

Hebrews 5:12-6:9

As we finished our last study we started digging into what it means that **Jesus is our High Priest**, which is focal now through **Ch. 10**.

- And whether you believe the author is Paul or someone else, right from the beginning you could see the passion behind this writer in the way the position and perfect nature of **Jesus** are spoken of.
- So, what has been recorded here is not just an intellectual exercise based on deep study and research, but **1) a matter of his whole heart**. Which is exactly what should have been the position of the Jewish believers he was speaking to. And what is immediately obvious to others when we speak of Jesus.
- Yet we'll see it is not only a matter of the heart, **2)** but **also** a matter of such importance to him that he dug in to search, to understand, and provide more information. So folks, in our pursing and sharing Jesus, it needs to be **both** a matter of the heart **and** a diligent searching of the bible for more understanding. If this had been the case, how different would this letter have been?

And we will pick back up in the middle of **verse 9** to lightly review what we covered last time.

*^{9b} He (Jesus) became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him, ¹⁰ called by God as **High Priest** "according to the order of Melchizedek," ¹¹ of whom we have much to say, and hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing.*

He wanted to tell them more, but **they had not listened earnestly** (which was the warning he gave them in 2:1). Yet even though they had become lazy/slothful with their looking into the word of God, he tried to get them back on track **and just kept on teaching like they were listening**.

- Just because these believers were not listening as diligently as they should have, it didn't mean he stopped teaching, or started watering it down for them.
- And, as we'll see, it didn't mean he went on to self-help and motivational speaking in order to keep the audience. I think there are more than a few ministry leaders who should take note here.
- Just like the author here, if we have the opportunity to share or teach, we must simply keep pressing in for those who do want to take the word of God in.

Now, this is where we get to verses we haven't covered yet.

¹² For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first 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 unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. ¹⁴ But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

The people he is was addressing here were Jews, meaning they would have had **an amazing OT foundation**, that once illuminated by seeing Jesus as the Messiah, should have catapulted their understanding of the word, **bringing everything that was veiled in the Law, now into technicolor**.

- Yet that's apparently not what was taking place. Those ah-hah moments weren't coming to them as they should have, **because** they had not invested the fullness of their **hearts and minds** to their belief in Jesus.
- And with all they had been given by means of an advantage over the gentile converts, there was a real disappointment on Paul's part that they had not moved past the most basic understanding of their faith.

Now lest we think this does not apply to us being we are not Jews, therefore not having the foundations of Judaism on our side, **Paul also speaks in a similar way to the Corinthians** (a more predominantly gentile audience). Because they had been given **special tutoring in the basics of the faith directly from Paul** yet also had not progressed to maturity (1 Cor. 3:1-3).

- And I think it's very apparent what **we** have been given as 21st century Americans, in terms of our ability to search the scriptures to gain a greater understanding of our faith, **is at least equal** to Paul's personal tutoring to the Corinthians at that time. And that's before we factor in some of the newer technology tools (which if used correctly, can provide information almost instantaneously).
- And he makes it clear here that **the immaturity** of these believers is because they were *unskilled in the word of righteousness*. And then goes on to make the point that **maturity comes to those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil**.
- Now when we were back in 4:12 we were told that the word of God could cut to the truth, "**and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart**". And because they were **immature** by reason of not

digging into the word, **their discernment was diminished to the point they couldn't discern that going back to the Law was to depart from faith.** But don't worry, because Paul is going to let them know 😊.

And if that doesn't stand out to someone as the same situation many believers are in today, they might be living in a bubble. There is so much information available, and yet a lack of **using** and **exercising** what is known, that it is apparent that far too many have no ability to discern what is good and evil.

But before we jump into **Ch 6**, it is so vital for us to remember yet once again **this letter is written to Jewish believers**, who's entire lives were steeped in Judaism. For in the beginning of this letter the argument is made that **Jesus is superior** to all the things the Jews had placed at **the top of their list in relating with God**.

- But from here through **Ch. 10**, it's **not just showing that Jesus is superior** to the Levitical priesthood, but that **He had replaced it (7:11-22)** (which also came with a replacement of the Old Covenant with the new one).
- And the reason this is so vital to keep in view is that all the warnings in this book are against departing from faith in Jesus to return to Judaism. Apart from that backdrop we can come to the wrong conclusions.

