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Hebrews 6



Hebrews - Steve Gregg

Steve Gregg discusses the warning section in Hebrews 6, which follows on from chapter 5's warning not to become stagnant in one's faith. Gregg suggests that the list of six things mentioned in the passage could be interpreted as Jewish practices and distinctives of Judaism, including the concept of washings rather than baptism. He stresses the importance of repentance and faith as the first stage in becoming Christian, followed by water baptism and laying on of hands, which represent the next stages of a convert's experience. Gregg also suggests that while it may be difficult, it is not impossible for someone to renew their repentance and faith and be restored to a saved state.

Transcript

So we now re-enter the discussion in Hebrews chapter 6. It is a continuation of a warning section. This is the third section like this we've encountered in Hebrews. The first one was very brief in chapter 2, verses 1 through 4, where he warned them against drifting and neglecting their salvation.

The second warning section was in chapter 3, verse 7, through chapter 4, verse 13. That was a warning about failing to enter into God's rest. He keeps interrupting his general line of argument with these parenthetical warnings.

The fact that he does this five different times in the course of a letter, a letter that he considers to be a short one, because he calls it a brief word of exhortation. When he talks about this letter in chapter 13, he says, please endure this brief word of exhortation. Yet in a brief letter, as he considers it, he interrupts himself five times to warn them about the danger there and spiritually suggests that this danger was very real.

At least in the mind of the rider, he felt like they were in need of some strong jolt to get them back on the right track. That certainly comes out in this chapter, where some of the most difficult material in the New Testament can be found. Only a few verses are really that difficult, but there are things that we definitely need to analyze somewhat.

At the end of chapter 5, he began to warn them that they were not progressing as they should. They were Christians for a long time, but had not shown that in the maturity level they were at. They did not really have the kind of discernment that a person needs, and that a mature Christian has.

That discernment is particularly useful in digesting spiritual things that are deep things. Because, frankly, the deeper you go into spiritual truth, the more nuanced, the more esoteric it is, the more you really need to be able to discern, is this really what we are supposed to be thinking here about this subject or not? This stuff that is on the surface, Jesus died for your sins, he rose again, you are supposed to repent. These are basic things.

You take them or leave them, you believe them or not, but they are not hard to grasp necessarily. Even a non-Christian is expected to make sense of them when you present that material. But there are some theological things that are deeper.

A person can claim these give you deep things of God, and it may actually be like it says of Jezebel in Revelation 2, these are deep things of Satan rather than deep things of God. And a mature Christian has to be able to discern, I mean this is deep, but is this really of God? Or is this some kind of deception? When you go deeper than the basics, you need to have a more nuanced grasp of what is true and what is not true. You need to be more mature and you need to have that discernment.

That he said that these young believers, or old believers who were still immature, that they were lacking. They needed to go on from there to a more mature place. This is also what Paul said when he was talking about the immaturity of the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 2. He said, these are things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, nor has entered into the mind of man, but God has revealed them to us by his Spirit.

He said the Spirit searches the deep things of God, and it takes a spiritual man to receive the things of the Spirit of God. Discernment, spiritual discernment, which is a result of maturity, which is a result of having put to use the Word of God in a proper way in your life, that state of maturity is a precondition for really being entrusted with the deeper things. That's what Paul was saying in 1 Corinthians 2 and what the writer here seems to be implying at the end of chapter 5. Now when we come into chapter 6, he says, therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to, it says perfection, but of course the word here should be in the context translated maturity, because that's his complaint.

You aren't mature, you're babes. Let's grow up. Let's go on to maturity.

Not laying again the foundation. Now when you build a building, you need to lay a foundation, and you need to do it right. But once it's laid, you don't have to lay it again and again and again.

If you're building a building and you just lay the foundation over and over and over again on top of itself, you're just building a monolith, you're just building a concrete block, you're not building a building. The foundation, though, does have to be laid properly at least once. Now you don't want to lay the foundation again, but you do want to lay it one time at least.

And the reason I bring this up is because the writer assumes that these people at least have had the foundation laid properly one time. And they need to go on from that. Let's build on that.

