



Past the Point of No Return

Hebrews 6:1-8

Years ago, there was a friend of mine who came to me for counsel. He had a lot of questions about different things in the Bible, but most of his questions revolved around whether or not he was saved. Now, I can't remember if he talked to me about this question or if it was to another friend, but one of the nagging questions on his mind was that he thought he had committed the unforgiveable sin. In case you don't know what that is, Jesus tells us that blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is the unforgiveable sin. In that scenario, you have people who knew that the Holy Spirit was at work in Jesus, and they denied the Spirit and called his miracles a work of Satan.

Now, my friend never told me or my other friend precisely what he did that made him think he had committed the unpardonable sin; but it was something he did in the past. As I heard about his struggles, I had a lot of sympathy for him. It's not just he who has wondered what the unforgiveable sin is, is it? How many here have ever had a situation in their past that when it comes into your mind, you cringe and then feel at least some of the weight of the shame and guilt? Seriously, raise your hand if you've had that happen to you.

But my friend was giving his past sin control over his present reality. That's what worry does. Worry traps you in its snare so that you do not see how you ought to be living right now, and it also blinds you to things you could work on in the present. I mean, here my friend is worrying about a weekend, but he also had current issues that others saw clearly. But, probably according to him, his greatest concern needed to be whether or not he was saved. So, I would encourage him to trust Jesus – and yet, that didn't work. The worry bound him from doing what the Scriptures called him to do in the present.

I share this with all of you this morning because I want you to have a helpful understanding as we approach the text for this morning. First, I share this with those of you who worry about your past. If you're stuck in the past, this text isn't going to benefit you because you're going to consistently apply this passage to something that happened "back then." This text is to be applied *right now* with a forward-look into the future. Listen to the text this way.

But what if you're not worrying about the past? Well, that *could* be good, but it also may not be. There could be some here who are too confident in their past that they don't have any healthy fear in the present. You have past godliness, past belief; but right now you're wavering. You're not taking seriously that you've drifted. This text is precisely for you.

As we dive into Hebrews 6:1-8, I have to ask you something. If you're a Christian and you know you've drifted, are you taking the author's words seriously about drifting or do you treat like it's not a big deal?

Sometimes I think we treat God's warnings like the *Boy Who Cried Wolf*. Remember the story? I've told it to my children to teach them the important lesson of telling the truth. Remember what the boy did? He was tasked to watch the herd and take care of it. If a wolf came, then he would yell for help. No wolf came, but he yelled for help. When the people came, he laughed. The same happened again. Then, a wolf really showed up. He yelled and no one came in because no one believed him.

If you hear what the Bible says and you don't respond to it with purpose, practically speaking, you believe God is a lying little boy who cried wolf. This is why the author confronts the Hebrew Christians with such intensity. To not care about God's Word, to not want to understand how Melchizedek and Jesus relate, reveals your lack of desire for God. So, the Christians are told that they've allowed themselves to be dull of hearing. But if you thought Hebrews 5:11-14 was intense, we see in chapter 6 that he was just warming up.

What I'm preaching today is probably the strongest warning in the entire New Testament. He says to the Christian church that there is a point you can pass where there's no return. Like getting in an accident and being at the complete mercy of gravity; so, we can drift so far that we cannot move from the rocks and hold back from shipwreck. One professor gave the basic gist of these verses by writing this: **"If I, who look to Christ alone for salvation, forsake him, I will find myself incapable of repenting such that I'll most assuredly perish forever"** (Ardel Caneday as quot. in <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/does-hebrews-6-teach-you-can-lose-your-salvation>).

Now, hold on a second! You might be thinking, "Do you agree with what that pastor wrote?" And what you're thinking is what any person who reads their Bible is thinking: is that guy saying that you can lose your salvation? No, he doesn't believe you can lose your salvation. And, I don't think you can lose your salvation either. But I wholeheartedly agree with the man's statement. If that makes no sense to you, stick around, and let's pray that the Spirit would give us wisdom into what God is saying in Hebrews 6:1-8. I hope and pray that I explain it in a way faithful to God's intentions and also in a way that helps spur you on in your godliness. So, if you haven't turned to Hebrews 6 yet, please do so. Before I read, we will pray for our missionaries, the MacPhail-Faussey's and also Manna Church of Holland with Dave Geurrin.