But I will also remind us that even though we did not come from Judaism, any believer who is not growing in their love and understanding of the truth of God, can also be tempted to return to the dead works they walked in before receiving Jesus. It was directed to them but is relevant to us all.

6:1 Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection (maturity), not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, ² of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. ³ And this we will do if God permits.

So again, Paul is wanting to take them to maturity, and in the process, he states that their discussions cycle around **3 primary understandings** that are by his estimation **equivalent to learning the A, B, Cs of our faith**. They are **1) repentance from dead works and of faith toward God**, **2) the doctrine of baptisms and laying on of hands**, and **3) resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment**.

- And what we should see in these items is that **each of these can relate to Judaism**, and yet after Jesus had come, **more fully to Christianity**.
- For in the gospel accounts, which these Jewish believers should have been very familiar with (but apparently were not), Jesus again brought to light the **deeper meaning** of each of these truths that were once **concealed** in the OT and where now **revealed** in the NT.
- But I believe the point being made here is these Jewish believers (due to persecution and failure to plant themselves in the teachings of Jesus) **began reverting to the interpretation of these things found in Judaism** (which they were brought up in) **as opposed to their fulfillment in Jesus** (which they failed to mature in).

The obvious implication being that **the Law and sacrificial system couldn't save a single soul**. And their thinking of going back to it posed a real danger. So, he now moves in to give them the next warning.

- But before we continue, I want to tell you **there are several different views on these next 3 verses** because they are some of the most difficult in the bible. And when you come to challenging verses such as these, I want to remind you **1)** that context is still king, and **2)** the bible is still the best commentary on the bible. **3)** Which also means the bible is not going to contradict itself.

⁴ For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, ⁵ and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, ⁶ if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame.

So, here are **the two common areas** that bring about debate in these verses, **1)** are the people being spoken of here true believers or had they come short of salvation? And **2)** is this saying that for some people it is **impossible to repent**? And I think **a good starting point** to answering the first question is **to add some more information** that comes from **the next warning in Hebrews**.

- Which after the writer exhorts them to **hold fast to their confession of hope Jesus (10:23)**, says; *For if we sin willfully (the willful sin spoken of here being turning away from Jesus) after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries. Anyone who has rejected Moses' law*

dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace (10:26-29)?

- And we see here this group **not only heard** *the knowledge of the truth* (which the text makes clear is regarding Jesus), but they **received** it. And in our text today, I am not sure how anyone can say that someone who was *once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit,* ⁵ *and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come*, could be anything less than a believer.
- So, I find there's **no honest way to draw any other conclusion** than that this is speaking of those who had truly put their faith in Jesus (yet again, to be fair, some prominent theologians and Greek scholars take that stance. But certainly not all).

Moving on to the next debatable piece in regard to the question of what it means that for these it would be **impossible to repent** if they fall away, **let's again look at context.**

- **Ch. 10** says *there no longer remains a sacrifice for sin* while **Ch. 6** says it's **impossible to renew them again to repentance**. And it should be noted that the word "**impossible**" means exactly that.
- But what is **the circumstance** for which it is "**impossible**" needs to be the question. And the answer is if they go back to Judaism to try and be justified before God. For (as we've already mentioned) once Jesus came and instituted the better covenant, **the old one became obsolete** (Heb. 8:13). Meaning the old system was **forever retired** and that *there no longer remains a sacrifice for sin* under it.
- Which also meant if you were trying to use the blood of bulls and goats *to renew them again to repentance*, it was **impossible**. And as a side note, it would be just a few more years until their temple was destroyed by Titus (the Roman military commander at the time), **even removing the only place the old and insufficient sacrifices could be made.**

But what we also get from each of these texts is that God did not look kindly upon them **rejecting** the work of salvation that He brought **through sacrificing His Son**. Which is very well highlighted in 10:29, saying "²⁹ *Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has 1) trampled the Son of God underfoot, 2) counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and 3) insulted the Spirit of grace?*

I think **Guzik** brings this point home here in summarizing what I think is **the companion piece to these verses in our main text**, saying "Their forsaking of Jesus is tantamount to crucifying Him all over again, especially if they were to express their repentance in traditional Jewish forms: especially animal sacrifices, which denies the total work of Jesus for them on the cross."