Let's don't lay the foundation again. But when we read of how he identifies that foundation, we say, wait a minute, there's a lot of stuff there I've never been taught myself. And I've been a Christian for years.

It's possible that the modern church is not teaching the same thing the early church was, so that when we read of what they counted as the foundation, we say, well, I don't know very many people who could expound on these, even if they've been Christians for 20, 30 years. Maybe the church is not laying the same foundation today that they laid back then. Maybe we need to lay the foundation for the first time in some modern churches.

Now, once it's laid properly, you don't need to keep laying it, at least not obsessing over it. You need to go on beyond. You can still make reference to the foundation again later on, but you don't want to always just be looking at that beginning stuff.

When you build a building, you want to pay good attention to the foundation while you're building it. And then once it's there, you count on it and you look to other aspects of the construction. And he says, we don't want to lay again the foundation of repentance from dead works, of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of the resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment.

And this we will do. That is, we will go on from this point to a greater stage of maturity, if God permits. No guarantees here, but if God allows, we will grow up beyond the point we're at now.

We will learn things that go beyond these foundational truths. Now, you need to notice, he listed six things, which he is equating with the foundations. These are the foundations of the Christian life, of the Christian teaching.

This is the milk. It's good to drink the milk when you're baby, but it goes beyond that and eventually develop a taste for solid food too. You don't want to just keep pouring on more milk in the baby.

He's got to learn to eat solid food someday. Let's not keep on at this level. Let's acknowledge this level, get it established, and move on to more things.

Now, the interesting thing about the list he gives is, if somebody, if you had not read this passage and someone asked you to make a short list of six things that you think are the foundational things. The first things to get squared away in a life of a new believer. What would you put in there? Okay, go to church, read your Bible, witness, pray, learn the doctrine of the Trinity, learn the doctrine of justification by faith alone.

I guess those are the foundational things. Those are the first things you tell a new Christian. Today, it's funny when you read this list that it's not the same list.

The first time I realized this is the time when, years ago, YWAM asked me to come teach a series, a week-long series on foundations. I thought, well, I don't know what they have in mind, but I know what passage talks about foundations. It's Hebrews 6, so I looked there.

I thought, well, this is not what I would have thought were the foundations. Some of these things are, but some of them definitely are not. I would have never included the laying on of hands.

as a foundational doctrine. Some churches neglect one or another or several of these other things. I was raised in a church that didn't say much about repentance, and it's at the top of the list.

I don't know if I really understood what repentance was, and if I did, I didn't understand it was a condition for salvation. We never really heard that too much in the church I was raised in. Now, faith toward God, lots of churches teach about that, though some go into really strange teachings about faith.

Faith churches, word of faith, and stuff like that. Some people definitely misunderstand that. It's a foundational thing, but some Christians have never learned what it really is biblically.

Baptisms, that's a curious one, especially because it's plural. Some churches have a very good teaching about water baptism, and very scriptural. Others seem to neglect it altogether.

Some teach about water baptism, but the word baptisms, plural, is perplexing. What's that about? And then the laying on of hands. Well, a lot of churches will lay hands on their elders to ordain them.

Most denominations, when men finish Bible college and they get ordained, there's a ceremony of laying on of hands. Sometimes it doesn't involve that, but a lot of times it does. In charismatic or Pentecostal groups, a lot of times there's laying on of hands for other purposes, for praying for the sick or other things.

The question is, is this practiced in the modern church and this was understood here?

Then you've got the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment. This is eschatology. Certainly there's a lot of weird ideas about eschatology out there.

Some right, and some wrong. But the interesting thing is, many churches treat it like understanding eschatology, that's the deep things of God. There are some churches that teach a little else than eschatology, as if that's really the pinnacle of being a Christian, what the 10 horns are on the seven-headed beast.

If you know that, then you're really into the deep stuff. There's whole radio ministries that teach nothing but eschatology. They think that's really getting into the mysteries of God.

But eschatology, the resurrection of the dead, eternal judgment, that's eschatology, that's the basics, that's the foundation. Now what I'd point out about these six things is not only that they are a different list than we probably would have made if we were not informed by this passage. It's a deliberate list, it's an important list.

