

The Book of Hebrews

מֵאֲנִישׁ מִנֶּגֶד דָּא מִן תְּאֵקְלָא
צִמְאָלִיל נִתְּאֵתְצֵרַח דְּרִתְסֵנִי סָק
אֵת פִּקְלָא תְּסֵנִי סֶרְבָּאֵל
רֵךְ תְּאֵ סֶךְ תְּאֵקְסֵנִי דְּמִמֵּצ
תְּאֵתְפִּלֵּשׁ נִתְּרִדְנֵהֶרְפֵּר נִרְלֵד
תְּאֵגֵשׁ רֵלֵד מִלְּלֵצ סֵם תְּלֵשׁ



Outline of Hebrews

“Jesus is Better”

- I. Jesus Is Better Than the OT Prophets (1:1-4)
- II. Jesus Is Better Than the Angels (1:5-2:18)
- III. Jesus Is Better Than Moses (3:1-4:13)
- IV. Jesus' Priesthood Is Better Than the Levitical Priesthood (4:14-10:18)**

Outline of Hebrews

IV. Jesus' Priesthood Is Better Than the Levitical Priesthood (4:14-10:18)

- A. Jesus Is a Compassionate But Sinless High Priest (4:14–16)
- B. Jesus Was Appointed By God to Be Our High Priest (5:1-10)
- C. Jesus Is Better – Don't Apostatize (5:11-6:20)
- D. Jesus Is a Priest After the Order of Melchizedek (7:1-28)
- E. The New Covenant Mediated By Jesus Is Better than the Old Covenant (8:1-13)
- F. Jesus' Sacrifice Is Better Than the Temple Sacrifices (9:1-10:18)

Outline of Hebrews

C. Jesus Is Better – Don't Apostatize (5:11-6:20)

1. Warning (5:11-6:8)

- a. The Present Problem With His Readers (5:11–6:3)
- b. The Danger of Falling Away from the Christian Faith (6:4–8)

2. Assurance (6:9-6:20)

- a. The Author's Confidence In and Desire for His Readers (6:9–12)
- b. God's Promise Is Our Basis of for Hope (6:13–20)

The Danger of Falling Away from the Christian Faith (6:4–8)

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.*

The Author's Confidence In and Desire for His Readers (6:9–12)

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.

The Danger of Falling Away from the Christian Faith (6:4–8)

- Last week I gave a high level overview of what I think this text is saying.
- I then went on to show how the category of people the author is describing in this text ties into the wider theological framework of rest of this book, as well as the rest of scripture.
- My conclusion was that the people described here are those who, though deeply involved in the Christian community at one point, did ***not*** have a ***genuine saving faith***, as evidenced by the fact that they fell away (apostatized), which a genuine believer, by definition, cannot do (e.g., see Heb 3:6, 14)

The Danger of Falling Away from the Christian Faith (6:4–8)

- This week, as I promised last week, I plan to go through this text verse by verse.
- When we get to the portion of the text where the author lists five blessings received by a hypothetical group of people that he describes as eventually “*falling away*”, one of the things I hope to show is that the blessings experienced by this group do ***not require*** us to believe that the people in this group were genuine Christians before they apostatized.
- Furthermore, I hope to show that even in the ***immediate context*** of this passage, and ***especially*** in the next section, there are clear indications that the author does not intend for his readers to think that the hypothetical group of people he is describing had genuine salvation.

⁴ ***For** it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, [etc.]... ^{6a} and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance...*

- The “*for*” explains why it is **imperative** that the readers progress onto maturity and **not** remain **spiritual infants**, as he described them in the previous section – they are in danger of **apostasy**.
- The readers were being persecuted and were growing weary and exhausted in the trials of the Christian life. The author sees they are at a crossroads.
- He is concerned that if they turn away from Christ, there will be no future repentance for them.

