

The Danger of Falling Away

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[0:00] I'm going to be in the book of Hebrews, chapter 6, if you want to turn there.

And this really isn't rocket science. It's written to Hebrews. It's the book to the Hebrews. A Hebrew church, probably outside of Israel.

Early days. We know that the individual was steeped in Old Testament knowledge. A beautiful theologian. And by the way, Paul was all those things.

Brilliant theologian. And understood Leviticus and the old books that we read in bed and get a nosebleed because the book falls. But they're actually wonderful books. But it was written to Hebrews.

And I taught this twice. It took me three years the first time. I narrowed it down the second time.

Two years and eight months. The first time I taught at a member, and Mike, you would know him, you and Marsha, but I won't call any names.

[1:08] He's long gone. He came up and he said, Why do you take so long? Why can't you do this in five or six weeks? And I said, well, how would I do that?

And he said, leave out the unimportant parts. And I said, well, how do we figure out what those are? He said, that's your problem. You're the teacher. So, anyway. I won't do two years, eight months tonight.

To properly interpret and then apply Hebrews to your life, you have to know to whom the Holy Spirit is speaking.

There are passages in the book where clearly he's talking to Christian people. Came out of Judaism, probably babies in Christ, but they're believers.

And then another verse will go by and he'll be talking to unbelievers. Now, theologians have a real technical term for this.

[2:16] They call it the pendulum swing. And Hebrews has a pendulum that swings continually.

And it is incumbent upon us to figure out, okay, who is the Holy Spirit talking to here so we can understand what is being said.

And then, as I say, make application to our life. I want to read to you some verses in Hebrews chapter 6, beginning in verse 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 and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come 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.

Now, let me say to you that our Arminian friends, and I have many, I have prayer partners in the Wesleyan church here, great men of God.

[3:50] I have some good, a couple friends in the liberal proletariat, and I have one friend that's a Methodist. They love this verse because it says, if you fall away.

Dr. McBride, who taught here for, what, preached here 17 years, he was in a group that met every Thursday, a group of pastors.

And I think he was the only Baptist in there, and they all loved this and told Mike, this teaches you can lose your salvation. You Baptists believe you can't lose your salvation once truly saved.

And Mike said, I don't think you guys want to go there, do you? Because it says, if you fall away, it's impossible to renew you. And then he said, have any of you all ever fallen away?

And they all started looking away and down, you know, downcast. But what were we going to say about this section? This is considered probably the most difficult section in, certainly in the epistles, but in the New Testament.

[5:01] The proper interpretation of these verses. And the first thing that we come face to face with is the people that this is addressed to have once been enlightened.

These are enlightened people. And as I read those verses, and we'll cover all of them this evening, I hope it's obvious to everyone here, these are not salvation terms.

We never go up to a friend, a colleague, family member, and say, have you been enlightened? Have you tasted? We never do that.

The Bible doesn't do that. Anytime we read in the New Testament about salvation, we deal with words like justification, sanctification, the new birth, being born again, or more accurately, born from above, redemption, regeneration, and those other terms we could throw in.

In the New Testament church, even in the 21st century, we are very familiar with those terms. But in today's passage, we are exposed to a phrase concerning those who have once been enlightened.

[6:41] 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 used nowhere else in Scripture.

And that is a very important point. The enlightenment being referred to here is an intellectual understanding of biblical truth.

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

And dare I say this, universities in the religion departments are full of people like that. They have a basic understanding, but have never been born from above. They are not born again.

Enlightenment, then, is a mental awareness, but without any lasting spiritual value. As Jesus walked on the earth, many were enlightened by what he did and by what he said, but without any lasting eternal benefit.

[8:03] I think often of the 5,000 and later 7,000 whom the Lord miraculously fed. He used his abilities as the creator and he created food and they miraculously were fed and derived great physical benefit from following Jesus around.

they received information from his sermons. They gained knowledge. They ate some great meals. Great meals. But few from those crowds will join us in heaven because the blood of the Lamb of God had not regenerated them.

They had not been regenerated. The same thing happened to the Jews being addressed in our passage today. they were enlightened but not saved.

And by the way, I'm going to prove that to you before we leave here this evening. The longer they went in this condition, the more likely they would never come to a saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus.

Peter spoke of this condition in words that we must deal with. He did that, by the way, in 2 Peter chapter 2. 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.

[9:40] 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 down onto them.

light given can become the means of judgment once that light is rejected. The scripture also says they had tasted of the heavenly gift.

