

Rejecting Truth; Embracing Error

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[0 : 00] We come this evening to one of the most interesting and least understood passages of Scripture in the Word of God.

! It is often the most misquoted portions of Scripture.! And actually these errors have caused great pain to people around the world.

Some of those misquoting Hebrews 6 chapters 1 to 8 are referred to as the Arminian. And I know a lot of Arminian and they are sweet guys and a lot of them are saved and living for the Lord.

Quite frankly that particular branch of Christianity probably makes up the majority of the New Testament church today. But central to their belief system is that truly saved men and women can turn away and fall from grace and lose their salvation.

So they hold to conditional salvation and they do so primarily based upon what they read in Hebrews chapter 6 verses 1 to 8.

[1 : 27] That's the very passage we're looking at tonight. Some of the denominations, not all of them, that hold to this belief include United Methodists, Wesleyans, some Pentecostals, some Assembly of God, a Church of God, four square churches, some Baptist denominations including Free Will Baptist, among other Baptist denominations, and of course our good friends in the Roman Catholic Church, and of course our good friends in the Roman Catholic Church hold to conditional salvation.

These verses we will focus on today are as follows. I'll just read the whole section there. Hebrews chapter 6, starting in verse 1.

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, and of instruction about washings, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment.

And this we will do if God permits, 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, and have tasted the goodness of the Word of God, and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away to restore them again to repentance, since they are also crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm, and holding them up to contempt.

For land that has drunk the rain that often falls on it produces a crop useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated receives a blessing from God.

[3 : 33] For if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed, and its end is to be burned. As I said, now the Hebrew study we come to today is undoubtedly one of the most misunderstood, misquoted, and misapplied passages in all of Scripture.

We are looking at the general theme of the tragedy of rejecting God's revelation. People can attend church in their entire lives, sit under sound teaching, even exercise faith to an extent, and yet never make any commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ.

And we have seen such people in this church in the last 43 years, or I have. Some of you have been here longer. They are here.

They appear to have a zeal for the things of God. And then they're gone. Somehow, in fact, some, in fact, do not leave, but hang around God's people as if Christ will somehow rub off on them.

Now, while the church has experienced deep divisions over our focal passage today, I'm absolutely convinced that the Spirit of God is addressing the people I just referred to.

[5 : 08] We know from the context that the audience is principally Jewish people who've heard the gospel but have never come to saving faith in Christ.

But the warning also goes well beyond the Jews to the Jews of the 1st or 2nd century and embraces Jews and Gentiles everywhere today. The passage stands as the most severe warning, I

think, in all the Bible for those who hear the gospel, make some profession of faith, hang out with God's people, yet ultimately turn away when it comes to full acceptance of that message.

This is nothing less than an example of a person following their own evil heart instead of the Savior and the Redeemer of the universe. The people addressed here have adopted a form of Christianity. Many in the modern church would be quite comfortable in declaring these people to be brothers in Christ. But merely professing the form is not enough.

They have missed the reality that comes with saving faith. I think some of these people are addressed in the Sermon on the Mount there at the end where Jesus says, Not everyone who says to Me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven.

[6 : 45] But he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. Many will say to Me on that day, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name and in Your name cast out demons and in Your name perform many miracles?

And then I will declare to them, I never knew You. Depart from Me, You who practice lawlessness. You'll note in there they had a whole lot of look at what I've done.

So let's examine our passage today with heavy hearts for those who have in the past or will reject truth and embrace error.

Again, it started out, Therefore, leaving the elementary teaching about Christ, let us press on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, of instruction about washings and laying on of hands and the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment.

The Jews hearing that in this Hebrew church would have understood those comments. And I think there are two keys contained in these two verses. The first is the idea of leaving and that is followed by the idea to press on to maturity.

[8 : 08] This is in fact the beginning journey on getting saved and becoming spiritually mature. And through our study so far, we've seen the Spirit of God calling these unsaved Jews out of the Old Covenant and into the New Covenant.