⁴ *For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, [etc.]... ^{6a} and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance...*

- In the Greek, the author places the term translated “*impossible*” at the **beginning** of the sentence for **emphasis**.
- He uses this word in **three** other places in this letter, proclaiming, for example, that it is:
 - *impossible for God to lie* (6:18),
 - *impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins* (10:4)
 - *impossible to please [God]* apart from faith (11:6).
- The term clearly means that **something cannot** happen.
- That “something”, in this case, is for people who experience the **five** spiritual benefits that he lists here and then “*fall away*” (apostatize) to be restored again to “*repentance*”

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*

- The **first** of the five spiritual benefits that the authors lists is that they have “*once been enlightened*”.
- The word “*enlightened*” translates a Greek word which refers to learning in general, but not **necessarily** learning that results in salvation – for example, it is used in:
 - 1 Cor 4:5 of the “enlightening” that comes at the final judgment when the Lord “*will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness*”.
 - Eph 1:18ff where Paul prays that God will “*enlighten*” the eyes of the Ephesian believers’ hearts to understand all that God has done for them as believers.
- In the case of the group described here, the enlightening probably indicates that they came to understand the truths of the gospel, but it does not **have** to be taken to mean that they responded to those truths with a genuine saving faith.

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 Spirit⁵ and have **tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come...***

- The text further says that these people “*have **tasted the heavenly gift***” and that they “*have **tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come***” (Heb. 6:4–5).
- The word “*tasted*” is probably used here in a figurative sense meaning “*come to know or experience something.*”
- It does not **necessarily** mean that they had genuine saving faith but may simply means that they experienced of the working of the Spirit in their lives – though the author does not specify in exactly what way they experienced it.

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 Spirit⁵ and have **tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come...***

- In the Gospel of Matthew, we see an example of what this might look like.
- There, Jesus describes a group of people who experienced what **appears** to be manifestations of the Spirit in their life, but Jesus makes it clear that in spite of these spiritual experiences, they were **not**, nor had they **ever been**, genuine believers:
 - *Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'* (Mat 7:21-23)

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**...*

- The author further describes these people as having “**shared in the Holy Spirit**”.
- The word translated here as “**shared**” (*metochos*) means “one who participates with, shares with, or accompanies in some activity.”
- The word translated “**shared**” here has a fairly wide range of meanings – from fairly weak to fairly strong association or participation, depending on the context.
- For example, in Hebrews 3:14, to “**share in**” Christ means to have a **very close** participation with him in a saving relationship.

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...***

- On the other hand, the word translated “*shared*” here can also be used in a much **looser** sense, simply to refer to associates or companions.
- For example, we read in the Gospel of Luke that when the disciples took in a great catch of fish so that their nets were breaking, “*They signaled to their **partners** in the other boat to come and help them*” (Luke 5:7).
- The word translated “*partners*” in Luke 5:7 is the same Greek word translated “*shared*” in Heb 6:4.
- In this case it refers to those who were **companions or partners** with Peter and the other disciples in their fishing work.

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...***

- Peter and the disciples could be associated with them and even to some degree influenced by them without having a thoroughgoing change of life caused by that association.
- This was apparently what had happened to these people spoken of in Hebrews 6, who had been associated with the church and as such **associated** with the work of the Holy Spirit, and had no doubt been influenced by him in some ways in their lives , but it doesn't necessary **have** to imply that they were **regenerated** by the Holy Spirit.

⁴ *For it is impossible...* ^{6b} ***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.***

- At this point we may ask what kind of person is described by all of these terms.
- These are no doubt people who have been affiliated closely with the fellowship of the church.
- They have understood the gospel (they have been enlightened).
- They have come to appreciate the attractiveness of the Christian life and the change that comes about in people's lives because of becoming a Christian, and they have probably had answers to prayer in their own lives and felt the power of the Holy Spirit at work, perhaps even using some spiritual gifts in the manner of the unbelievers described by Jesus in Matthew 7:22.

⁴ *For it is impossible...* ^{6b} *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.***

- They have been exposed to the true preaching of the Word and have appreciated much of its teachings (they have “tasted” the goodness of the Word of God).
- But then in spite of all this, if they “fall away” and are “*crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt*”, then they are **willfully** rejecting all of these blessings and turning decidedly against them.
- Now the author tells us that if these people willfully turn away from all of these temporary blessings, then it will be impossible to restore them again to any kind of repentance or sorrow for sin. Their hearts will be hardened and their consciences calloused.