The people spoken of here had seen light, they had been exposed to a heavenly gift. Now just what is the heavenly gift spoken of here?

Though the Holy Spirit is sometimes referred to as a holy gift, it is doubtful that the third person of the Trinity is being referred to here. The Holy Spirit is actually going to be referred to in the next sentence which we'll get to.

There is no doubt that the greatest heavenly gift in the universe is the salvation from the Lord that we receive. There could be no greater gift to the sinner. This has to be the heavenly gift spoken of here.

[10:48] this passage does not suggest that the gift was received. True believers don't just taste, they feast upon the gifts of the rebirth.

Here we had a mere tasting of the things of God. There was no acceptance of the salvation offered by Christ. there apparently was only a level of examination of the gift being offered but without a changed life.

Really, that's the measure, isn't it? That's the measure, a changed life. For someone to be saved, Christ must be consumed.

We don't just taste him and walk away. I don't go to a really good barbecue place and order a slab of baby back ribs and take a little piece of taste and say, boy, that is really good. We've got to come back here, hon, and walk out the door.

I don't do that. I consume. And that's a lot further down the road than mere tasting. The scriptures tell us they had been partakers or they had partaken of the Holy Spirit.

[12:05] Partakers have to do with association, not possession. I would suggest to you this morning in our service, and I don't know if there were unbelievers here or not.

I don't know anyone's heart. I know mine and I'm not very happy about it, but I don't know anyone else's. And everyone that was here this morning was a partaker in the ministry of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit was revealing truth through our pastor. And people that had their ears open were partakers of that. It didn't mean they were necessarily saved, but they partook in what was going on here.

The Hebrews, these particular Hebrews, never possessed the Holy Spirit. Their exposure to the Holy Spirit was based upon the fact that they were hanging around the true church, and where does the Holy Spirit live in this age, the age of grace?

Inside the church. So they were hanging around the Holy Spirit. When they came to church, the unbelievers, they're hanging around the Holy Spirit. There was a sharing of certain things through the process of being a partaker.

[13:20] Now, we have unbelievers that come to the church, they share in fellowship, they share in Bible study, they share in a meal, but merely being a partaker is not the same as being saved.

The whole theme here in this passage in Hebrews is one of association. The unbelievers in that church were associated with the believers in the church.

They were neighbors, they were friends, probably some family members, and they associated there. The Bible never speaks of true believers being associated with the Holy Spirit.

that's a term that's foreign to the entire Bible except for these brief verses here. The Holy Spirit is not, we don't associate with the Holy Spirit, we are indwelt by the Holy Spirit.

Big difference. He takes up residence in us, never leaves us, never forsakes us, is the comforter, the restrainer, the convictor.

[14:29] He has all these wonderful ministries that he carries on in the life of the true believer. But our focal passage in Hebrews, we see people that are associated with the Holy Spirit.

That is a far cry from an indwelling of the Spirit of God, which affects change in a person's life. They did not possess the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit did not possess them.

And then the Bible tells us in that passage, they had tasted the Word of God. They had tasted the Word of God. 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. They might have been fairly regular attenders of that church.

They may have been attentive to the message and even gained some Bible knowledge. Exposure to truth will do that for most people if they hang around long enough.

[15:44] In all likelihood, they enjoyed hearing the truth, they enjoyed fellowshiping in the church, but they had not consumed the words of Christ.

They had not been changed, but what they heard, they tasted but they did not eat. I have a friend in this town who's Jewish.

He's an agnostic Jew. He's pretty well off financially. He gives money to Christian causes. And I asked him why he did it. He says because they're clean people.

They're good people. He supports Wesleyan Christian School, for instance. The other day, he's in my office and I start witnessing to him. He said, I know what you're doing. You're trying to tell me that Jesus is the Messiah.

And he said, I'm not even sure I believe there's a God. And I said, well, you and I are going to be talking through the rest of this year and into next year. He said, okay. So we left for that and be praying for him.

[16:43] One thinks of Herod, who enjoyed listening to John the Baptist. Remember that? He wanted to hear John the Baptist. But he certainly never made any decision to follow Christ.

He sampled from the table of the Lord and walked away without dining on the truths of God. He walked away.

Now, we should not conclude that there's anything wrong with tasting. In fact, tasting is really the first step in eating.

David told us to taste and see that the Lord is good. People need to taste the gospel on the journey to receiving salvation.

But the problem comes in when people stop merely tasting and do not go on to consume as only a spirit filled, spirit led person can do.

