

Text Hebrews 5:11-6:8

One thing that I attempt to convey in my lessons, and that I hope you have perceived, is that the Scriptures truly must be “the supreme standard by which all human conduct, creeds, and religious opinions should be tried” (from the 2000 *Baptist Faith and Message*). The reason I have all of you look up so many passages of Scripture is that I don’t want us to fall into the trap of offering only “Sunday School answers” to theological questions. If we don’t address every issue by consulting the Word, the path toward the formation of unbiblical opinions is both wide and steep (a “slippery slope,” even).

This is especially true of the passage we’re covering today, which is extremely difficult to comprehend and absorb. This is one of the passages that directly address the veracity of one’s “salvation experience,” and whether or not professing believers are truly saved. This is a concept that I have discussed often already in this class—not because I want to unduly emphasize the fact that I think a large percentage of today’s professing Christians are in fact unsaved, but because I want to ensure that we are keenly aware of what a true salvation experience is, and that we do not become guilty of the shallow evangelism that ultimately results only in “inoculation against the Gospel.” The opinions of various commentators on today’s passage vary widely, confirming the difficulty of constructing a correct exegesis. I will do my best to point us toward verses that can help us understand it better, though I acknowledge that you might or might not agree with my conclusions. That would be perfectly fine, but if you do disagree make sure you have a Scriptural basis for your argument, and not just that it hurts your feelings or goes against any preconceptions you might have.

Finally, although I try to only teach what’s in the Bible and not let my personal opinions come into play, I know that they do and will, especially in a controversial passage like this one. Therefore, a point of disclosure: if you haven’t figured this out yet, I am a Calvinist, holding to an essentially Reformed theology. What does that mean? It means that I believe that salvation is a sovereign act of God—those that come to faith in Christ do so because God *gives* them that faith (Ephesians 2:8-9). That’s a historic Baptist position (and a Presbyterian one, but I’m not for “sprinkling babies”), though it has fallen out of favor among many Southern Baptists in the last 50 years or so. I believe that the Scriptures support this position, but in any case this view has influenced my interpretation of today’s passage and I want to get that out in the open before proceeding.

Now, as always, I want to make sure we’re on the same page about a few things before delving into our main passage for today; today I have four such items. The first is that God is always truthful, unchanging, and never self-contradicting. If we believe that we have found contradictory passages in His revealed Word, the error lies with *us*, or perhaps in our editions or translations (another human error), but not with the Word itself or with God Himself:

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. (Hebrews 13:8)

Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth. (John 17:17)

16 All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; 17so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

The grass withers, the flower fades, But the word of our God stands forever. (Isaiah 40:8)

The second is the very dearly held doctrine of the “perseverance of the saints” (incidentally, one of the five points of Calvinism, but one still almost universally agreed upon by Southern Baptists). No one that has truly been saved can lose his or her salvation.

27" My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; 28and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. 29" My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. (John 10:27-29)

37" All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out. 38" For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. 39" This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day. (John 6:37-39)

38 For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:38-39)

The third is that those who are truly saved will demonstrate evidence of the fact by their dispositions, their manners of life, their works for the Kingdom of God, and by their perseverance in the faith:

12But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, **23**gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. (Galatians 5:22-23)

12Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation. (1 Peter 2:12)

17Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself...**22**You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected...**26**For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead. (James 2:17, 22, 26)

But the one who endures to the end, he will be saved. (Matthew 24:13)

Finally, not all those that profess Christ are truly regenerate. Unsaved professors do not “bear fruit in keeping with repentance” (Matthew 3:8) and eventually “fall away” (Luke 8:13):

11"Now the parable is this: the seed is the word of God. **12**"Those beside the road are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their heart, so that they will not believe and be saved. **13**"Those on the rocky soil are those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no firm root; they believe for a while, and in time of temptation fall away. **14**"The seed which fell among the thorns, these are the ones who have heard, and as they go on their way they are choked with worries and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to maturity. **15**"But the seed in the good soil, these are the ones who have heard the word in an honest and good heart, and hold it fast, and bear fruit with perseverance. (Luke 8:11-15)

15"Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. **16**"You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes nor figs from thistles, are they? **17**"So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. **18**"A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. **19**"Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. **20**"So then, you will know them by their fruits. **21**"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. **22**"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?' **23**"And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.' (Matthew 7:15-23)

18Children, it is the last hour; and just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have appeared; from this we know that it is the last hour. **19**They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, so that it would be shown that they all are not of us. (1 John 2:18-19)

With these truths in mind, let's begin today's main passages.