But we have to ask ourselves, what is he listing? Is he listing Jewish things or Christian things? Many commentators believe that in the vein of encouraging his people to not go back to Judaism, but to progress fully into Christianity, distinctive Christianity, distinctive from Jewish practices, that what he's telling them not to lay again in the foundation is Judaism. Let's don't lay the foundations of Judaism again. You've been there, done that, let's go on into Christianity proper.

Now it is pointed out by them that the list of things are all things that are part of Judaism. In the Old Testament, you'll find references to repentance. The prophets are often calling people to repent.

Faith in God, certainly people are called to trust God in the Old Testament. Trust in the Lord with all your heart. Do not lean on your own understanding.

Trust in the Lord and do good. Trust in God, faith, repentance, these are Old Testament concepts. Baptisms is a particularly interesting word because it is baptisumus in the Greek.

It sounds like baptisms, but it's not the word that usually is translated baptism in the New Testament. Usually in the New Testament, the word baptism is baptisma. Baptisma is the word usually meaning baptism, it means immersion.

Baptisumus is a slightly different version of the same word. Most translations do translate it baptisms, and it's quite clearly a transliteration of the Greek. But some argue that better than baptisms, the translation should be washings.

Meaning Jewish washings, the ceremonies of washing your hands and stuff that the Pharisees were doing. The many washings they did. Now in favor of this, it's pointed out

that this same word, which isn't used very often in the New Testament, is used later in chapter 9 of Hebrews, and where it clearly is referring to Jewish washings.

In Hebrews chapter 9, verse 9 and 10, it says, the tabernacle was symbolic for the present time in which both gifts and sacrifices are offered, which cannot make him who performed the service perfect in regard to the conscience, concerned only with foods and drinks, various washings, and fleshly ordinances imposed. He's talking about Jewish practices, the food restrictions, the various washings. This word washings is the same word, baptisms, that is used in the list in chapter 6. And in chapter 9, it clearly refers to Jewish washings, not Christian baptism.

Also, the fact that it is plural has argued that it's talking about Jewish washings. Christians don't get baptized repeatedly. They get baptized once.

There's baptism. When you get saved, you believe and you're baptized. Period.

Not multiple baptisms. In fact, Paul said in Ephesians chapter 4, there's one hope, one faith, one baptism. And yet here it speaks plural.

And so a lot of scholars believe, and you can see they've got some good arguments for it, that this is a reference not to baptism, but Jewish washings. And that changes the whole complexion of the list. It makes it not so much a list of Christian practices or beliefs, but a list of Jewish practices and beliefs.

Repentance can be found in the Old Testament. Faith can be found in the Old Testament. Washings, that's a Jewish thing.

Laying on of hands, you find that in the Old Testament. Moses laid hands on Joshua. There are other laying on of hands in the Old Testament.

Then resurrection from the dead and eternal judgment, those are Old Testament teachings too. Though I will say the resurrection of the dead is not a very clear Old Testament teaching. It seems to be mentioned maybe once in Daniel chapter 12.

Maybe alluded to in one other place in Isaiah chapter 26 perhaps. But it's not like the Old Testament has a real blatant revelation of the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead. That's kind of an obscure subject.

Nonetheless, it's not entirely absent. So you can find all these things, especially if baptism is translated as washings, all these things are in the Old Testament. And also, this interpretation seems to fit the flow of the main argument.

The main argument of the book is Judaism is passé. You've gone on from there to Christ. Don't go back to Judaism.

And so it would make sense for the author to say, let's not lay again all these

foundations that you were observing in Judaism. You're Jews, it's true, but now you're Christians. Let's go on from those foundational things.

Judaism was a foundation of Christianity. But Christ is more than that. And let's go on to maturity, which means full embracing of Christian distinctives.

Not just the Jewish ones. Now, there's a very, I've just made, I think, a fairly strong case for this being a list of Jewish practices, but that's not what I believe. Obviously, it's possible that that's what he's saying, but I think not.

And I'll give you my reasons for thinking that. First of all, he calls these the elementary principles of Christ, not the elementary principles of Judaism, in verse one. More than that, if the author really did want to enumerate the distinctives of Judaism that he wants them to leave behind, this is not the list he would make.

