

Hebrews 6B (2014)

- Last time we studied in this chapter, the author confronted us with the challenge of whether we were maturing in our faith as we should
 - At the end of Chapter 5, the writer sounded a bit frustrated with this church's lack of spiritual progress
 - He felt forced to pause in his explanation of Melchizedek as the forerunner to Christ
 - The concept of Christ serving as priest in the order of Melchizedek was difficult to understand
 - Especially by an audience that hadn't done its homework
 - So he diverted his attention away from that discussion to engage the church on the dangers of failing to pursue spiritual maturity through a dedication to studying Scripture
 - At the beginning of Chapter 6, he listed six areas of Christian knowledge that he called the elementary teaching about the Christ
 - Notice he didn't call them teachings about Jesus
 - He calls them the teachings about the Christ
 - In other words, these were basic teachings that predated the revelation of Jesus as Christ
 - They are the basics of faith, which were presented as far back as the Old Testament
 - But as we looked at the list, we found several topics that can still pose a challenge for Christians today
 - Teachings on washing or spiritual gifting
 - Teaching on resurrection & eternal judgment
- So, as we began the chapter, we found ourselves already convicted by what constitutes the basics of Christian maturity
 - If these things are the basics, according to Scripture, and yet many believers are still ignorant on these topics, then what does that say about the state of our maturity?

- Perhaps we are also in need of learning the ABCs of our faith
- Perhaps we're also in danger of making the same mistake the early Church apparently made
- And if so, then we may be subject to the same consequences, right?
- Now the writer hasn't yet explained what those consequences are
 - That's coming in the second half of this chapter
 - It's the third warning of the book of Hebrews, and one of the more challenging in the entire letter
- As we dive into that section this morning, we must maintain a firm view of the writer's context leading into the warning
 - In fact, we need to remember where the writer began in Chapter 5
 - In 5:12, he told this group that they ought by now to be teachers of the Word
 - And he chastised them for not moving on to solid food
 - Instead, they have remained on milk, which was a euphemism for simplistic, unchallenging teaching and ideas
 - And then, in Chapter 6, the writer opened by telling them to press on to maturity in their faith
 - And we ended our introduction to Chapter 6 in v.3, where the writer ominously declared that these brethren will mature if God permits
 - And with that, the writer moves into the warning of what may transpire for those who fail to press on to maturity
 - Now why did I take us back through those observations?
 - Because I want us to note that throughout this discussion, the writer has been focused on the consequences of failing to mature as a Christian
 - He has never veered off that topic
 - Therefore, we must understand that the warning that follows is directed at this very same audience

- That is, this is a warning for the believer who fails to mature as God expects
 - Remember, we must guide our interpretation by the context of the letter
 - And if we overlook the context, we will move in the wrong direction with our interpretation, and so our theology will be wrong as well
- We'll return to the question of the writer's intended audience as we examine the warning, but for now, let's read the warning

[Heb. 6:4](#) 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, [Heb. 6:5](#) and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, [Heb. 6:6](#) and then have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame.

- The writer begins with the preposition "for", or we could also translate the Greek word as "consequently"
 - In the preceding verse, the writer said the church would press on to spiritual maturity if God would permit
 - And now he says "consequently"
 - He's connecting these two thoughts, so it's important that we try to understand how they are connected
- Then writer begins to describe a certain scenario, one that he fears his audience is at risk of encountering
 - The scenario begins with the group encountering a series of experiences
 - First, this group experiences an "enlightenment", which is the Greek word *photizo*, from which we get "photon"
 - It literally means "to be brought into the light"
 - In John's Gospel, we learn that being brought into the light is a description of coming to know the Gospel

[John 1:3](#) All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.

[John 1:4](#) In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men.

[John 1:9](#) There was the true Light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man.

- Jesus is the Light of the world, and He enlightens men
- So this group's experience begins with an enlightenment
- Next, the writer says this group tasted of the Heavenly gift and were made partakers of the Holy Spirit
 - To understand what the Heavenly gift is in this context, we should note that it comes after being enlightened
 - And it leads to being made a partaker of the Holy Spirit
 - There is only one Heavenly gift mentioned in the Bible that would fit all these criteria
- Paul tells us what that gift of Heaven is in Ephesians 2:

[Eph. 2:8](#) For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God;

[Eph. 2:9](#) not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.