6 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, ² and of instruction about washings, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. ³ And this we will do if God permits. ⁴ For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, ⁵ and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, ⁶ and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt. ⁷ For land that has drunk the rain that often falls on it, and produces a crop useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God. ⁸ But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed, and its end is to be burned.¹

¹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), Heb 6.

In case you've forgotten or you weren't here last week, the backdrop for these verses is that the author steps away from his teaching on Melchizedek and says that the church can't understand these things because they've drifted. He knows they've drifted because of two reasons: 1) they have a minimal desire for the Word, and 2) They should be teaching others by now, but they need to be taught. Some solutions he gives to this drifting is that they need to: 1) find someone to teach them, and 2) live out what they have been taught. To grow in knowledge and then grow in obedience is like an infant eating, gaining strength and then using that strength in actions, which then draws the child back to eating – and the cycle continues.

We have no problem seeing that the author is being serious. But again, are the recipients of his letter going to take the challenge seriously? The question comes to us here, too. Are you going to take the exhortation seriously or will you log it away for another time when you deem it more convenient or necessary? If you're in the second category, we have verses 1-8 for you. So, in verses 1-2, the author tells us to

1. Let the basics of God's Word move you forward (vv. 1-2).

The first part of 1 says, "Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity. . ."² When some read this, they think the author is saying, "Let's move beyond the gospel." Some have argued that being "gospel-centered" isn't biblical because of a verse like this. After all, he says "let us leave the doctrine of Christ behind!" That is not what the author says. We have to put a couple things together to understand the meaning of the word. First, the context. If the author is saying he wants to stop talking about the gospel from here on out, then he fails in his desire. He keeps talking about Jesus all the way to the end of the book, basing his arguments in Jesus. Go all the way to the end to the doxology and you read him praising Jesus who died and rose again.

The writer obviously isn't saying we are to leave Jesus behind. So, what must he mean by this word? One commentator writes that "the verb means literally 'to be carried'" (Longman, p. 81). The idea of this word is to be understood as a launching pad or even a foundation. In other words, you have to have this with you in order to understand everything else. As I think through Hebrews' argument with needing to go back to the milk and also maturing in what we eat, I'm reminded of the old "Got Milk?" commercials. Do you remember those? A man listening to a radio competition who is eating peanut butter and bread. He hears on the radio: "Who shot Alexander Hamilton?" The guy listening is in a room full of artifacts from the duel. He dials the phone. He knows he'll win. They pick up the phone and he answers, but he's muffled. They ask again, and he gets the milk to pour it, but there's none left. Still muffled, he yells, "AARON BURR!" They don't understand, hang up, and he quietly and sadly says, "Aaron Burr." Commercial then says, "Got Milk?" Point taken! You need liquid when eating.

Don't hear "elementary principles" as bad things. No, they are absolutely *necessary – essential*. When eating a meal, I always have liquid with me, too. So it is with doctrine: the basics are with you always. My house always has a foundation. Once it's built, we don't get rid of the foundation. So, we see what the author's saying here. He proves his point as he moves forward in this letter. If you know the basics, you will be carried along into more doctrine. You will see how the gospel affects everything!

² [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), Heb 6:1.

And, as you grow, he says you will move on to maturity, “not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, ² and of instruction about washings, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment.”³

Maturity treats the basics as essential. The illustration is that maturity doesn’t keep re-laying the foundation. Put another way, a person who keeps questioning the basics is a baby and can’t move forward. So, if you’re a person who is stuck in a continuous cycle saying, “Well, I’m not sure Jesus is” or “Is it really worth it to follow him,” or, “I’m not sure about a future kingdom,” these are basics. You need to heed the counsel of the author in chapter 5, saying you need someone to come alongside of you and help you.

Maybe you’re wondering, though, what the basics are. What’s foundational? The author provides a list of pairings. **Repentance from dead works and faith toward God, washings and laying on of hands, resurrection and eternal judgment.** Since they’re paired together, that should help us understand what he’s saying.