True, these things are found in Judaism, but they're not the things you leave behind when you become a Christian. You might leave behind, he might say, let's not lay again the foundation of animal sacrifices, dietary laws, holy days, holy places. Those would be the distinctives of Judaism that you leave behind when you become a Christian.

You don't leave behind repentance and faith or the doctrine of the resurrection. These are as much a part of Christianity as they are a part of Judaism, and they're not really the distinctives of Judaism. They're in there, but the things that are the distinctives of Judaism are the sacrificial system, the Aaronic priesthood, the temple.

That's what Judaism is about, the law, circumcision. These are the things you'd think he would list if he's trying to get across all that Jewish stuff. Let's leave that behind and go on to Christ.

I'm saying that while it is a possibility that these things could be seen as Jewish practices, it's hardly the list a person would make if he's trying to exemplify Judaism as something that was then. This is now. Let's leave that behind and go on to here.

Well, you don't leave behind repentance and faith when you become a Christian. That's as much a part of the Christian life as of any godly life, Old or New Testament. Now, therefore, since he calls them the principles of Christ, the elementary principles of Christ, and since everything he lists really does belong to Christianity and is not some Jewish thing that is left behind when you become a Christian, I don't think that the approach I was talking about earlier is the approach that he's making.

I see this as basic Christian doctrines that the early Christians got under the belt very early. Now, I would point out some interesting things about this list, as a list. It's not like the writer's just trying to think of a random list and just list it.

He just threw things into the list just as they came to his mind. This is a very organized

list. Each thing is listed in the order it actually occurs in the life of the believer.

The first thing is repentance, then faith. Now, some people might think that faith should come before repentance because, after all, why are you going to repent if you don't already believe? You have to believe first, then you'll repent. Well, it depends on what you mean by faith.

It's true, no one will repent unless they believe that God exists and he's the rewarder of those who diligently seek him. But that's not Christian faith. Lots of people believe that God exists and that he's the rewarder of those who diligently seek him.

There's something programmed on that radio we need to change. Lots of people believe, even the devil believes, that God exists and that he's the rewarder of those who diligently seek him. That belief is not Christian belief, per se.

If you don't believe those things, you won't come to God, it says in Hebrews 11.4. He that comes to God must first believe that God exists and he's the rewarder of those who diligently seek him. But believing those basic things doesn't make you a Christian. That's the prerequisite.

Christian faith is a commitment of yourself to trust God, to be totally confident in God, in your life, to make God the focus of your trust. You can't get there without repenting first because repenting means changing your mind. And when you're not a Christian, you're not trusting God in that way.

You're trusting man or yourself or something else, your money. You're trusting in something other than God. Becoming a Christian means you turn around and stop trusting in whatever it was you were trusting in and you trust in God.

So you repent unto faith. The repentance happens almost simultaneously with believing, but it's logically prior. Maybe not chronologically prior because it may happen at the same time.

Maybe you're not trusting God. In fact, believing God is the result of my repenting of not having done so before. My life is now focused on trusting God.

Yeah, before I repented, I believed that God existed. That's not what he's talking about by faith here. I believe he's saying repentance and faith are, in that order, what brings about conversion.

The very first things in a person's life as a Christian is repentance and faith. By the way, repentance is always mentioned first. In Mark chapter 1, verse 15, Mark 1, 15, it says, Jesus came preaching the gospel.

He says, this is his message. The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand.

Repent, therefore, and believe the gospel.

Repent and believe in that order. In another place in Acts, and I don't have the reference at my fingertips, but I believe it was when Paul was before one of his tribunals that was trying him, although it's also possible that it was when he was talking to the Ephesians. The particular context eludes me right now, but he summarizes his ministry.

He says, I've gone about teaching Jews and Gentiles repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. Again, repentance and faith mentioned together and in that order. You never find them mentioned in the opposite order because they go together, you repent in order to become a believer in Christ.

And here the foundational things of becoming a Christian begins with repentance from your dead works and your faith toward God. And then what baptism, very next thing a believer does when he is repentant and believed, at least in the book of Acts, next thing he did was get baptized. Now, why is it baptisms? Why plural? Paul said in Ephesians 4 that baptism, but we need to ask what does he mean by that? Look at Ephesians 4 if you would.

