

A STUDY OF HEBREWS

Signs of Salvation and Apostasy - Chapter 5:11-6:12

I. Recent Review on Hebrews 4-5

A. Jesus Christ is our Great High Priest, called by God, and sympathetic to us all since He was truly and painfully tempted.

1. Therefore we who have profound needs must fly to God's throne of grace, freely opened because of Christ's heavenly intercession for us. (4:14-5:10)

Author's Most Recent Point: *And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him,¹⁰ being designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek. (Heb 5:9-10)*

II. Text: Hebrews 5:11-6:12 – A Divine Detour Detailing the Devastation of Disbelief and Disobedience

5:11 About this 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 need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food...

“[Our wills and affections] are the principle wings or sails of our souls, whereby we are, or may be, carried on in our voyage...When, in the diligent use of means, our wills and affections do adhere and cleave with delight unto the things wherein we are instructed, then we are in our right course; then **if the holy gales of the Spirit of God do breathe on us, are we in a blessed tendency toward perfection.**”

- John Owen, *Hebrews*, Vol 5, 13-14.

6:1 Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity...

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.

⁹ Though we speak in this way, yet in your case, beloved, we feel sure of better things—things that belong to salvation. ¹⁰ For God is not unjust so as to overlook your work and the love that you have shown for his name in serving the saints, as you still do.

¹¹ And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end, ¹² so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises. (Heb 6:4-12)

1. What are some of the apparent difficulties in understanding vv. 4-6? What does it appear to teach?

And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. (Phil 1:6)

I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. (John 10:28)

“Those whom God has accepted in his Beloved, effectually called, and sanctified by his Spirit, **can neither totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace, but shall certainly persevere** in it to the end and be eternally saved.”

- Westminster Confession of Faith, 17.1

2. How does the category of “apostasy” help us to understand this text?

Apostate = one who has *seemed* to have been a Christian, professed faith, given signs, received sacraments, and then rejects and disowns Christ. Such a person is not merely an unbeliever, nor merely a disobedient but genuine Christian, but belongs to a third category altogether. They are not elect, but they are in the covenant community, then they leave it.

They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us. (1 John 2:19)

We must *pay more careful attention to what we have heard so that we do not drift away*. (Heb 2:1)

Therefore since the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it. (Heb 4:1)

If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left. (Heb 10:26)

You need to persevere, so that when you have done the will of God, you receive what he has promised. (Heb 10:36)

See to it that you do not refuse him who speaks. If they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, how much less will we who refuse him who warns us from heaven? (Heb 12:25)

3. To whom are these warning applied: the converted or the unconverted in the covenant community?

4. How does the parable of the four soils (Mark 4) teach the reality of apostasy?

5. How might the characteristics listed in Heb 6:4-8 describe apostates?

- “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”

“Others not elected, although they may be called by the ministry of the Word, **and may have some common operations of the Spirit**, yet they never truly come unto Christ...” (WCF, 10.4)

6. What comfort does the author give to his audience in vv. 9-10?

“I should like to enlarge on this subject, but really I do not know if I can; you are so spiritually immature. I must warn you solemnly that those who have once been baptized and tasted the blessings of the new age can never repeat the experience of repentance and conversion if they commit apostasy. Not that I think you actually mean to be apostates; I have better hopes of you than that. I want you rather to press on from the point you have reached, so as to attain full maturity, instead of sticking there, or slipping back.”
- F.F. Bruce, paraphrase of Heb 5:11-6:20, *Hebrews*, xx.

Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to make your calling and election sure, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall. (2 Pet 1:10)