The first basic is conversion. In other words, “What must I do to be saved?” Turn from sin to Jesus. You know living for yourself and the things of this world aren’t going to give you eternal life. They’re not going to rescue you and make you right with God. Trust the Lord to give you what you were made for: a reconciled relationship with God. Repentant faith is vital. Without this, you do not know God.

But close to conversion is what comes next: washings and laying on of hands. But what does this mean? Some say that “washings” is simply talking about baptism. But the author words it in the plural form. It’s the only plural in this list. So, what does he mean here? Well, there were different kinds of ritual washings and even baptisms. There was Jewish baptism. There was the baptism of John. There was the baptism of Jesus. Then there was the baptism of the Holy Spirit. In Acts 18 and 19, we have a story about Apollos and other believers in Ephesus who were only aware of the baptism of John, and then they were baptized by the Spirit. This is what I think the author of Hebrews is talking about here. Essential in ABC’s of God’s Word is understanding baptism. Are you have the Spirit? And, if so, have you followed Jesus by giving a symbol in being baptized?

By the way, I want to speak to parents briefly here: is baptism important? Yes. If your child says they have followed Jesus, but they don’t want to get baptized, is that a problem? Potentially. I personally think that’s a conversation piece. When one of my son’s told me he trusted Jesus, I waited to talk about baptism with him, but when I did, I said, “If you say you trust Jesus, then you need to be baptized. If you don’t get baptized, then I’m not sure you really follow Jesus.” I wasn’t trying to guilt him into it. I think there’s a way you explain it, but it must be explained. Baptism doesn’t save, but it is a part of the Christian’s life. If I follow Jesus, I will follow Jesus. If my child said he followed Jesus and he didn’t obey the Lord in other areas and refused to, I would be concerned; why not with baptism? According to Hebrews, having the Holy Spirit and being baptized is an essential understanding.

And, this actually is only further emphasized by the next phrase “laying on of hands.” Scripturally, the laying on of hands took place at baptism, in prayer for healing, and also to commission someone. Given the connection with “washings,” I think this is a reference to water baptism. The laying on of hands isn’t something magical but in some way speaks to the commission and blessing of God upon the person who is professing their faith in Jesus in baptism. So, to restate, by putting these two phrases together, the

³ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), Heb 6:1–2.

author is probably emphasizing here an awareness of the baptisms that exist and then actually being baptized in water.

Then he moves on to resurrection and eternal judgment. Listen, if you believe Jesus rose from the dead, then you have to believe you're going to raise from the dead someday, Christian. And, if you came to Christ, you also were aware that there was an eternal judgment coming. And, notice, he says "eternal judgment" not just a temporal one. There is a place that people will go to after death: with God in his dwelling place or separated from God's grace in Hell and the Lake of Fire. Yet, Jesus, through his life, death and resurrection lived the life we could not live and then took the death that we deserved to die (God's wrath) on the cross so that we could be free from the wrath of God and be with him forever when we are raised from the dead. Praise God for his mercy and grace in Jesus!

As you hear these essentials, you could be thinking, where are other essentials like substitutionary atonement? Well, clearly within some of these phrases, you would have some more meaning in them. If I'm going to trust Jesus to save me, I have to believe he atoned for my sins. I find this list to be very helpful, though. And the author says this is foundational and we shouldn't keep rebuilding. To the Hebrew Christians who are wavering in their faith, the author is saying, "Stop questioning it, and live on this foundation. Don't move away from it. Grow on top of it." This is what we need as well. So, the author says in verse 3: And this we will do if God permits.⁴ But he doesn't immediately build off of the foundation. Verses 4-8 is a stern warning. Why didn't the author just trust God that he was going to permit the author to build on the foundation? It's because the author believes God is going to use a warning to mature them. God may permit them to mature through using this warning.