[17 : 50] That comes from the indwelling. If you merely taste the things you are sampling will eventually become tasteless and people will become indifferent to it. That is why Paul instructs people to test themselves to see if in fact they are in the body.

That's the method chosen by the Spirit of God through the writings of Paul to know if we are truly born again or born from above. It's the Greek word *anōthen*.

It's a spiritual birth that comes down from above. They had tasted the powers of the age to come. We live in the church age.

We are approaching and I think rapidly the kingdom age. There's another age to come. During that time there will be great miracles. When Hebrews was written many had seen great apostolic powers exercised.

These were pictures of what would happen one day in the kingdom. In the kingdom age. Those who were exposed to great miracles and reject them are really guiltier than if they'd never been exposed to them at all.

[19 : 11] There were many in the early days of the apostles. In the latter days of the apostles you see those going away. Those miracles were used to authenticate the messenger.

Once the word of God was completed you didn't need a messenger to authenticate anything. You went to the word of God and looked it up. That's why we don't see those great miracles. There was only about three periods of miracles in the Bible.

A few in the Old Testament when Jesus was on earth and the early days of the apostles but they started passing away. Paul would raise people from the dead and yet Timothy comes my stomach is killing me.

We'll drink a little wine. That fermentation will kill the bacteria. He said I left some friends in Miletus because they were too ill to travel.

This is a guy that raised people from the dead. But that was passing away. Imagine for a moment the Pharisees who saw Lazarus raised from the dead.

[20 : 13] They were there. They were spying on Jesus looking for a way to accuse him. Any way they could come up with to accuse him. Now you got a guy that's been dead four days.

Even his sister said you better leave him in there. Corruption has taken hold. Now Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead and the Pharisees went back and reported to the religious leadership what they had seen.

That would be earth shattering I would think. The leadership rather than focusing on the fact that a dead man had come back to life plotted the death of Christ because they were fearful that their nation would proclaim him as Messiah and king and they would lose their position in the hierarchy of Israel.

Yeah, you're going to sell that argument to the father, aren't you, when you stand before him as they have already stood before him. Many Jews in this Hebrew congregation had been exposed by the things of God.

They had tasted the powers of the age to come. They had tasted his heavenly gift, his word, and his power, but they did not believe and they had not received Christ.

[21 : 47] So the Holy Spirit then issues this warning, and I'll read again what I've already read. 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 and then have fallen away.

It is impossible. Boy, that's a strong word. It is impossible to renew them again to repentance since they again crucified of themselves the Son of God and put him to open shame.

Now, the Spirit of God, the author of Hebrews is still speaking to the unsaved in this Hebrew congregation that have heard but not committed.

And the warning here has to do with falling away. One can be exposed to truth at a deep level but eventually grow cold and seek salvation in something or someone else.

Backing away from Christ is always fatal. I haven't seen a statistic recently but I guarantee you it hasn't diminished any it's increased and that is something like 265 people a day leave the Southern Baptist Convention for a cult for a known cult.

[23 : 19] 265 a day walk away. They walk away. walking away from Christ and looking for something else is a fatal error.

There is nothing else. There's no other way under heaven by which we are saved. This is the very passage that many believe teaches the method of losing one's salvation.

The problem with that is the passage says that salvation could never be regained. If you could lose it based on this give up.

Give up. People don't want to go to this verse to teach conditional salvation. The good news is that Christians are not the ones being addressed here.

What can be lost is the opportunity to receive salvation and not salvation itself. When people walk away from Christ they are losing an opportunity.

[24 : 26] I had a good friend and he said I just believe you can lose your salvation. I said you're talking about people truly born again? Absolutely. I said let me ask you this. Would it take any sin or does it have to be a really serious sin?

I said if you like in Singapore it's against a lot of spit on the sidewalk or throw gum on the if you did that could you lose your sin? Oh no no no no it's not spitting your gum on the sidewalk it has to be much more serious how much more serious really serious really serious I said okay I'll buy into that but I said let me ask you this suppose and I said you're a Christian right?

Oh yeah yeah and he is the guy I'm talking about I said suppose you violate the greatest commandment 24 hours a day 365 days a year your entire life is that enough to lose your salvation?

and I think he said which great command are you talking about I said love God with all your heart soul strength and mind all perfect love 100% complete love never diverge from that or digress from that and I said let me tell you something my dear brother none of us have ever achieved that in this lifetime some of you are hitting at 99% some of us are hitting at .99% but none of us have achieved 100% and I love what Dr.