And the clock is running and the time for them to leave Judaism and embrace Christianity is now or in their day now for them.

And the word leaving is interesting in the Greek language. It means to forsake or to put off. It refers to a separation from a previous location or condition.

In fact, one translation uses the phrase let us abandon to describe this action. Now the elementary teaching about Christ are those found in the Old Testament.

They're being called to press on to the completed teaching on Christ found in the New Testament. They are called to abandon the Old and seek the New because it is complete in all ways.

[9 : 28] When this Hebrew church was meeting, Jesus had gone to the cross. He had lived, died, resurrected, ascended, atoned. Now the foundation of the Old Covenant had six features that's listed in these first two verses.

And the features are repentance from dead works, faith toward God, instruction about washings, laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment.

And the first of these six features is repentance from dead works. I think we all know repentance means turning away.

You're going a direction, you repent, you turn, and you go the other way. In context, it means to turn away from evil deeds because those only bring death.

And the Old Testament was quite accurate to teach men to turn away from their sins. But once they turn away, what do they turn to? It's not just good enough to turn away, you've got to turn to something.

[10 : 46] When John the Baptist came, and he was literally the last of the Old Testament prophets, although we find him in the New Testament, his message was one of turning from sin and turning to the Messiah.

In fact, John taught that the Messiah was already on earth and would soon make himself known. We have always had the doctrine of repentance, but in Christ, the doctrine became mature and complete.

The Apostle Paul's ministry was a call to biblical repentance. The Old Testament taught one to turn from evil deeds to God.

But in the New Covenant, we learn that no one can come to God except through the Lord Jesus Christ. therefore, genuine repentance is a turning from evil deeds and a turning to Christ in order to gain entrance into the presence of the Father.

Under the New Covenant, no one can repent without faith in Christ Jesus. And remember, faith is not of yourselves, it's a gift of God. Sincerity is not the test.

[12:15] There's a whole lot of people that are sincere and they just really are, they're just sincerely lost. Genuine faith is the test. So the writer of Hebrews tells this Jewish congregation that they must come to Christ by faith in order to turn from their evil deeds in genuine repentance.

You don't have genuine repentance before you have faith. And specifically, it says, it's faith toward God. We have examined this feature rather deeply in our study.

It is impossible to have faith in God if that faith is not expressed in Jesus Christ. There's no acceptable repentance or acceptable faith except that expressed in Jesus.

There's simply no way to the Father except through the Son. I've heard people deny that. They say, oh no, I believe in God, I just don't believe in Jesus. What's the big deal?

Well, the big deal is you're lost and going to hell. It is a big deal. Dr. Luke said in Acts 4.12 there is salvation in no one else for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved.

[13:47] And then he mentions this instruction about washing. And that could be confusing for non-Jews and that pretty much takes in all of us here. Every Jewish home had a basin by the entrance.

I spent this weekend with my three youngest granddaughters in Branson and they had all these questions for me about people that take their shoes off before they come in your home.

And I have had VOM visitors from overseas stay with us but their shoes are neatly lined up. They put them in the house because our dog liked to chew on them outside so they'd be in the house but neatly lined up.

I had to explain all that to them and many times I've been at homes where I've removed my shoes and socks. That was a little embarrassing. So every Jewish home had a basin of water at the entrance.

This was for family members and visitors to use for ceremonial cleansing. They were being cleaned. It is this washing that the writer of Hebrews is telling the unconverted members you can abandon that now.

[15:01] Even the Old Testament predicted that these would pass away from the scene. Ezekiel 36 And I will sprinkle clean water on you and you will be clean.

I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from your idols. Now the old washings were physical and they came in many ways.

They were also symbolic and they were temporary. The new washing was not physical so much as it was spiritual and real and permanent.

In Titus 3.5 Paul spoke of the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit. Jesus told Nicodemus that to enter the kingdom of heaven one must be regenerated by water and the Spirit. In other words one must be born again. Born from above. Regenerated. Redeemed. And then the writer of Hebrews talks about laying on of hands.