This statement emphasizes the sovereign goodness of God while also humbling humanity. God is the one who graces us with the knowledge we have. Will he permit the Hebrew Christians to know what they need to know? Will they grow in the truth or will they drift? It's a serious question that needs contemplating. And, it's a question for all of us. If you are drifting, are you going to let yourself continue or will you turn to the merciful God, asking him for grace to know him more? Let the basics move you forward because

2. If you drift far enough you will shipwreck (i.e. – perish forever; vv. 4-6).

Let's read verses 4-6 again: ⁴For 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, ⁵and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, ⁶and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt. ⁵

What does this sound like to you when reading it? Break down the sentence a little. The big idea is that it is impossible to restore certain people to repentance. What type of person is the author talking about here? Who cannot be restored to repentance? This is an integral question to ask because if God's Word is to be applied to all of our lives individually, then we have a lot at stake in answering this question correctly. We don't want to get this wrong.

⁴ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), Heb 6:3.

⁵ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), Heb 6:4–6.

Some people believe that these verses are talking about people who looked and acted like Christians, but really weren't. They walked away (like some in the Hebrew Christian church), and they have apostacized. They won't come back because their rejection was like that of the Pharisees. Other people this passage is talking about real Christians who then no longer believe and they then lose their salvation. This is a viewpoint held by traditional Wesleyans and Lutherans. Faith saves, but if you no longer have faith, you will die in your sins.

I strongly disagree with that view (and also the first viewpoint). I do not believe Christians can lose their salvation. And yet, while I believe that there are passages talking about people who can pretend Christianity for a time and then stray away, I do not believe these verses are talking about that. The author is talking directly to the Christians and warning them as Christians.

Let's go point-by-point to see what it is then that the author is saying, and why I don't believe he's talking about people who merely profess Jesus. The people he talks about here are those who have once been enlightened, tasted the heavenly gift, shared in the Holy Spirit, tasted the goodness of the Word of God and the powers of the age to come.

To be enlightened is to refer to the time when you first came to faith in Christ. You were made aware of reality and you trusted in him. Later on in Hebrews 10:32, the author writes, **"But recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings. . ."**⁶ The only other time the word "enlightened" is used in Hebrews is referring to the time when the people actually came to faith in Jesus. And Scripturally, it's never used to refer to a scenario where it just seems like they were enlightened. To be "enlightened" is to be saved.

The next phrase is "tasted the heavenly gift." The word "taste" is used twice in this list, and it means to experience something to the full. So, Jesus "tasted" death. He didn't just sip it. He experienced it to the full. That's what this word means here. So, this person tasted the heavenly gift to the full. Only Christians can have the fullness of what's being talked about here: the "heavenly gift?" This is a general term. But it refers to God's generosity. In 2 Corinthians 9:15, Paul praises God and says, ¹⁵"Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!"⁷ Those who trust Jesus have been given the fullness of God's generosity. Oh, just ponder that, Ventura. Where you deserved the cup of God's wrath poured out on you because of your sin, Jesus took the wrath and now God's generosity is poured out on you!

Now, the author says the person is also a partaker of the Holy Spirit. Biblically speaking, to partake of something is to participate fully in something. This isn't a word that is saying, "to seem like you're participating." In every instance of this word in the book of Hebrews – 3:1, 3:14, 12:8 – it means actual participation. The same must be true here. Those who trust Jesus now have full participation in the Holy Spirit. Christian, do you realize that God, the Spirit, is at work in you to honor and love God?

Look down again and see the next phrase. He uses "taste" again, but now talks about tasting the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come. Oh, when you came to faith in Christ, you loved the Truth of God. But what is this "powers of the age to come?" Tasting things of the coming age. I'm honestly unsure of the fullness of the phrase. But probably in the first century context, it included miracles: those things that are going to be in the coming Kingdom that God is beginning to shine forth in this present age.

⁶ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), Heb 10:32.

⁷ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), 2 Co 9:15.

What we see in these words is that the author is clearly talking about Christians. Only Christians can have these experiences and gifts. So, one commentator wrote, **“It seems clear that the people described in these verses are real Christians, not just interested people on the fringe. This is the clear implication of the language used in the light both of Hebrews’ use of similar terms and of general NT usage”** (Longman, p. 83).

But here’s where we have a problem, right? What about Jesus saying that not one of his will be plucked from his hand? What about Paul saying that he who began a work is faithful to complete? How does that mesh with the author saying that it is impossible for this person to be restored to repentance? Well, I think the author wants us to feel the tension here. I mean, to restore to repentance means that there were people who repented at one point in time, but they can’t repent again. Christian, do you want that to happen to you? Every Christian here should be nodding their head “no.” And this is the seriousness of the author here. Christians should not want this to happen to them. The seriousness of drifting is put out on display. Are you wishing to shipwreck your faith? Will you not wake up to the seriousness of your soul drifting to the precipice of Hell?

