

Pressing on to Maturity
Hebrews 6:4-8
Part Three

We are presently studying the Book of Hebrews. This book was written by an unknown author to a group of struggling Hebrew Christians living in Rome, who under a great persecution were considering leaving the Christian faith in order to return to Judaism.

The author in response to this struggle wrote this particular book in order to strengthen their faith so that they, in having their faith strengthened, might be able to persevere.

In seeking to accomplish this goal he sought to focus his readers attention on the superiority of Christ. So, what have we seen so far in our ongoing study of this epistle?

We have seen that Christ is superior to the Old Testament prophets. We have seen that Christ is superior to the angels. We have seen that Christ is superior to Moses. And now we are seeing in our ongoing study that Christ's priesthood is superior to all other priesthoods (Hebrews 4:14-10:18). This section began in **Hebrews 4:14** and will continue all the way down through **Hebrews 10:18**.

So how did the author begin this section? The author began this section by focusing his readers attention on Christ's heavenly high priestly ministry in **Hebrews 4:14-16**. After this the author then pointed out to his readers that Christ's appointment to His heavenly high priestly ministry was according to the order Melchizedek. He did this in **Hebrews 5:1-10**. So then what did the author do?

The author, after having introduced the Son's divine appointment according to the order of Melchizedek, then took a strategic detour in order to warn his readers in Hebrews 5:11-6:20.

So how did the author begin this warning section? The author began this warning section with an exhortation (Hebrews 5:11-6:3). This exhortation section, which was built around the author's negative assessment of his

reader's spiritual maturity, began in **Hebrews 5:11** and concluded in **Hebrews 6:3**. So how did we break up this particular section?

The author started this exhortation section in **Hebrews 5:11-12** by stating their problem. And what was their problem? They were dull of hearing. They were lethargic in hearing. They were lazy in hearing. And because of this they, rather than spiritually maturing, had actually gone backwards and were now spiritual infants feeding on milk rather than on solid food or in other words they were now feeding on the elementary teaching about Christ rather than on more substantive teaching about Christ.

The author then, after having stated the problem, illustrated it in **Hebrews 5:13-14**. So, what did he communicate to his readers through this illustration? He communicated to his readers that those professing believers who continued to feed on milk rather than solid food would not be accustomed to the word of righteousness, and therefore would invariably find themselves not being able to discern the difference between good and evil. This obviously is not a very good thing and would leave them spiritually speaking extremely vulnerable, which in fact they were currently demonstrating.

So how did the author conclude this exhortation section? He exhorted them to **“press on to maturity”** or other words he exhorted them, as those who had been up to that point “dull of hearing,” to purpose themselves to be more energetic, not only in respect to their hearing but also in their pursuit of the more substantive truths concerning Christ within God's word. This, of course, their pursuit of maturity, was the cure for their present spiritual problem. And this is where we left off. So where will the author of Hebrews take us next?

After the author exhorted his readers, he then presented a harsh warning (Hebrews 6:4-8). So now let me read these verses for you. **“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, (5) and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, (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. (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; (8) but if it yields thorns and thistles, it is worthless and close to being cursed, and it ends up being burned.” So is this a harsh warning? Absolutely! It is a harsh warning and rightly so. For if this struggling Hebrew congregation did not heed his earlier exhortation in **Hebrews 6:3**, **“to pursue maturity,”** the very thing that this author is now warning them against in **verses 4-8** might in fact become their reality or in other words they may in fact end up abandoning their earlier confession of faith, which in turn would lead them back to Judaism and to their former Jewish practices. And would there be consequences for this? Absolutely! And this author certainly wanted his readers to know this. And this is why he wrote this particular passage. He wrote this passage, this harsh warning, to literally put the fear of God in their hearts.

Now will this warning passage be easy for us to interpret? No! This warning passage is one of the most controversial in Hebrews, if not in the whole of the New Testament, and has caused considerable discomfort in the history of interpretation.

And what is the reason for this discomfort? The reason for the discomfort is that a cursory reading of this warning passage could very easily raise doubts about the doctrine of eternal security or in other words the doctrine of “once saved always saved” even though hundreds of passages in the New Testament clearly affirm this doctrine.

So as we approach this passage this morning, that contains this very harsh warning, I would hope that you would be very engaged. And I would also hope that as we examine this passage that we all might be able to see that even though on the surface it might seem to contradict the doctrine of eternal security, in fact, it is no contradiction at all.

So how did author begin this harsh warning section? The author began this harsh warning section with an assertion (Hebrews 6:4-6).

And what was the assertion? The author in Hebrews 6:4-6 asserted that it is impossible to renew to repentance those who fall away after they had enjoyed certain spiritual blessings.

And where do we see this assertion? We see this assertion in **Hebrews 6:4-6**. So now let me read these verses for you. **“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, (5) and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, (6) and then have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance.” So did the author in these verses make the assertion that it is impossible to renew to repentance those who fall away, after they had enjoyed certain spiritual blessings? Yes! I believe he did.

So now let us look at these certain spiritual blessings as recorded for us in **Hebrews 6:4-6**, and as we begin to do so it is important to note as we look at these blessings that there is a certain ambiguity built into any attempt to interpret them. Why? This is because the author did not define the terms that he used to describe these blessings. This is why. So with this in mind let us begin to look at these various blessings.