- Paul says the gift that comes from Heaven is the gift of faith in Christ
- And by that gift of faith, we are saved by God's grace
- And we know that faith follows an encounter with the Light of Christ and it leads to the arrival of the Holy Spirit to dwell in our hearts
- Notice that the writer says that this group was "made" to be partakers of the Holy Spirit
 - The arrival of the Holy Spirit is not an optional event for the new believer
 - Nor is it a moment that depends on any action on our part
 - It happens by God's power, according to His promise to send the Helper to all His children

- So the writer says this group was “made” to receive the Spirit by the power of God as a result of faith
- Finally, the writer says this group has “tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come”
 - This statement has been analyzed 7 ways to Sunday, as the saying goes, but it’s very simple
 - The Greek word translated “taste” is literally the word for “eating”, as in taking in or consuming something
 - The writer isn’t trying to be cute with his choice of words
 - He’s just speaking in poetic language to describe how a person can only sample all that the Word of God contains
 - We taste it, in the sense that it’s impossible to consume all of it in one sitting
 - The Word of God is infinite in its wisdom
 - Furthermore, they have tasted the powers of the age to come
 - The coming age is a reference to the Kingdom age, when we will live in eternal bodies without sin and in the full light of Christ’s presence
 - Once again, the term “taste” is accurate to express our limited experience with the Kingdom to this point
 - By our faith, we’ve only tasted what that coming age will be like
 - We have the indwelling of the Spirit, and with that, certain spiritual gifts
 - We know the love of God and have a hope of resurrection
 - But these things are but a taste of what’s to come for us
- All in all, the list is a description of the believer who has entered into the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ
 - And of course, such a conclusion fits perfectly with the context of Chapters 5 and 6
 - The writer is concerned about believers’ spiritual immaturity
 - And he’s been chastising his audience for not pursuing maturity

- And so he begins his warning for this same group by describing their early experiences in the faith
- Now if someone were to assume that the writer has suddenly, and quite inexplicably, shifted his focus to discussing unbelievers, the list we just examined would raise numerous red flags
 - The experiences on the list are completely foreign to unbelievers
 - For example, unbelievers are never enlightened, according to Scripture
 - In fact, John says that men do not enter the Light of Christ, because they prefer the darkness

[John 3:19](#) "This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the **darkness** rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil.

[John 3:20](#) " For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed.

- Furthermore, unbelievers never experience any of the other spiritual moments in the writer's list
 - Unbelievers are simply never aware of the gift of God
 - They are never made partakers of the Holy Spirit
 - Nor have they ever known the good things in the Word of God
 - The Bible says the Word of God is foolishness to the unbeliever
 - And of course, they have no experience with the powers of the age to come
- The writer isn't saying that this group has watched others experience these things or experienced them vicariously
 - He has spoken of a personal experience of salvation common to a group
 - And by the context and by what he described, we must conclude that he's speaking of a group of believers
 - In other words, this is a warning for the Church

- A warning of what could happen to any group of believers who fail to press on to maturity
- As we look at the consequences of their immaturity in v.6, we see even more clearly that the writer is concerned for the walk of a believer
 - At the beginning of the verse, he raises the prospect of a Christian falling away
 - What does it mean for a Christian to fall away?
 - First, we know that it must speak of something that a person has control over, rather than something that lies outside our control
 - For example, a believer has no control over their salvation
 - It comes by way of a gift through the work of the Holy Spirit
 - It is maintained in our hearts by the power of the Spirit, in keeping with the promises of God
 - As Paul says in 1 Cor. 1, by His doing, we are in Christ Jesus
 - Furthermore, the arrival of faith in our hearts produces a degree of spiritual change that is irreversible
 - Paul says in 2 Cor. 5, that the believer becomes a new creature
 - Because our old nature we received from Adam has passed away, never to return
 - Salvation isn't a question of what we think
 - The Bible says it's a matter of who we are
 - And once God changes our identity, the old identity is gone forever

Phil. 1:6 For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.

- So whatever the writer means by "falling away", it must refer to some aspect of our Christian experience that a believer can control...so what can a believer control?
 - Well, a believer has control over his or her behaviors, thoughts, attitudes and feelings

- We see the truth of this reflected in the many, many exhortations in the New Testament to walk in the Spirit instead of the flesh
- Paul tells us in 2 Cor. 10:5, to take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ
- And in Philippians, Paul tells the believer to have the same attitude of sacrifice that the Lord possessed
- As Paul says:

Phil. 3:15 Let us therefore, as many as are perfect, have this attitude; and if in anything you have a different attitude, God will reveal that also to you;

Phil. 3:16 however, let us keep living by that same standard to which we have attained.

Phil. 3:17 Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us.