To “fall away” refers to someone who “deliberately abandon” the faith (see Longman, p. 83). And to do so is to crucify the Son of God. *The Son of God*. You aren’t simply walking away from some Galilean who was innocently crucified. You are spurning God in the flesh. To know who Jesus is and to turn from him is to shame him publicly and to harm yourself. Oh Christian, if you have the Holy Spirit and know the worth of Jesus, do not continue down the drifting path! To reject Jesus is to reject all that is good, beautiful and best. It is to embrace your eternal judgment. Take seriously the sin of drifting.

But you could be thinking, “But I’m a Christian! I’m not going to lose my salvation!” And so, maybe you’re still confused by what the author is saying here. He’s talking about Christians and warning them of the dangers if they persist in sin, but he’s not saying they can lose their salvation. Instead, I think he’s heightening their understanding of what salvation includes. Imagine that you live on a compound that is surrounded by a high wall. You ask someone what’s on the other side of the wall, and they say that there’s lava at the bottom and people with guns aimed, ready to shoot anyone coming over the other side. Then that person said, “It’s impossible for anyone who makes it over that wall to survive.” Well, you decide to walk close to the wall. You feel the heat of the lava. You’re curious if the person is telling the truth. So, you climb the wall. Then you feel the pelt of a bullet. You hear the words “It is impossible.” Then bullets wiz over the top of the wall. You hear the words again. You quickly get back down and you never return to the wall again.

This is how a warning functions. It is true that if a Christian denied the faith, they’d never be able to come back to faith in Christ. And, it’s true that drifting leads to denial. But it’s also true that a Christian cannot apostacize. Even a few verses down, the author says he’s confident this won’t happen to them because those results don’t belong to salvation. Those who participate fully cannot *no longer* participate. Therefore, God will not allow his children to deny him completely and utterly. And, if you’re drifting that direction, you’re not living in line with who you are as a Christian.

If this is what the author is communicating, then go back to my wall illustration. What’s the point of the warning? When a Christian is climbing the wall, the warning warns them. The warning is real. If a Christian denies Christ, they could never repent again. And every Christian listens. This warning functions to wake them up. The warning is part of God’s process to keep his children. God’s children will listen to God’s voice and won’t deny him. The thought of apostacy causes a child to shutter.

If you're a Christian here today and you've been confronted in your drifting, you will repent. You will hear these warnings. You will know they come out of love. God will never leave you nor forsake you – and that is your delight. You do not want to be without him.

So, where are you? Take one last step of evaluation. Look at verses 7-8: **⁷ For land that has drunk the rain that often falls on it, and produces a crop useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God. ⁸ But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed, and its end is to be burned. ⁸**

In agriculture, the land that is cultivated, receives the rain and then produces a crop is useful and receives a blessing from God. The land that denies the water and only bears thorns is cursed, and is going to be burned. What's the point of that land?

What do you want to be? If you are a Christian and you've drifted, turn back to Jesus for forgiveness and grace. The only way you can be useful is if you take the milk of the Word, the essentials, and grow in knowing God's Word. Then obey it. Keep growing. Keep persevering. No matter how hard, trust the Holy Spirit to work in you and grow you. There's more to life than just this life. There's a Savior who is Superior to all.

If you're here today and you haven't trusted in Jesus, I pray that you would. God is so good and he takes his children seriously and loves them infinitely. He grants you to enjoy all the privileges and blessings of eternal life!

This morning, as we move into communion, I want you to think through what it means to be blessed by God and be one who is useful for God's glory.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Hughes, R. Kent. *Preaching the Word: Hebrews, An Anchor for the Soul*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015.
2. Hughes, Philip Edgcumbe. *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990.
3. Lane, William. *Word Biblical Commentary: Hebrews 1-8*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1991.
4. Longman III, Tremper. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Hebrews, Revelation*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006.

⁸ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), Heb 6:6–8.