Ok, so now that we have that out of the way, **let's go back to the question** that is likely circling around in some minds, and that is **if it would be impossible for those who had followed Jesus, and then turned back to Judaism, to turn back to Christ?**

- Because if it is impossible for them to repent from that, **then what would keep it from being impossible to turn away from Christ to anything else and not be able to return?**
- Well, **Warren Wiersbe** rightfully points out that "the words "crucify" and "put" in **Heb. 6:6** are in the Greek, present participles (which could also be read) "**while** they are crucifying...and **while** they are putting Him to an open shame". He goes on to say "The writer did not say that these people could never be brought back to repentance. He said that they could not be brought to repentance **while** they were still treating Jesus Christ this way."
- But I will also say that even though he is correct, this might not be the best rendering of the Greek (for you bible geeks, the debate among Greek scholars is if the emphasis by the writer was on cause or condition). And at the same time, **knowing the bible will not contradict the bible, 1)** in the Old Testament God is continually calling His people to come back to Him (even after incredibly egregious sin). And **2)** in the New Testament He calls His people to repent so He can restore them (**Acts 8:22, 2 Cor. 5:20, James 5:19-20, 1 John 1:9, Rev. 2-3, Luke 15-** the parable of the prodigal son).

And you and I have heard directly from the words of Jesus that the only sin that would **never** be pardoned if it were sought in repentance is that of the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. Which occurred when the Pharisees claimed the spirit working in Jesus was Satan and not the Holy Spirit (Matt. 12:32). And **this was not that**.

- But here's the rub, the text also makes it clear that they could turn back from Christ. And the truth is they were considering turning back.
- So, no matter what you do with the text, it was obvious that if they did, and if they afterward did not repent and return to Jesus, they were going to be eternally lost.

What the text does not say is that you and I can, by result of making some stupid decision, have our salvation revoked. **But what it does seem to clearly say** is if you revoke your faith in Jesus, He will honor that eternally fatal decision.

- For if they could repent of what is described as, *trampling the Son of God underfoot, counting the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulting the Spirit of grace?* And, of *crucifying again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame*, do you really think you can exhaust the grace of God more than these, if afterward you come to Him in sincere repentance?
- But the real way to be victorious is to simply stay so connected to Jesus though **1)** maturing in your faith **2)** and relationship with Him, that if/when we do get tripped up, it looks more like catching your toe on a door jamb than falling out of a third story window 😊. For Prov. 24:16 says to us “*For a righteous man many fall seven time and rise again. But the wicked shall fall by calamity*”. Folks, if you have stumbled, the Lord wants you to get back up. It's called repentance. And He will receive it/you!

And now he uses a word picture to bring home his point.

⁷ For the earth which drinks in the rain that often comes upon it, and bears herbs useful for those by whom it is cultivated, receives blessing from God; ⁸ but if it bears thorns and briers, it is rejected and near to being cursed, whose end is to be burned.

I think the point he's making is if you continue to mature in the faith and keep cultivating your relationship with Christ, **1)** things will grow in your life that are useful for you **2)** and indicative of your abiding in Him. But pull back and return to the dead works of the law (or anything else), where nothing good can grow, and **you will certainly suffer loss to one degree or another. Depending on whether you stay there, or not.**

And I will add that it seems to me those who have known all of these wonderful experiences with and from God, but turn away from their faith in Jesus, **tend to have been apathetic long before turning back**. So, once they do turn back, it seems they are less interested or inclined to come back!

- And folks, make no mistake about it, the message seems to make this very clear that such a decision is to surrender salvation. Because it's only found in Jesus.

And now Paul turns the corner from warning to encouragement.

⁹ But, beloved, we are confident of better things concerning you, yes, things that accompany salvation, though we speak in this manner.

There is no doubt that parts of this letter were difficult for those who received it. For out of love, the Holy Spirit (communicating through the author) **was speaking to them in a very raw way** about what they were considering walking away from.

- Yet in his stern warning, he also shows his great desire for these believers (and for us) to receive the inheritance and promises **Jesus procured for us all on the cross**.
- And so, he starts with a warning **and concludes in taking the position of being our greatest supporter and cheerleader of our faith**.
- I hope we can receive such corrections and warnings when or if necessary, knowing His desire is for us to spend eternity with Him.

If you are not sure that's where you're at today, I hope there's a little tension going on inside of you, because that tension might just be Jesus calling you to return in repentance before He returns for us, or your body finally gives up.

- And I believe the word tells us no matter how far you have gone, you can choose to repent and come back to Him today (see also Rev. 2:4-7).