Ephesians 4, Paul is making an appeal for Christians to embrace those things that they all have in common as a basis of their unity. He wants them to be and act unified. They have some things they differ about, but there's so many things they have in common that this forms the basis for Christian unity.

And he says in verse 3, endeavoring to keep the unity of your body. Why? Because there's one body, no matter how many different opinions there are, there's only one body, so you should be unified. We're all in one body.

And there's one spirit. We all have the same spirit. Just as you're called in one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is above all, through you all, etc.

These are the reasons we should be unified. There weren't some baptized in the name of Paul, and some baptized in the name of Apollos, and some baptized in the name of Peter, or Cephas, and some in the name of Christ. See, Paul brings that up in 1 Corinthians 1, where he's also appealing for unity.

And he also brings up baptism. He says, some of you in the church are saying, I'm of Apoll, or I'm of Apollos, or I'm of Cephas, or I'm of Christ. Were you baptized in the name of Paul? Did Paul die for your sins? In other words, what he's saying is, you're all different.

You all received the same baptism in the name of Christ. Not some of you in Paul, in Apollos, in Cephas. Every Christian received the same one baptism into Christ.

He's talking about water baptism, certainly. And he said that when you were water baptized, you weren't baptized into Presbyterianism, or Methodism, or Baptism, or Episcopalianism, or Pentecostalism. You were baptized into one baptism.

It was the name Christ. It was Him that you were baptized into. All of you, the same baptism.

There's only one of those. Just like there's only one God, one body, one spirit. There's only one baptism you've all had.

But he's not addressing a separate question. And that is, besides water baptism, are there other things that can be called baptisms in the Christian life? The answer is truly, obviously. I mean, Jesus and John the Baptist both said that John baptized in water.

That's one baptism. But you will be baptized in the Holy Spirit. That's another baptism.

And in another place, when Peter and John said to Jesus, can we be at your right hand and left hand in your kingdom? He said, can you be baptized with the baptism I'm going to be baptized with? He was clearly referring to suffering. You see, baptism is just a generic word for being immersed. Most naturally, it'd be immersed in water.

But not necessarily. You'd be immersed in other things, too. You could be baptized in fire.

Or in the Holy Spirit. Or in sufferings. You'd be immersed in many things.

Now, the primary baptism that is at the initial stage of becoming a Christian is water baptism. You get immersed in water. But there are other baptisms, too.

Not other water baptisms. Just other experiences that can rightly be referred to as a baptism. Baptism in suffering.

Baptism in the Holy Spirit. Baptism in fire. Whatever.

I mean, there's different kinds of things that are called baptisms that are not baptisms in water. I personally believe that when the writer here speaks of baptisms, plural, since he's following a chronological sequence of Christian experience from conversion on, he's got repentance, he's got faith, he's got baptisms. What? Water baptism? Then what? I think baptism in the Holy Spirit.

Because that was the normal procedure. We see it exhibited by Paul in Acts 19. We read that when they believed in Christ, he baptized them in water in the name of Jesus, and says, and then when Paul laid his hands on them, they were filled with the Holy Spirit.

The same phenomenon that Jesus called the baptism of the Holy Spirit in Acts 1.5. Being filled with the Spirit initially after conversion is the baptism of the Holy Spirit. This

happened when Paul laid hands on them, which brings us to the next thing on the list, laying on of hands. Now, baptisms and laying on of hands, I believe, represent the next stages in the Christian's experience after repentance and faith.

They get baptized in water. They get baptized in the Holy Spirit through the laying on of hands. That was the normal procedure.

It didn't have to be that way. But the laying on of hands had other functions in the church, like for ordination of elders or deacons, they laid hands on them. For sending out missionaries, they laid hands on them.

For praying for the sick, they laid hands on them. The laying on of hands is a very general practice for a lot of different purposes. But initially, the person who was baptized in water would have hands laid upon him to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

That was the first experience of laying on of hands for the new believer. There would be others for other purposes at other times. But you see, we've got a sequence here.

It's not a random sequence. It's a chronological sequence. Then you've got the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment.