[16:12] Anyone ever done that? Y'all have. Right here. The laying on of hands has nothing to do with the apostolic practice of laying on their hands on people for healing.

In the Old Testament the Jews brought a sacrifice. It could be a lamb, a goat, a turtle dove if they were poor. They were required to lay their hands on the animal that was about to be sacrificed. In so doing they were symbolically identifying with the animal as if they were being sacrificed for their own sins.

They were transferring their sins to this lamb or to this goat. And so it was very symbolic. Now we too must be identified but we're identified with Christ.

But it does not come from us laying hands on Jesus. Our identification comes from the Spirit baptizing us into union with Christ through faith.

[17:29] And that's not water baptism that I'm talking about. We lay hold of Christ by putting our faith in Him and not our hands on Him. And then it speaks of the resurrection of the dead.

There was not deep instruction in the Old Testament on the doctrine of the resurrection. Job spoke of a bodily resurrection but for the most part the Old Testament was silent on the subject.

Now in the New Testament we learn that the resurrection of the dead is a central theme and doctrine. Jesus Himself declared that He was the resurrection and the life. The Jews must embrace the Old Testament doctrine of the resurrection and leave the limited Old Testament teachings behind. And then He speaks of eternal judgment. There is actually very little in the Old Testament on the teaching of final judgment. People did expect the punishment of the wicked. They expected rewards would come to the righteous. [18:53] I haven't attained that level quite yet. But beyond that there was very little to base the doctrine on. When we get to the New Testament we learn that there is much truth on the doctrine of eternal judgment.

In fact there is probably more taught on the subject of eternal judgment than most people want to hear. The New Testament is very clear on the fate of true believers.

True believers. Romans 8:1 I know you can quote it. There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Chew on that. Let that be the last thing you visualize when all the lights are out and it seems like the whole world is crashing in on you.

the Lord reserves no condemnation for those who are in Him. What happened to it? It was nailed to a cross.

[20:05] We will stand before the Lord and render an account. We will receive rewards. We will receive loss of rewards. But we will not come into judgment and condemnation.

Again Christ took those and nailed them to the cross. Now we know that unbelievers will stand before the Lord in the great white throne judgment.

There they will be shown from the book of works that their feeble works on earth in no way measured up to the great sacrifice of Christ for sin.

We know that Jesus is the judge and all judgment is committed unto him. The point that the writer is making in Hebrews is that these unconverted Jews hanging around the church must completely let go of the immature elementary shadows and symbols of the Old Testament which they grew up with.

And they've been around 1600 years through Judaism because now the reality is found in the New Testament. the Holy Spirit is calling them to leave dead works and embrace the living Christ.

[21:39] It is there they will find the new life with God. Without Christ they will never find this new life.

And these six doctrines were the basics of Judaism. and now they're being told lay those aside. They're no good anymore. They were to press on to better things in Christ.

The Old Testament is truth but it is incomplete truth. The writer is telling these Jews that Judaism has been nullified now only Christ will do.

The old way must be abandoned for the new. And then in Hebrews 6 we read and this we do if God permits. Well what does that mean?

Well I'm not sure. This is a very difficult passage and interpreting it is hard. One school of thought believes the writer is saying that he will go on and teach what must be taught if God permits him to do so.

[22:52] others believe the writer is saying you will go on to maturity if God permits you to do so. But I like what one writer said.

He said I think there's a strong likelihood that both interpretations are correct. Maybe both of them are correct. These are ideas that are consistent with the rest of the teaching of the book of Hebrews.

God is sovereign and he uses both teachers and students, instructors and seekers to bring forth his truth. Well are there any advantages to being a Jew?

Yeah. Next we turn to five great advantages of being a Jew. In spite of the fact that the individuals spoken of were not yet saved, they were in Judaism, they were probably being ostracized at that very moment because they were visiting a Christian church.

I remember what Sukumar, the chief pastor from India told us that if he goes into the home of a Hindu, he's a committed Christian, they have to get a Hindu priest to come and cleanse the house.