So, what was the first blessing? The first blessing was having **“once been enlightened.”** So, what does this mean? It could mean a number of different things but I believe the best interpretation would be that the descriptive phrase, “having once been enlightened,” most likely referred to the initial exposure to the gospel and the early instruction in Christian doctrine.

So, what is the second blessing? The second blessing is having **“tasted of the heavenly gift.”** So, what does this mean? It could mean a number of different things but I believe that the best interpretation would be that the descriptive phrase, having “tasted of the heavenly gift,” most likely referred to having experienced the blessings of God that surround salvation.

So, what was the third blessing? The third blessing was having **“been made partakers of the Holy Spirit.”** So, what does this mean? It could mean a number of different things but I believe that the best interpretation would be that the descriptive phrase, having “been made partakers of the Holy Spirit,” most likely referred to someone having become “sharers of” the Holy Spirit.

So, what was the fourth blessing? The fourth blessing was having **“tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come.”** So, what does this mean? It could mean a number of different things, but in light of the close relationship between God’s word and His power in Hebrews 1:2-3, 2:3-4, 3:7-19, and 4:12,13, I believe that the best interpretation is that the descriptive phrase, having “tasted the good word of God and the powers of

the age to come,” most likely referred to having experienced God’s good word.

So now having taken a look at these various spiritual privileges let me ask you this question. Can the language that the author used to describe these various spiritual blessings be interpreted to apply to true born again Christians? And the answer is what? The answer is yes, of course they can! But now let me ask you another question. Can the language that the author used to describe these various spiritual blessings be interpreted to apply to someone other than a true born again Christian? And the answer is what? Now be careful! The answer is yes. And I believe that this is exactly what the author had in mind here in **Hebrews 6:4-6**.

The author in Hebrews 6:4-6 was not describing true born again believers but unsaved professing believers who because of their attachment to the church had experienced certain spiritual blessings, in other words the very blessings that he had just described. So how does this work?

When unsaved professing believers attach themselves to a church, when they had never as an expression of their faith in Christ turned from their sin to follow Him, they will still be spiritually blessed because of that attachment.

They will be blessed by being enlightened or in other words they will by default be exposed to the gospel and will be instructed in Christian doctrine. They will also be blessed by being able to taste the heavenly gift or in other words they will by default be able to experience the blessings of God that surround salvation. They will also be blessed by becoming partakers of the Holy Spirit or in other words they will by default become “sharers” in the Holy Spirit. And finally they will also be blessed by being able to “taste the good word of God and the powers of the age to come” or in other words they will by default experience God’s word and the power that is associated with God word, simply by their attachment to the church and to true believers.

But what happens if they “**fall away**” or in other words reject Christ and the message of Christ and return back to their former life in spite of all these spiritual blessings?

Those who “fall away” or in other words who reject Christ and the message of Christ and return back to their former life in spite of these spiritual

blessings will not be able to be renewed again to repentance. This is what the assertion in **Hebrews 6:4-6** tells us.

Now this should not surprise us in light of what we have already seen in this epistle as the author compared the present danger of this struggling Hebrew congregation with what happened to the Exodus generation of Israel. They had been blessed by their identification with Moses, but they ultimately rejected Moses and the gospel of the Promised Land, even in spite of all the spiritual blessings that they experienced by their attachment with Moses. And what was the result? God cursed them and promised them that they would never enter the Promised Land because they, in their unbelief, had rejected Him and His message delivered to them through Moses. So should this impossibility surprise us? No!

The impossibility of God renewing a person to repentance was explained by this author in two parallel clauses at the end of verse six.

So let us look at the first clause, **“Since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God.”** So how would those who had been in such a blessed position and then who have fallen away actually be considered as having done this?

Those who had been in such a blessed position and then had fallen away were in effect rejecting the saving work of the Son and showing contempt for Him just as those who crucified Him.

So let us now look at the second, **“and put Him to open shame.”** So how would those who had been in such a blessed position and then fell away be actually considered by this author as putting Christ to open shame?”

Those who had been in a blessed position and who then had fallen away had in effect put Christ to open shame because they made it possible for Christ to once again to be publicly mocked. So, what does the author do next?

The author, after explaining to his readers why it would be impossible for those who had been in such a blessed position and then fallen away to be once again renewed to repentance, then went on using agricultural imagery to illustrate the contrast between those who come to a good end in

relationship with God as a result of their perseverance over and against those who do not come to a good end in terms of their perseverance.

So, based on this agricultural imagery, what was the good end? Now let me now read this **verse 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.**” This is the good end in relationship with God that has resulted because of perseverance.

And what was the bad end, based on this agricultural imagery? Let me now read for you **verse 8. “But if it [or in other words this land that drinks rain that often falls on it] yields thorns and thistles, it is worthless and close to being cursed, and it ends us being burned.**” This is the bad end in the relationship with God that has resulted because of a lack of perseverance.

So, what does this expression “**close to be cursed**” mean? “Close to being cursed” does not imply a narrow escape but merely that it has not yet occurred.

And what does the expression “**ends up being burned**” mean? This expression hardly pictures a purifying so that the ground can produce a better crop; rather the tenor of the passage appears to picture ultimate judgment.

May God give us the grace to pursue maturity so that we, rather than falling away and being ultimately cursed, might find ourselves persevering and being ultimately blessed.