These two are listed chronologically. God raises from the dead to bring people to the judgment. Of course, he's now skipped to the end.

These don't happen immediately after conversion. But they are still in chronological order in the life. I first repented.

I believed. I got baptized. I had hands laid upon me.

And someday I will be raised from the dead and go to the judgment. The great white throne judgment. So we can see there's a deliberate chronology mentioned here.

But there's more than that in the organization of these things. And that is that there are six of them and they are in three couplets. Each couplet has something about that couplet that's not true of the other couplets.

The first couplet is repentance and faith. This obviously speaks of conversion. And repentance and faith are unlike the other things in the list in that they are personal.

You have to do it yourself. You have to repent. You have to believe.

Your parents can't repent for you. Your Sunday school teacher can't believe for you. You have to do that yourself.

This is a personal relationship with God. You've got personal responsibility here. The first issue that's brought to our attention through the mention of these two items is that

Christianity is a personal choice.

A personal response to God of repentance and faith. You're not a Christian just because you're born in a Christian family or you're attending a church. That doesn't make anyone a Christian.

You have to have that personal choice of repentance and faith. And thus, these two underscore the personal aspect of a relationship with God that is fundamental to being a Christian. But the next two, baptism and laying on of hands, you don't do that to yourself.

The church does that to you. Other Christians baptize you and lay hands on you. In fact, the very act of laying on of hands suggests connection with other Christians.

Likewise, there was never known a case in the Bible of people baptizing themselves. When a person had repented and believed, that underscored the fact that they had personally committed themselves to Jesus Christ. But now they are in a community that is including them.

Baptized into the body of Christ. Hands laid upon you mean you're connected to the long line of Christians who've laid hands on me and the people who laid hands on them. There's like a symbolic connection there with the whole family.

This is a social aspect of Christianity. Christianity has a personal aspect and a social aspect. Baptism and laying on of hands presupposes the social inclusion in a group of Christians.

Otherwise, who baptized you? Who laid hands on you? And then this third couplet are things that only God can do. You don't do them for yourself and the church doesn't do them for you. Raising you from the dead and judging you, ultimately, that's God's prerogatives.

Ultimately, all things answered to God's final intervention. No matter how many Christians want to, they probably won't be able to raise you from the dead. Only God can do that.

The Christian's life is ultimately dependent on God to do what only God can do. And ultimately, answerable to God. The eternal judgment is that God's... I'm not going to stand before you for you to judge me.

God, judge me. I'm accountable to Him. In other words, there are three important aspects of Christianity that are fundamental.

Every new convert should be made to know them early on. And that is you've got a personal relationship with God established by your repentance and faith. You've got a

social relationship with all other people who've made that commitment.

You're in the body of Christ. You were baptized by them and had hands laid on you by them to suggest your inclusion in the social group of disciples. But ultimately, we all look to God to raise us from the dead because our fellow Christians can't do that for us.

We don't even answer to them in judgment. We answer to God. That this is a God-centered... There's a social element, but it's ultimately a God-centered life that looks to God ultimately to do what only God can do, to raise us from the dead.

Paul said in 2 Corinthians 1, we had so much trouble in Asia. He said we had the sentence of death in ourselves so that we might not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead. We can't always trust in ourselves or our brothers for everything.

There's some things that only God can do, and that's something we just take for granted as Christians. That's the mentality we have. I live my life before God.

I'm going to answer to Him. And He'll vindicate me or no one will. And so it's foundational to the Christian life to do these things or to experience these things, but also they are listed in a way that unavoidably brings up these different key dimensions of what it means to be a Christian.

It's personal. It's social. It's God-word.

And so there's the list. But they are things that many churches, I have to say, have never really included in their training of new Christians. And I'd say more about it, except I have to take the whole chapter, not just those verses in the session, at least as much of the chapters I can get through.

But I do have a series of lectures called Foundations where I do spend a bunch of lectures, eight or something like that, on this list and talking about what the Scripture says about them. We'll just have to not concentrate in the details here. But what is the argument of the author is that you need to go beyond that.

Once you've got that under your belt, good. Keep it there, but move on. You've got this sort of in the background of your thinking.