11Concerning him we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing.**12**For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. **13**For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant. **14**But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil. (Hebrews 5:11-14)

This passage begins what amounts to an “aside” in the discourse about Christ our High Priest, and consists of the author chastising his readers for their lack of spiritual maturity. Apparently these Hebrew Christians had been believers for some time, but had grown very little in the faith after the initial experience of conversion. Because these believers had not yet progressed to “solid food,” they were not yet “trained to discern good and evil.” This can have perilous consequences:

14Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless, **15**and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation; just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you, **16**as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the

rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction. 17You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, be on your guard so that you are not carried away by the error of unprincipled men and fall from your own steadfastness, 18but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory, both now and to the day of eternity. Amen. (2 Peter 3:14-18)

Peter here warns against the tendency of the “**untaught and unstable**” to distort the Scriptures, leading to their destruction. Even in the first century various sects and perversions of Christianity had arisen, and threatened to “**carry away**” unsuspecting believers. Peter therefore exhorts his readers to be on guard against this. How are they to guard? By **growing “in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”** In other words, Peter is telling his readers that if they wish to guard against evil and destructive heresies they must increase in knowledge of Christ and His Word, and thus in spiritual maturity. The author of Hebrews desires the same for his readers.

1Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, 2of instruction about washings and laying on of hands, and the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment. 3And this we will do, if God permits. (Hebrews 6:1-3)

The author here appears to briefly review some of the basic elements of the Christian faith before moving on, “**if God permits,**” to more theologically intense matters. For example, we have:

Repentance from dead works and faith:

8For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; 9not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. (Ephesians 2:8-9)

Washings (baptisms) and laying on of hands:

12But when they believed Philip preaching the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were being baptized, men and women alike.... 14Now when the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent them Peter and John, 15who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit.16For He had not yet fallen upon any of them; they had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. 17Then they began laying their hands on them, and they were receiving the Holy Spirit. (Acts 8:12, 14-17)

The resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment:

11Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. 12And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. 13And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds. 14Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire This is the second death, the lake of fire.15And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire. (Revelation 20:11-15)

Clearly all of the things mentioned in verses 1-2 are rudimentary parts of the Christian faith, and are fundamental issues which must be understood before moving on to deeper concepts. And, to dwell on these without moving on to “**solid food**” will indeed produce spiritually immature believers (let us not become guilty of that!). One commentator, however, suggested that all of these beliefs and practices were also inherited from Jewish practices of the time. In that context, it may be that the author of Hebrews was not only telling his readers to move beyond the basic elements of Christianity, but also exhorting them to not return to the practices of Judaism. The latter would certainly have been a danger for these Hebrew believers, given their spiritual immaturity. In that condition, they might have been unable to resist the influence of those known as “**Judaizers,**” who taught that Christians were still subject to Jewish ceremonial law:

1Some men came down from Judea and began teaching the brethren, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved." (Acts 15:1)

Such a contention, of course, flies in the face of the doctrine of salvation by grace through faith. Hebrew believers that were weak in knowledge and understanding, however, might have been swayed by such teaching, thereby ultimately repudiating the Gospel of

Christ—an extremely dangerous prospect! Even if a return to Judaism was not a concern, though, these believers still needed to grow in the faith in order to withstand other spiritual attacks, and understand the deeper elements of the faith.

4For 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, 5and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, 6and 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. 7For 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; 8but if it yields thorns and thistles, it is worthless and close to being cursed, and it ends up being burned. (Hebrews 6:4-8)

At this point, the author begins moving his readers into the “**solid food**” to which he referred earlier. This passage is the one that creates a point of contention among believers. Is it referring to backsliding Christians that sin and therefore miss out on spiritual rewards in earth or heaven? Is it referring to unregenerate professors whose end is in Hell? Or, is it referring to another group of people or situation? More intelligent and educated people than I have argued a variety of perspectives, some of which you can see briefly summarized in your book on page 57. Perhaps you will disagree with my judgment, but to me the interpretation that requires the fewest “theological gymnastics” is that the author is referring to professors that are not truly regenerate. Verses 7 and 8, for example, harmonize nicely with a passage from Matthew 7:

15" Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. 16" You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes nor figs from thistles, are they? 17" So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. 18" A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. 19" Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 20" So then, you will know them by their fruits. (Matthew 7:15-20)

Matthew warns the reader against those professors whose “fruit” consists only of “thorns and thistles.” He identifies them as “**false prophets,**” and states that their destiny is to be “**cut down and thrown into the fire.**” Likewise, it appears that Hebrews 6 is referring to unregenerate professing believers that are bound for Hell.

