to Jesus, we turn away from any silly attempts at saving ourselves, those works are dead works, and when we turn from our dead works we turn to God. We no longer look to our works to be saved, we look to God who sent His Son Jesus to do the work we cannot do in his perfect life, and who died the death we deserve in our place, and we place our faith in Him. We trust God as we trust His son Jesus.

This is the new birth moment of a genuine Christian, this is the first step of Christianity, not the last, so maturity demands building on this foundation, not staying at this point.

Second, instruction about washings – He isn’t talking primarily about Baptism here, the word washings is plural and you’ll remember how David spoke of the many ritual washings that accompanied Jewish practice, and we know that one of the earliest heresies in the church were the Judaizers we see prominently in Acts and Galatians who demanded that to be a genuine Christian you needed to obey Jesus and keep the Old Testament commands. Here the author reminds them that there was no need to return to the ceremonial washings of the past because the cleansing those washings required were no longer binding with the resurrection of Jesus. They had already been taught about that and did not need to go backwards and be retaught that Jesus had cleansed them from all unrighteousness. This new cleansing was what had been symbolized in their baptism, they did not need to go back to any ritual in order to be cleansed.

⁴ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Heb 6:1.

Third, the laying on of hands – in the early church we see the laying on of hands accompanying the receiving of the Holy Spirit in Acts and then later the laying on of hands was part of setting apart missionaries and pastors for ministry. Now it seems that they were focusing on this practice in a way that distracted them from faith in Christ. They were by a practice and not the savior. Laying hands on someone to symbolize God’s commission of them is good, but not ultimate.

Fourth, the resurrection of the dead – Jesus rose from the dead and there is a resurrection to come for every human, to eternal life or eternal death. Paul addressed this in 1 Corinthians 15 extensively, but in the early church the debate over resurrection carried over from the time of Christ. And these early Christians did not need to return to debates over Jesus’ resurrection or the reality of their own resurrection – this was basic to their Christian confession. They needed to build on the reality of the resurrection of Jesus and claim the confidence of God that they too would be raised with Christ and live from this central truth.

Fifth, eternal judgment – This is where the world is headed, every person who has ever lived. We look towards the day when the Lord Jesus will return and judge everyone for all eternity. For every one of his children that judgment will mean their eternal life in glory in the new heavens in the new earth we will be judged faithful, not because of our deeds, but because of our gracious savior. The eternal judgment that awaits those who refuse to return to Christ is the second death and eternity separated from God’s grace and the full fury of God’s wrath in hell.

All this, our author argues, is basic Christian belief that serves as foundational to growing in Christian maturity. And he implores his hearers to leave these matters and progress in their understanding of God. Now by leave he does not mean abandon, but rather build upon. Leave here does not mean leave behind as in these matters don’t matter, but leave them as you grow in maturity.

And then verse 3 is packed with theological dynamite – “***3 And this we will do if God permits.***”⁵ Notice the “we” in the verses – the author includes himself, he doesn’t absolve himself of needing to mature even as he is farther along than his readers. Be wary of any pastor who tells you that he has reached the pinnacle of maturity, we are maturing in our faith just like you. We may be farther along, but we have not arrived. The pastoral heart of the author is seen here as he calls these Christians to join him in maturing in Christ...but did you see the powerful truths side by side in this verse

There it is God’s sovereignty and man’s responsibility placed conveniently side by side to blow our minds. “This we will do” – we are responsible to pursue maturity and it will happen only “if God permits.” This is such a pride smashing comfort to us. Your maturity is

⁵ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Heb 6:3.

connected to your effort, but it is God who grants us growth. You are not in control of your spiritual maturation, God is, but you are responsible to pursue it. This reminds me of what Paul wrote in 1 Cor. 15:10, *“¹⁰ But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.”*⁶ Was it God, or Paul? Yes – Paul studied and poured over the Scriptures, he disciplined his mind to search out the unsearchable riches of Christ, and yet he recognized that every effort he exerted only resulted in maturity if the Lord granted it. Brothers & Sisters, do you want to mature as a Christian discipline yourself and ask the Lord to guide and grow you, this is the path of Christian maturity...but there is another path that some apparent believers find and that is the path of apostasy, which is our second point...