This colors your whole awareness of reality. But let's learn some more things about reality. Let's go on to deeper things.

So he says, let us go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of, and he lists these things. And he says, we will do that, verse three, if God permits. Now is the hard part.

Verses four through six. Actually just beyond six even. For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to

come if they fall away to renew them again.

That is, go back to the verb in verse four. It's impossible, not verb, but it's a, I should say it's a, what should we say, is it adverb? Anyway, in any case, it's impossible to renew them again to repentance since they crucify again for themselves the son of God and put him to an open shame. 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.

But if it bears thorns and briars, it is rejected and near to being cursed whose end is to be burned. And I should point out verse nine. But beloved, we are confident of better things than this concerning you.

Yes, things that accompany salvation, though we speak in this way. And he goes on, but I don't want to keep going on before I touch on the contents of these verses. Verses three through five, excuse me, four through six, more like, are a long sentence.

And the idea at the beginning of the sentence is of impossibility. What is the impossibility? Well, you don't really find out the impossibility until the end of that long sentence. It's impossible to renew certain people to repentance.

To renew someone to repentance suggests they had once repented, but now they need it again. But it's impossible to renew them to that. Who are the people in question? Well, he gives five descriptive clauses of the people he's talking about.

The final clause, or the sixth clause, is that they've fallen away. The five things that are said about them before they have fallen away is that they were enlightened, they've tasted the heavenly gift, they have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, they've tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come. But they also have fallen away.

Now, in our New King James, it says, if they fall away. And this has raised some people's opinion that the writer is speaking of a hypothetical situation. Some people say, actually, that if you really are a Christian, you can't ultimately fall away.

There's this doctrine of the perseverance of the saints. If you're really the elect, you will persevere and you won't fall away. If you do fall away, you weren't really the elect and therefore you weren't really saved.

That is, if you're ever saved, you're always going to be saved because once you're really saved, you can't fall away at all and therefore will never be lost. This is a Calvinist doctrine. It's the fifth point of the tulip acrostic, P, perseverance of the saints.

This verse seems to go against that. It does talk about people who certainly appear to be true Christians and yet who fall away. Now, this passage, therefore, is troublesome to Calvinists and we'll find it also has elements that are troublesome to Arminians.

It's just a troublesome passage. It's got some things about it that are a challenge to us. But let's talk about how it's a challenge to Calvinists and what they say first.

Then we'll talk about the challenge it presents to people like me, an Arminian. Calvinists respond to it in one of two ways, at least the Calvinists I've read. Some Calvinists say this is speaking hypothetically, leaning apparently on the if in verse 6. If such people would fall away, it would be impossible to restore them to repentance.

Why? Because they'd be crucifying Christ again and by some say, well, Christ can't be crucified again. The writer of Hebrews says he was crucified once for all. He's not going to be crucified again.

So obviously such people could never fall away because doing so would be to crucify Christ again and he's not going to be crucified. So this is saying such people cannot fall away because if they did, it would involve an impossible circumstance that Christ is crucified again. And so some Calvinists say this is not really talking about the possibility, but rather the impossibility that these people could fall away.

And he states it as sort of a rhetorical device that if they did fall away, it would involve this. And since it can't involve this impossibility, then obviously they can't fall away. So some Calvinists have said this is one of the strongest arguments for the perseverance of the saints.

Because it's essentially arguing that if you're really a Christian, falling away would involve doing something that's impossible, crucifying Christ again. So the argument is it can't happen. Problem is there is no if in the passage.

It's not hypothetical. The King James and the New King James says if they fall away. But even the Greek manuscripts that are used by the King James don't say that.

They say and have fallen away. That's how it reads in the Greek. Instead of if they fall away, the Greek says and have fallen away.

So he's actually saying it's impossible for those who've had all this experience and have fallen away to be renewed to repentance. It's impossible to renew them to repentance. So he's not talking about a hypothetical, rhetorical argument saying it can't happen.

He's saying there are people this has happened to. There are people who are described in these terms who have in fact fallen away. And I'm telling you something about them.

They can't be renewed to repentance. You can't renew them to repentance. Now what does the Calvinist do when they acknowledge that? Well, they say well, okay, fair enough.