If this is the case, then, what about verses 4-5? Don’t these state that those being referred to here have been “**partakers of the Holy Spirit?**” Can that term apply to nonbelievers? Understood correctly, I think so. The best explanation I have found or can construct for this is that these individuals have been “**enlightened**” by knowledge of the Gospel, they “**have tasted**” some of the external benefits of Christianity, and have “**partaken**” of or experienced a part of the ministry of the Holy Spirit—at least in corporate worship, but in all this they have not come to the place where they have truly renounced sin and confessed Christ as Lord, and thus have not received salvation and the gift of the Holy Spirit within their own hearts.

That brings us to verse 6, which states that those who have made a nominal commitment to Christianity and then willfully repudiate Christ (“**crucify to themselves the Son of God**”) cannot be brought to repentance. One commentator suggested that this is often the case when one experiences a shallow “conversion,” thinks he is “in,” and goes on willfully sinning. He is then offended when someone presents him with the true Gospel and calls him to repent, confess Christ, and be saved. He has, in essence, been “inoculated against the Gospel,” and will not be saved.

The concept here is expounded upon later, in Hebrews 10:

26For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, 27but a terrifying expectation of judgment and THE FURY OF A FIRE WHICH WILL CONSUME THE ADVERSARIES. 28 Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. 29 How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace? 30For we know Him who said, "VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY " And again, "THE LORD WILL JUDGE HIS PEOPLE." 31It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God. (Hebrews 10:26-31)

Perhaps an example of a poor soul in this condition is Simon the sorcerer, discussed in Acts chapter 8:

9Now there was a man named Simon, who formerly was practicing magic in the city and astonishing the people of Samaria, claiming to be someone great; 10and they all, from smallest to greatest, were giving attention to him, saying, "This man is what is called the Great Power of God." 11And they were giving him attention because he had for a long time astonished them with his magic arts. 12But when they believed Philip preaching the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were being

baptized, men and women alike. 13Even Simon himself believed; and after being baptized, he continued on with Philip, and as he observed signs and great miracles taking place, he was constantly amazed. 14Now when the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent them Peter and John, 15who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. 16For He had not yet fallen upon any of them; they had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. 17Then they began laying their hands on them, and they were receiving the Holy Spirit. 18Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was bestowed through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, 19saying, "Give this authority to me as well, so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit." 20But Peter said to him, "May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! 21" You have no part or portion in this matter, for your heart is not right before God. 22" Therefore repent of this wickedness of yours, and pray the Lord that, if possible, the intention of your heart may be forgiven you. 23" For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bondage of iniquity." 24But Simon answered and said, "Pray to the Lord for me yourselves, so that nothing of what you have said may come upon me." (Acts 8:9-24)

In Simon, we see an individual who heard the Gospel, believed (but so did the demons in James 2), and was baptized. The unregenerate condition of his heart is revealed in verses 18-19, however, when he desires to gain the power of God in exchange for money. Then, when Peter exhorts him to repent, he doesn't—in the hardness of his heart he instead tells Peter to pray on his behalf! So far as we know from the Scriptures, Simon never truly humbled himself and repented, and was never truly saved. Such was the fate of a man who **"tasted of the heavenly gift,"** but fell away.

Our final passage is much less intense:

9But, beloved, we are convinced of better things concerning you, and things that accompany salvation, though we are speaking in this way. 10For God is not unjust so as to forget your work and the love which you have shown toward His name, in having ministered and in still ministering to the saints. 11And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end, 12so that you will not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises. (Hebrews 6:9-12)

The author begins this passage by reassuring the readers that he does not believe them to be among the apostates described in the previous verses, and cites the works which they have already done as evidence of their salvation. Nevertheless, he admonishes them to **"show the same diligence...until the end."** Why? Perseverance is commanded of us, and is indeed one of the key marks of a true salvation experience. As the Scripture says:

14You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them, 15and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. 16 All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; 17so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:14-17)

But the one who endures to the end, he will be saved. (Matthew 24:13)

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