- Paul calls the Church, who have been made perfect by faith, to have an attitude of living up to that same standard
 - In other words, Paul tells us to live up to the perfection of Christ
 - Which we received by our faith
- So it should be obvious that the choice of how to live, think and feel are choices that lie in our control
 - So if we are commanded to live in obedience to Christ, then it stands to reason we have the possibility to disobey in each of these areas
 - We are called to control our thoughts, because it's possible to indulge disobedient thoughts
 - We're called to maintain healthy attitudes, because a believer can slip into undesirable attitudes
 - And when we move in the direction of disobedience to God's Word, we are falling away
 - We are falling away from obedience
 - We are falling away from our mission to represent Christ
 - We are falling away from pleasing the Lord
 - And we are potentially falling away from our opportunity to receive eternal reward

- And this process almost always begins by neglecting the Word of God
 - The writer introduced his third warning by lamenting the way this group had failed to pursue spiritual maturity in the Word of God
 - They hadn't progressed to the meat of God's Word
 - They were stuck in milk
 - And as a result, they had become confused and deceived
 - And so they now needed to be retaught the ABCs of their faith
 - And when believers make a pattern of neglecting the Word of God, they are in grave danger of falling away in their walk of faith
 - In my experience, this rule is so certain as to be a law of the universe
 - Believers troubled by persistent sin, caught by fleshly temptations or deceived by the enemy's lies, are almost invariably people who have a weak or nonexistent Bible study life
 - Ironically, they often think themselves strong Bible students
 - Much as I suspect this writer's audience probably thought they were knowledgeable
 - But the problem is, our standard for what is enough Bible understanding is usually far lower than God's standard
 - As Warren Wiersbe once wrote:

"One of the first symptoms of spiritual regression, or backsliding, is a dullness toward the Bible. Sunday School class is dull, the pastor's preaching is dull, everything spiritual is dull. The problem is usually not with the Sunday School teacher or the pastor, but with the believer himself."

- So what happens to a believer who has entered into the Christian experience, and begun their walk of faith in the Spirit, but then they fall away into sin, disobedience and apathy?
 - The writer says this is a serious problem, one that may not have a rescue
 - That person may remain in their disobedient state indefinitely

- Remember, he began the warning in v.3 saying that we will press on to maturity only if God permits
- And the hard reality is that He may not permit us a second chance to mature
- And there are two reasons why this second chance may never arrive
- First, the writer explains in v.6 that it's impossible to renew such a person again to repentance
 - The word "repentance" in Scripture can be used in a couple of different ways
 - It talks of a repentance leading to salvation
 - And following our salvation, the Bible commands believers to continually repent of sin so we can seek to live a life that pleases Christ
 - In this case, the writer speaks of a repentance that leads to a renewal
 - The word "renew" simply means "to be made new"
 - There is only one kind of repentance associated with being made new
 - This is the repentance that leads us into salvation
 - It's the repentance that is according to the will of God
- The moment of our entering into faith in the Gospel is a glorious, one-time experience
 - We can all relate to this truth, especially if we came to faith later in life as an adult
 - The truth of the Gospel arrested us and set us on a new course in life
 - It produced a spiritual renewal in our hearts
 - And by that renewal, we were pulled free of a life of sin and ungodliness and granted a new life of peace, hope, love and joy
 - But like the church in Ephesus, it's possible for believers to leave their first love and squander that "reset" moment

- A believer can slip back and fall away into a life of disobedience, very much like the one they possessed prior to coming faith
 - But just as a believer can't "lose" salvation – even a disobedient Christian – then neither can they be saved a second time
 - And if they can't be renewed to repentance again, then they have no prospect of receiving another spiritual wake-up call
- So now...if the repentance that leads to renewal can't be repeated, what set of circumstances might draw a disobedient believer back onto the straight and narrow path?
 - This brings us to the second reason the writer says we can only press on to maturity if the Lord permits...because if we disobey, we are testing the Lord's patience
 - The writer says that when a person spurns the Lord's grace, they are crucifying again the Lord by putting Him to open shame
 - The writer is referring to the shame Christ suffered at the hands of those He came to save
 - As Christ was stripped naked and nailed to the cross, He suffered great pain and great shame
 - And the great irony of that moment is that Christ endured that shame for the sake of those who were hammering the nails and tearing his clothes
 - Likewise, when a believer takes the grace of God and abuses it through a life of sin and ungodliness and selfishness, we are putting our Lord to open shame again
 - Each Christian is an ambassador for the Lord and a representative of Christ before a fallen world
 - When we neglect our spiritual maturity and fall away, we set such a bad example before the world, that we bring new shame upon Christ
 - The writer says those who fall away can't expect a rescue, because they crucify to themselves the Lord
 - He doesn't mean they literally kill the Lord again...obviously, that's not possible
 - Notice, the writer says they are re-crucifying Jesus to themselves