Second – Apostasy

Verses 4-8 are where the challenge lies for many Christians with this text, these are the verses that cause some to conclude that Christians can and do lose their salvation, and for the sake of our clarity I want to re-read this section in 2 parts, first vs. 4-6

*“⁴ 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, ⁵ and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, ⁶ 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.”*⁷

The question that has puzzled many Christians is whether he is talking about true believers in this verse? It is a fair question because as he describes these people there appears to be many factors that lead us to think he’s talking about Christians, they have been enlightened, tasted the heavenly gift, shared in the Holy Spirit, tasted the goodness of God’s Word and even experienced spiritual power and displayed repentance in some form – yet, they are not walking in obedience to Christ.

To be up front with my understanding, I don’t believe he is talking about true believers here, but rather that he is talking about what has been referred to in church history as “false professors” or “false converts.”

Now I am not going to show all my work here like I am turning in a math test, but I need to do some work with you in the text so that you understand how I deal with what appears like plain evidence that would go against my conclusion. 2 reasons I am doing this: the Word of God is too wonderful for me to simply give you an “I told you so answer” that’s not satisfying. Second, I want to help you learn to interpret your Bible’s better. By showing

⁶ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 15:10.

⁷ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Heb 6:4–6.

you how I did my work I want to help you learn how to do the same work in your own personal study.

While the description of the apostates in these verses can appear to look like genuine believers I actually don't think he means genuine Christians at all, I come to that conclusion based on what He says here.

First, he talks about "those" – just a verse ago he referenced "we" in calling for maturity, assuming the we means genuine believers he turns his attention to a group he calls "those." This is the first indicator that he is talking about a group other than Christians.

Second, the phrases he piles up do not sufficiently demand we call the ones who have fallen away Christians because all of the items on the list can and are experienced by people who do not genuinely surrender to Jesus.

They were "**enlightened**" – this word used in Hebrews elsewhere does refer to conversion, but doesn't demand we interpret it as conversion here, from the context this points to an initial response to the gospel – so these people apparently heard the gospel and responded to it, appearing to trust in Christ.⁸ But as we see their confession of faith in Jesus didn't last, they had turned away.

Let me offer an application for us, we celebrate when sinners repent of their sin and trust in Christ, but we need not assume that every decision for Christ is genuine, because time will tell. This does not mean we play a game of doubt with new converts, but rather it is our duty as a church to walk alongside those who make a profession of faith discipling them in the faith. Helping them to understand what a decision to follow Jesus really means. Often it is when the emotional excitement wears off and the reality of life sets in that the genuineness of a person's profession of faith is revealed. Sometimes when it is those whom we love we can be blinded by our joy when what we need to do is exercise and affectionate care for them in helping them walk through what it means to be a disciple. Assurance should be given to Christians, and yet there is wisdom in not giving assurance too quickly. Jesus' never rushed to affirm someone's profession of faith, even at times provoking even his disciples to see if their faith was genuine, don't believe me, read the end of John 6. If that bothers you, hang with me I have more biblical reason for what I am saying. If patience is a fruit of the Spirit that patience should also apply to the helpful discipleship of new converts. It may be in our excitement and haste to affirm someone we set them up for spiritual disaster in the future.

They had "**tasted the heavenly gift and have shared in the Holy Spirit**" – certainly these people had been in contact with the genuine Christians the author addresses because to taste the heavenly gift and share in the Holy Spirit could not have come elsewhere, but

neither of these descriptions demand that we say this means genuine conversion. There are plenteous examples of people who by proximity experienced spiritual blessing by being integrated into a Christian community. Though there are churches that hurt people, there are many churches that have been havens of care and rest for people. And some who have participated in church activities have genuinely experienced a taste of heaven by the love of the saints and shared in the Holy Spirit through the Spirit's work in local churches. The word share doesn't demand to be a synonym to indwell, which is what we are told the Holy Spirit does in true believers. To use a bad example here, many of us remember when there were smoking sections in restaurants until research revealed the very real dangers of second-hand smoke. We learned you didn't have to be smoking the cigarettes to experience the effects of tobacco related symptoms – a similar experience is described here – there was a second-hand experience of gospel blessings because these people had been in and around the Christian community, but the experience did not last.