[24:04] Can you imagine? And also, I'm throwing this in for free. I also heard, I didn't know this, you know they have a caste system in India. And the really good preachers are about right here in the culture, but they would never be caught dead in a pastor's church in a lower caste.

These are Christian guys supposedly, but they wouldn't be caught dead at that conference, for instance. These were all poor, very poor individuals. Poor, very poor. But we're going to turn to these great advantages of being Jewish in spite of the fact these guys were not yet saved. And they have five specific advantages that are worth noting, and these advantages are identified in verses 4 and 5 of our text. 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, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, well we start out and we see they've been enlightened.

Well that's kind of good news. And the first thing that should become obvious as we examine these words, in totality, guys these are not salvation terms.

If these were salvation terms they'd be all over Romans, they'd be all over Galatians, they'd be all over Peter's writing and John's writings and John's gospel and the epistles. Someone walks into our church, we don't say have you been enlightened?

[25 : 52] Have you tasted of the heavenly gift? Anytime we read in the New Testament about salvation, we deal with other words, don't we?

Justification, sanctification, the new birth, being born again, redemption, regeneration. In the New Testament church we are or should be quite familiar with these terms.

If you're not, come over here to this big stack and dig out our lesson on salvation God's way. We went almost three years on that. And we covered those in detail.

But in today's passage we are exposed to a phrase concerning those who have once been enlightened. Now in fairness I need to say a lot of guys in those churches I mentioned earlier, they think, oh they're saved, they've been enlightened.

I just, I don't think that's being taught. Nowhere else in the Bible is such a term used to describe the salvation experience. All of the terms used in this portion of Hebrews are not found for the most part in other scriptures.

[27 : 03] It's very important. The enlightened referred to here in the original language refers to an intellectual understanding of biblical truth up here.

And clearly there are some who arrive at a mental understanding of portions of the gospel but without having a true, having made a true and lasting commitment to Christ.

To put it simply, they're not born from above. At least not yet. Enlightenment then is a mental awareness that is of no lasting spiritual value.

As Jesus walked on this earth, many were enlightened by what He said and what He did. You could probably include Judas in that, who was never saved.

And there was no lasting eternal benefit to Him. Let me remind you that many who partook of the Jesus made food out of nothing, there were 5,000 and another time 7,000.

[28 : 18] A lot in that same crowd were the ones that went to Jerusalem and were screaming crucify Him, crucify Him. Same crowd. These guys hung around Jesus.

They followed Jesus. They were fed. They derived great physical benefit from following Jesus around. They received a lot of information from His sermons and gained knowledge and they ate some really good meals.

but few from those crowds will join us in heaven because of the blood of the Lamb of God had not regenerated them. And the same thing happened to the Jews being addressed in our passage today.

They were enlightened but not saved. They no longer went in this condition. I'm sorry. The longer they went in this condition, the more likely they would never come to a saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

They were happy the way they were. Peter spoke of this condition in words that we must all deal with. This is in 2 Peter 2 20-21 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.

[29 : 55] For it would be better for them to not have known the way of righteousness than having known it to turn away from the holy commandment handed on to them.

Light given can become the means of judgment once that light is rejected. We had a ministry here you old guys in here.

You remember that citywide thing we were part of? And Dr. McBride, our pastor, he participated with six or seven pastors. And he had a guy in there who was telling him when he couldn't make the biddies what went on, Dr.

Colaw. But these guys made fun of Mike if he wasn't there. And one of them said, you've got to remember we have more light than the Baptists do. And Mike jumped on about that.

He said, well, we were referring to the turtle security clearly teaches in Hebrews that you can lose your salvation. And he said, have you ever had anybody in your congregation lose theirs?

[31 : 00] Oh, yeah. Dozens of people. Do they still attend church? Yeah. Why? What do you mean why? Well, it says they can't gain it back again. If you're going to use that passage, and they look at that and they say, well, let's move on.

I mean, you know, that's why it's not what it says. Again, light given can become the means of judgment if that light is rejected.

And then we come to this interesting passage, they had tasted of the heavenly gift. people spoken of here had seen light.