- He means that by their disobedient behavior, they are treating the Lord with contempt
- Just as those who crucified Him the first time
 - In effect, we are repeating the process of shaming the Lord before the world
 - And as before, His shame comes at the hands of someone He died to save
- Notice that only a believer can bring shame to the Lord
 - If anyone is still harboring thoughts that this is a discussion of an unbeliever, this statement puts the issue to rest
 - Only the behavior of a believer has the potential to bring shame to a believer
 - Unbelievers act in ungodly ways at all times, since that's all they can do
 - So there is no possibility of a believer of bringing shame to the Lord by their behavior
 - Only a believer has a relationship with the Lord, and it's by that association that a believer can bring Him to open shame
- So Christians who fall away and return to a life of ungodliness are at grave risk
 - They lack the possibility of a second renewal through repentance, and by their lives, they bring open shame to the Lord, testing His patience
 - They run the risk that the Lord will not permit them to press on to maturity, as v.3 suggested
 - Instead, the Lord may just leave them where they are, like the prodigal son mired in the mud
 - Until they reach their judgment day
 - Obviously, such a person is still saved, as we've discussed, but they are on a road to personal ruin leading to a loss of eternal reward
 - We see that consequence reflected in a short parable the writer offers to conclude the warning

[Heb. 6:7](#) For ground that drinks the rain which often falls on it and brings forth vegetation useful to those for whose sake it is also tilled, receives a blessing from God;

[Heb. 6:8](#) but if it yields thorns and thistles, it is worthless and close to being cursed, and it ends up being burned.

- The writer tells this parable to apply the truth he just explained, that is, of a believer who neglects the grace of God by living a disobedient life
 - In the parable, the ground pictures the people of God, who receive God's grace falling from above
 - This ground is tilled by a farmer, who expects to receive a harvest of good vegetation
 - But sometimes, despite the work of the farmer and the good rains, the land might only produce thorns and thistles
 - These are clearly not the expected outcome, and they are a severe disappointment to the farmer
 - Should the ground yield only these worthless crops, then the farmer will have no choice, but to burn the field to clear it for next year's planting
 - The farmer receives no crop
 - The picture created in this parable fits perfectly with the writer's teaching
 - God dispenses His grace to believers with an expectation that it leads to a fruitful harvest – a harvest of obedience
 - Some believers make the most of God's grace, learning from God's Word, and maturing in our walk
 - As we do so, we produce that harvest God expects
 - And we receive a blessing for our obedience
 - Or we can elect to neglect our spiritual maturity, fall away from God's Word and regress in our walk until the point we cannot please the Lord
 - At that point, we're producing thorn and thistles
 - We're useless to God's purpose
 - And we're close to being cursed, the writer says

- “Close” in this case doesn’t refer to our position before the Lord, for our position is secure in Christ
 - “Close to being cursed” refers to the way our life resembles the life of unbelief
 - Just like the lives of unbelievers, we produce nothing of value for the Lord
 - And so we are burned
- That last point creates some confusion for those who assume any reference to burning must mean the fires of Hell
 - But the most common way fire is used in the Bible has nothing to do with unbelievers or the judgment of Hell
 - The most common picture of fire is one of purification or judgment for the believer
 - In the OT, Israel is often reminded that the Lord will test them in furnaces or purify them by fire
 - And in the NT, Paul tells us that the believer’s works will be tested by fire
 - In 1 Cor. 3, Paul explains that we will see our life of service to Christ tested at our judgment moment
 - And if those works are not pleasing to the Lord, they will be burned up
 - And we will have nothing remaining to receive reward
 - That’s the concept the writer is explaining in this parable
 - The believer who falls away lives close to being cursed (but isn’t cursed)
 - And their unfruitful life will experience the fires of Christ’s judgment
 - And this is the likely outcome for anyone who makes a point to live in disobedience
 - Because we have no reason to expect the Lord to rescue us
- Which is all the more reason not to take that chance in the first place

- Let's press on to maturity from the start, rather than testing the Lord's patience by squandering the fresh start He gave to each of us
 - And if you're one of those who may have taken two steps forward and one step back, then take note of the writer's warning
 - Let today's lesson be that spark from God's Word to bring you back from the brink
- Don't bet that the Lord has another rescue waiting in the future
 - There is no such promise in Scripture
 - On the contrary, there is a firm warning that disobedience is a one-way trip to personal ruin