Sproul said about that we violate the greatest commandment around the clock meaning we have need of a savior around the clock we need somebody that has fulfilled the greatest commandment and there's only one person in there can you call his name Jesus the Lord Jesus Christ he's the only one true believers need never fear losing their salvation true believers we live in a day when we have to add that term we didn't do that 30 years ago here but now we have to add that term because there's so much out there being passed off from what is true and it's false the Bible is clear on this point passages in the Old and New Testament verify this great and comforting truth we are saved by the power of Christ we are kept saved by the power of

[27 : 29] Christ God's grace is sufficient to keep us saved until we enter into glory it is a sufficient power and he always completes what he starts now examine yourself if he hadn't started go back to the beginning and get started the warning here is to unbelievers who are in danger of passing up any opportunity to be saved by rejecting the only grounds of being saved and that is faith in the Lord Jesus Christ Alistair Beggs a great preacher today a man from Scotland my wife and our ancestral home said this there is no cure for those who reject the only cure 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 there's no other way it is a form of putting God to an open shame it is a form of crucifying again the son of God and let me say it is the ultimate blasphemy it is the unpardonable sin to look after exposed to Christ coming to a tasting of Christ understanding fundamentals and to say well I'm going to look somewhere else that's the ultimate blasphemy and again the people in focus here are those who stay on the sidelines and make no commitment to Christ that was what was plaguing this Hebrew church you had baby believers coming out of Judaism and you had their neighbors Jewish neighbors coming and they kind of liked it and hey they have food down there in the evenings and they sing happy birthday and you know the things we we have been doing that for 2,000 years and they wanted to hang around they were hangers on and they were filled with self deception you don't get saved through osmosis you know well my dad was saved so therefore you know our whole

family is saved remember a great line in that movie inherit the wind the old movie and he asked this one jury he said are you a religious man he said let my wife take care of religion let me tell you there's going to be many men in hell because the wife was the spiritual leader of the home he was busy bailing hay on

Sunday morning she was there they're self deceived and self deception is the worst deception there's no worse deception than being self deceived convincing thinking that you're right with God when in fact you're doomed to eternity in hell no decision is a decision against Christ and the writer goes on for ground that drinks this is verse 7 and 8 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 Dr.

MacArthur gives an excellent explanation of this passage he says do you see the illustration for those who hear the gospel are like the earth the rain falls the gospel message is heard the gospel seed is planted!

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!

[31 : 46] it has come from the same seed and 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 it and become good only for burning only for destruction well I said before we ended that I would prove to you that this passage that we studied tonight was written to the unbelievers in this Hebrew church observers only hangers on there for a variety of reasons and who knows maybe some of them later got saved we don't know the Bible is silent on that but I want to go a few verses to verse 9 and show you another pendulum swing remember the pendulum is over here with the unbelievers and now it's going to swing and the

Holy Spirit has got something to say to believers but beloved first of all you know he's talking to believers don't you cause them beloved we are convinced of better things concerning you things that accompany salvation do you see the pendulum swing there he's left behind these people that tasted and they had exposure and now he says but now I'm going to talk to you folks you that are doing things that verify that accompany true salvation and we have this pendulum swing and actually there's two but I didn't read on I could have but I'm not going to because the spirit of God has been giving warnings and appeals to the unbeliever in the

Hebrew church he's begging them not to fall away don't become apostates apostate is one who was exposed to the truth and rejected it then the Holy Spirit speaks briefly to believers I'm convinced of better things concerning you the things that accompany!

And then he shifts back immediately and he starts talking about God is not unjust and the love which you've shown his name having ministered and still ministering and then he goes from there talking about unbelievers so we see this shift back and then in verse 11 he says and we desire that each one of you!

unbelievers show the same diligence of who? Of those that are believers that have things that accompany their salvation so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end so that you will not be sluggish but imitators of those who through faith and patient inherit the promises and only believers inherit the promises unbelievers never inherit the promises their inheritance is in hell the spirit tells the unbelievers to observe the believers in the congregation look at the believers that are all around you and do what they do well what is it they do well according to Hebrews chapter 6 verses 11 to 12 they show diligence they realize the full assurance of hope they understand hope hope is settled for the believer it's a settled hope they're not sluggish about the gospel they dig into the world they consume it they're wanting to be imitators of God imitators of Christ live like him in some poor way for people like me but at least hopefully trying and then it says and in this manner having done all these they inherit the promises and the writer says to the unbelievers be like them they have the things that accompany!

[36 : 23] salvation they can be marked out they can be identified because they have those things that accompany salvation