They had been exposed to the heavenly gift. Just what is the heavenly gift spoken of here? Now, sometimes the Holy Spirit is referred to as the heavenly gift.

It is doubtful that the third person of the Trinity is being referred to here. The Holy Spirit is actually referred to in the next sentence. There is no doubt that the great heavenly gift in the universe is salvation from the Lord.

[32 : 16] Without it, we're forever lost. There can be no greater gift. This has to be the heavenly gift. They've tasted of salvation.

They've tasted. Nowhere does this passage suggest the gift was received. True believers feast upon the gift of rebirth.

That's our life. Here we have a mere tasting of the things of God, no evidence of acceptance of the salvation being offered by Christ.

There apparently was only some level of examination of the gift being offered, but without a changed life. for someone to be saved, Christ must be consumed.

And that's a far cry from merely tasting. And then it says they had partaken of the Holy Spirit. Very important to hear this.

[33 : 22] Partakers have to do with association, not necessarily possession. The Hebrews that are being referred to as lost in this congregation had not at least to this point ever possessed the Holy Spirit.

Their exposure to the Holy Spirit was based upon the fact that they were around when He was around. If we have unsaved people come into this church on a Sunday morning, they will have partaken in the presence of the Holy Spirit.

And we're not into silly stuff. We're not making trees walk and all that. We're preaching the Word. We're preaching the Word, which is our pastor Mike's highest calling.

There was a sharing of certain things through the process of being a partaker. We have these unbelievers come to church, they share in fellowship, in Bible study, they may share a meal.

But partakers are not the same as people that have been saved. A whole different level. The whole theme here in Hebrews is one of association.

[34 : 44] The Bible never speaks of true believers being associated with the Holy Spirit. Rather, the Bible speaks of the Holy Spirit indwelling believers, taking up residence in believers.

But in our focal passage, these people are seen as associated with the Holy Spirit through the church that they're sitting through every Sunday listening to the message.

That's a far cry from an indwelling of the Spirit of God. They did not as yet and some would never possess the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit did not possess them.

He just didn't. And it says they had tasted the Word of God. We have a lot of tasting here. Here we have a tasting of the Word of God, a mere sampling of the things that God had to say.

This was not a consuming of His Word. These people had been exposed to some of the teachings of the church. church. They may have become fairly regular attendees of the church.

[36 : 02] They may have been attentive to the message. They may have gained some Bible knowledge. Exposure to truth will do that for most people. In all likelihood, they enjoyed hearing truth and fellowshiping in the church, but they had not consumed the words of Christ.

They had not been changed by what they heard. They tasted, but they had not yet eaten. I think of Herod.

He enjoyed listening to John the Baptist, but he never made any decision to follow after Christ. He sampled from the table of the Lord, but walked away without dining on the truths of God.

Now, we should not conclude there's anything wrong with tasting. In fact, tasting is the first step in eating. David told us to taste and see that the Lord is good.

People need to taste the gospel on their journey to receiving salvation. The problem is when people stop at mere tasting and they don't go on to consume truth as only a spirit-filled, spirit-led person can do.

[37 : 23] If you merely taste, the things you are sampling will eventually become tasteless or boring and people will become indifferent to it. Paul instructs people, go test yourselves.

You need to know that you've been truly born again. Make sure you're in the body of Christ. Well, one more tasting. They tasted the power of the age to come.

Now, we live in the church age. The age is rapidly approaching to life in the kingdom age, the millennial reign of Christ.

During that time, there will be great miracles. When Hebrews was written, many had seen great apostolic powers exercised. These are pictures of what will happen in the kingdom age.

Those who are exposed to great miracles and reject them are guiltier than if they'd never been exposed to them at all. Those who benefited from Christ's miracles but never believed in Him have a higher accountability at the judgment.

[38 : 31] Imagine for a moment the Pharisees who saw Lazarus raised from the dead. They went back and reported to the religious leadership what they had seen and the leadership, rather than focusing on the fact that a dead man had come back to life, plotted the death of Christ.