They also had, "*tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come*" they had sat under true gospel proclamation and witnessed people respond to the gospel and turn from sin to trust in the living God. At some level they had heard the gospel preached and seen other lives changed, they had been participants in seeing supernatural change in the lives of others.

Finally, they had even repented, we know this because the author speaks of the impossibility of *restoring them to repentance*, which implies they had repented at some previous point. Again, just the word repentance doesn't demand that we interpret it in this passage to mean the repentance that accompanies true faith. Paul describes the reality of true and false repentance in 2 Corinthians when he writes, "*⁹As it is, I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting. For you felt a godly grief, so that you suffered no loss through us. ¹⁰For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death.*"⁹ There is a repentance that appears genuine but is not rooted in genuine sorrow over sin against God, but sorrow in the consequences sin brings into your earthly life.

And there is sadly a hardening that can accompany someone who has outwardly pledged allegiance to Christ, such that to have them return is impossible from an earthly point of view, but that does not mean that God cannot restore them to repentance and a genuine repentance for that matter. Listen to how the late F.F. Bruce spoke on this text:

"In these verses he is not questioning the perseverance of the saints, \...But in fact, he is stating a practical truth that has verified itself repeatedly in the experience of the church. Those who have shared in the covenant privileges of the people of God, and then deliberately renounce them, are the most difficult people to reclaim for the faith. It is indeed impossible to reclaim them says our author. We know, of course, that nothing of this sort is ultimately

⁹ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 2 Co 7:9–10.

impossible for the grace of God, but as a matter of human experience the reclamation of such people is, practically speaking, impossible.”¹⁰

Then the author I think further reinforces that these verses do not refer to genuine believers with the metaphor he gives in vs. 7-8, Look back with me, *“⁷ 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. ⁸ But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed, and its end is to be burned.”*¹¹

What does this talk of soil have to do with apostasy, well it is interesting that the rain falls on two types of soil, one produces a crop and the other soil produces weeds. The author differentiates that there is good soil and bad soil that share the same experience of rain, which, I think draws on one of the most significant parables of Jesus – the parable of the sower, do you remember that story? The sower sows seed all around, and the seed lands on four different types of soil all producing different results. Then Jesus explains the meaning of the parable in this way, *“¹⁴ The sower sows the word. ¹⁵ And these are the ones along the path, where the word is sown: when they hear, Satan immediately comes and takes away the word that is sown in them. ¹⁶ And these are the ones sown on rocky ground: the ones who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with joy. ¹⁷ And they have no root in themselves, but endure for a while; then, when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately they fall away. ¹⁸ And others are the ones sown among thorns. They are those who hear the word, ¹⁹ but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it proves unfruitful. ²⁰ But those that were sown on the good soil are the ones who hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold.”*¹²

Can you see the connection? Jesus describes four soil types, but only two real outcomes – the same two outcomes that the author of Hebrews gives – true lasting life, or death. Jesus parable even resonates with our text because two of the soils he describes represent people who give the appearance of right response to the gospel, but time and life reveals that their faith was not, in fact, saving faith.

So, what does this mean for us? Let me suggest at least two applications for us

First, hear and heed the warning – though this description doesn’t refer to true believers there is value in us who do believe in Christ to heed the warning to remain faithful to Jesus. Maybe you remember what we learned back in Hebrews 3, that God warns his people to encourage their faith and to preserve them from death. The warning of danger is a gift from God. Christians can read these verses and be warned against shallow

¹⁰ F.F. Bruce, The Epistle to the Hebrews, NICNT, pg. 144

¹¹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Heb 6:7–8.

¹² [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Mk 4:14–20.

immaturity and from walking away from Christ. In fact, it is the warnings of Scripture that do actually prove to be a means of perseverance for Christians.