4 *For it is impossible...* ^{6b} *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.*

- What more could be done to bring them to salvation?
 - If we tell them Scripture is true, they will say that they know it but they have decided to reject it.
 - If we tell them God answers prayer and changes lives, they will respond that they know that as well, but they want nothing of it.
 - If we tell them that the Holy Spirit is powerful to work in people's lives and that the gift of eternal life is good beyond description, they will say that they understand that but want nothing of it.
- Their repeated familiarity with the things of God and their experience of many influences of the Holy Spirit has simply served to **harden** them against conversion.

*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.*

- Next the author uses an agricultural metaphor where those who receive final judgment are compared to land that bears no vegetation or useful fruit but rather bears thorns and thistles.
- When we recall the other metaphors in Scripture where good fruit is a sign of true spiritual life and fruitlessness is a sign of false believers (for example, Matt. 3:8–10; 7:15–20; 12:33–35), we already have an indication that the author is speaking of people whose most trustworthy evidence of their spiritual condition (the fruit they bear) is **negative** (“thorns and thistles,” v. 8), which would indicate that the author is talking about people who are not genuinely Christians.

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.

- This metaphor bluntly indicates that those who fall away are like the crop that is brought forth on land that has no worthwhile life growing on it, even though rain “*often falls on it*” (such land is like a person that receives repeated blessings from God but bears no good fruit).
- We should notice here that people who commit apostasy are not compared to a field that **once** bore good fruit and now does **not**, but that they are like land that **never** bore good fruit, but only thorns and thistles.
- The land may **look** good before the crops start to come up, but the lack of fruit shows that it is bad.

9 *Though we speak in this way, yet in your case, beloved, we feel sure of **better things**--things that belong to salvation.*

- Though the author has been speaking harshly about the possibility of falling away, he now reassures them by telling them that hopes for “*better things*” in their case.
- The question is, “*better things*” than what?
- The plural “*better things*” forms an appropriate contrast to the good things that have been mentioned in verses 4–6: the author is truly hopeful that his readers have experienced “*better things*” than simply the partial and temporary influences of the Holy Spirit and the church talked about in verses 4–6.

9 *Though we speak in this way, yet in your case, beloved, we feel sure of **better things--things that belong to salvation.***

- In fact, the author talks about these things by saying (literally) that they are “*better things--things that belong to salvation.*”
- These are not only the temporary blessings talked about in verses 4–6, but these are **better things**, things having not only temporary influence, but “*things that belong to salvation.*”
- By saying this, the author shows that salvation is something that was **not** part of the things mentioned in verses 4–6 above and therefore it becomes clear at this point that the people he describes in verses 4–6 were **not** saved.

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...**

- So, what exactly are these “*better things*”?
- In addition to “*salvation*” mentioned in verse 9, they are things that give **real** evidence of salvation:
 - Genuine fruit in their lives in which they show their “*love*” for the Lord by “*serving*” fellow believers (verse 10)
 - “*Full assurance of hope*” that perseveres “*until the end*” (verse 11)

¹² *so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.*

- In verse 12, the author tells his readers he does not want them to become “*sluggish*”, but rather to become “*imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.*”
- We see the author’s intense desire for his readers to emulate great people of faith not only in this exhortation, but also in his use of positive examples throughout this letter, such as:
 - The Lord Jesus, as we saw in Heb 3:1-2: “*consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession, who was faithful to him who appointed him...*”
 - Abraham in the verses that follow (Heb 6:13–15)
 - The great host of the faithful that he lists in the “hall of faith” in Hebrews 11.

Class Discussion Time



*Class Discussion Time

- One of the lessons that come out of the description of the unsaved people in Heb 6:4-8 is that participation in the Christian community does not necessarily equal genuine salvation. How might an understanding of this principle affect the way that you interact with other church members?
- On one hand, we must accept one another's profession of faith at face value, unless given reason to think otherwise. But on the other hand, when we compare a passage like Heb 6:4-8 with what Jesus says in Mat 7:21-23 about those who on the Day of Judgment are shocked to find that they don't have the relationship with Jesus that they thought they had, we realize that all of us have the potential to be self-deceived about our true spiritual state.
- When seeking to have spiritual assurance about our own salvation or the salvation of others, what should we be looking for? What, according to our text, constitutes evidence of a ***genuine*** faith – whether it be our own faith or the faith of others?