That just is amazing. Why would they do that? Because they were afraid that the Romans would come and if the Jews declared Him to be the Messiah and King, the Romans would take away their kingdom and these guys are going to lose their positions in the hierarchy of Israel.

Many Jews in this congregation had been blessed by exposure to the things of God. They had tasted His heavenly gift.

They had tasted His word and His power. Still, they did not believe and had not yet received Christ. Amazing. And then the Holy Spirit issues a warning, starting in verse 4.

For in the case of those who once been enlightened and tasted the heavenly gift, have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the power of the age to come, have fallen away, and this is what I commented on earlier, 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.

[40 : 06] God is still speaking to unsaved people that have heard and not committed. This warning has to do with falling away. I think at a deeper level, it is people are saying, you know, I've heard all this, I've been sitting in this Hebrew church, I just am not there, I'm going to go and look for another way to heaven.

And when a person does that and turns his back on Christ and His sacrifice and goes out and says, I'll hunt over the entire world until I find something better, they've condemned themselves.

I think that's basically the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. Because the Holy Spirit came and told us this great truth about Christ. They fall away.

And this is a warning against falling away. Once they have been exposed to truth at this deep level, and eventually they grow cold and seek salvation in something or someone else.

Backing away from Christ is always fatal. And I'll tell you, I'm getting old and crotchety in my old age. These guys say, well, I'm not worried. When I was nine years old, I came forward and I repeated a prayer.

[41 : 29] Okay. Okay. So? What more? Give me more. Well, I don't have any more. This is the very passage that many believe teaches the method of losing one's salvation.

The problem with that is this passage says that salvation could never be regained. And people really don't want to use this verse to teach conditional salvation.

But there's good news here. Christians aren't being addressed. What can be lost is the opportunity to receive salvation, not salvation itself.

I had a good friend of mine and called me just before he died of sickle cell. Black fellow, great athlete, was looked at by the NBA and the NFL at the same time.

But he came down, had a stroke, he lost a leg, he had sickle cell, and I called him up because he was going to die, and he said, I found a church that loves me.

[42 : 33] It's called Unity. And that's cultic. He said, I've joined Unity Church. It's almost sad to tell you why he joined Unity Church.

Being a black guy, he was in the richest church in the Dallas area, Highland Park Baptist. They asked him to go to a black church. They didn't need him there. And that's when he joined Unity Church.

It still pains me. true believers need never fear losing their legitimate salvation.

The Bible is absolutely clear on that point. Passages in the Old and New Testaments verify this great and comforting truth. We are saved by the power of Christ, kept by the same power.

God's grace is sufficient to keep us saved until we enter glory. Again, the warning is to unbelievers who are in danger of passing up any opportunity to be saved by rejecting the only grounds of being saved.

[43 : 41] That's faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Alistair Begg puts it this way, there is no cure for those who reject the only cure. anyone who walks away from Christ as the only way to the Father and looks for another venue is damned for eternity.

It is a form of putting God to an open shame and crucifying again the Son of God. Again, the people in focus here are those who stay on the sidelines, make no commitment to Christ.

They are filled with self-deception, thinking themselves to be right with God, when all along they are doomed to an eternity in hell. No decision is a decision against Christ.

Let me finish with verses 6 and 7, kind of confusing. 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.

But if it yields thorns and thistles, it is worthless and close to being cursed and ends up being burned. Well, we'll let John MacArthur close our lesson tonight because he gives a pretty good explanation of this passage.

[45 : 02] John says this, do you see the illustration? All those who hear the gospel are like the earth. The rain falls, the gospel message is heard, the gospel seed is planted, and there is nourishment and there is growth.

Some of the growth is beautiful and good and productive. It is that which is planted, rooted, and nourished in God. But some of the growth is false, spurious, and unproductive.

It has come from the same seed, it has been nourished by the same ground and the same water, but it has become thorny, destructive, and worthless. It has rejected the life offered and became good only for burning.

It's like the sower, the parable of the sower, which is a great, great passage.