Second, be intentional with those who respond to the gospel – take the charge and the lead in discipling one another. One of the saddest realities that should never be said of local churches is that a person responds to the gospel, there is excitement and celebration, and then they are handed a Bible and said, “here you go, figure it out” – church, the great commission includes the statement, baptize and “teach them to obey all that I have commanded you” Jude opens his letter saying that he was appealing to the church “to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints” – how was it delivered, by the Christians who had gone before them – shame on us if we are zealous for people to come to Jesus and not equally zealous to come alongside them and help them understand and grow and mature in Christ. This is the responsibility you and I have been given by the Lord Jesus himself, let’s be found faithful doing the work He entrusted to us.

Now, even with the exhortation to maturity and the warning about apostasy the author does not leave his readers hanging there, but gives them a final word of assurance lest they are overwhelmed with fear or despair...

Third – Assurance – Our Certain Salvation

Vs. 9 begins with a declaration of hope and expectation, “*9 Though we speak in this way, yet in your case, beloved, we feel sure of better things—things that belong to salvation.*”¹³ He has spoken directly about their lack of maturity and warned about those who turn away, but behind these hard truths he gives a sweet reassurance. The “better things” is a contrasting statement to what he has just laid out about their lack of maturity and the sad state of those who never truly believed was not what he believed would be true of these believers, he assured them that there were better things ahead for them.

Remember these were struggling believers, and he comforts them with this word of assurance, and it is a better word than they may expect or even desire. It is easy in our pain to think the best possible assurance we could receive would be an end to our pain, but what if our struggle is the very thing that God is using to build up and sustain our faith. He assures them of better things, not necessarily escape from their adversity, but something even better, lasting blessings of salvation. What if your pain ended, yet you lost Jesus, you lose heaven, what real gain have you received. The author reminds his hearers that the good work that Jesus began in them, even if it goes through rough times will not be meaningless. They will experience the better things of salvation as they cling to Jesus in faith.

¹³ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Heb 6:9.

Then He roots his confidence not in his hearers ability to provide these better things that belong to salvation, no he roots their hope in the character of God. *“¹⁰ For God is not unjust so as to overlook your work and the love that you have shown for his name in serving the saints, as you still do.”*¹⁴ Do you see his argument here, his confidence for these weary saints is the nature of God’s justice. God will not turn a blind eye to the love and the labor of these Christians, and don’t miss the way the sentence flows. Notice that these Christians work for God’s name and demonstrate love for His name by means of serving the saints. Christian, if you serve others little your actions say much about the size of your love for God. Notice that the measuring tool of their love for God and work for God was their service to one another. If you say you love God and neglect serving the church, you are being dishonest. Its clear that these Christians were not being guilting into serving each other, they did it out of a natural overflow of Jesus’ love that had been poured out on them. It could be that you struggle to serve the church because you have taken your eyes off Jesus for so long you are no longer stunned by the glorious salvation you have through His life death and resurrection. Because what we see in Scripture is that when Christians are captivated by the wonder of God’s glory in the face of Jesus they do not need to be motivated or guilting into serving other Christians, no that begins to happen because of their love of God.

I wonder, is your love for God low? Perhaps as David showed us last week, you have grown dull of hearing and you need to pray and ask God’s help to renew your heart and mind with the unsearchable riches of Christ.

Then our text closes with a final closing exhortation for these beleivers to continue to persevere in the faith, *“to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end,”*¹⁵ These Christians would experience greater assurance as they served with greater earnestness. So for us, if we desire greater assurance from God, we must render earnest service to Him in worship and serving the saints we are connected to in a local church. As we serve our confidence in the promises of God deepens as he transforms us into the image of Jesus.

Brother/Sister in Christ it is not God’s desire for you to live immature and doubtful as a Christian, no God’s desire for us is that we would mature in our faith and have ever increasing assurance of God’s glory until that day when he brings us home to see Him face to face, until he does that let us be found faithful in serving each other out of love for God who loved us first in Jesus. Let’s pray

¹⁴ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Heb 6:10.

¹⁵ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Heb 6:11.