There are people who have fallen away who fit this description. But they weren't really

Christians. Now that seems like a stretch because when you read this list of five things, they were enlightened.

They've tasted the heavenly gift. They've become partakers of the Holy Spirit. They've tasted of the good word of God and the powers of the H.M. That sounds like Christians to me.

But they say, well, look at the repeated reference to tasting. They've tasted the word of God. They've tasted the heavenly gift or whatever and the powers of the H.M. Tasting isn't the same thing as consuming.

This is actually talking, they say, about people who've come mighty close to being converted. They've explored it. They've investigated it.

They've kind of licked it a little bit to taste it, see what it's like. But they haven't ever really gone all the way. They're not really saved.

And therefore, they can fall away because they're not really the elect. They never really came all the way to Christ. This is the other view and this is probably a more common view among Calvinists.

I'm not sure which is more common because you find them both, both these arguments from Calvinists. The first one clearly doesn't work at all because it's hypothetical and that's what their argument depends on. On the other hand, what about this one? Is it possible that the writer is talking about people who never have been fully saved? Well, if we're going to base that argument on the use of the word taste, I think we're going to be in trouble as if taste means something less than fully consumed or fully experienced because the same word is used by the writer of Hebrews in chapter two in a way that simply rules out the possibility that he's using the word taste in that way as if to nibble at something or explore it merely but not fully committed to it because in chapter two of Hebrews, verse nine says, but we see Jesus who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor that he might by the grace of God taste death for everyone.

Same Greek word, taste. He tasted death. Was he not fully committed? Did he just nibble around the edges of death? No, obviously the writer of Hebrews is using this metaphor of tasting for something more than just, you know, exploration into the subject, a little investigation into it.

It's talking about full commitment here. Tasting is just a term the writer of Hebrews uses. I don't think the other writers of the New Testament necessarily use that.

I haven't done a concordance study but I don't recall offhand other New Testament writers using it but the writer of Hebrews clearly uses it a number of times but he uses it to mean what Jesus did in tasting death. He was all in when it comes to death. He went

all the way and using the same term to people who tasted the word of God, tasted the heavenly gift, tasted the powers of the world to come or whatever, there's no suggestion here that they were, you know, holding back and that they didn't really come all the way.

And let me just say this too. Suppose we allowed, for the sake of argument, to explore this question that this is what he's saying. That he is talking about people who have almost gotten saved but not quite and then they're kind of drawn back again.

If that is so, then what he's saying is if you almost get saved but don't quite, you can never repent again. People who've come mighty close to salvation held off a little while but then later came all the way. Is he saying that if you taste at it but you don't commit right now, you'll never be saved? That just doesn't really correspond with reality that much and I don't think it's what he's saying.

He certainly seems to be describing people who are saved. By the way, if he was not, he should have put in some kind of disclaimer because all the phrases he uses are things that are true of Christians. He did it all the way to Christ.

These are the people I'm talking about because simply to give these descriptions without qualifying it is certainly communicating to the reader. I'm talking about Christians here. Not only Christians, spirit-filled Christians, mature Christians, powerful Christians.

They've known the powers of the age to come in their life. These are full-on Christians. Maybe even more mature than some of the readers.

What is he then saying? I said this is a problem for Armenians too because you believe that a person who is a true Christian can fall away and even no longer be saved because they have fallen away. Apostasy, according to Armenian view, is to depart from Christ completely. If you were a Christian at one time but you've departed from Christ, you don't get to take your salvation with you when you leave Jesus.

Jesus is salvation, the Bible says. You come into Jesus, you have salvation. You leave Jesus, you leave your salvation with him.

You don't take it with you when you leave in Christ and still keep your salvation as your ticket in your back pocket. Armenians believe it's both possible to abandon the faith once you've been in it and it has consequences. If you do abandon the faith, you've abandoned salvation.

That's the non-Calvinistic view. By the way, quite apart from anything the Bible may say specifically about that point, the early Christians all believed that too until Augustine in the fourth century. Augustine was the first person to suggest the doctrine of perseverance and Calvinist doctrines.

Before that, all the church fathers spoke as if it was a problem, a possibility that

Christians could lose salvation by departing from Christ and they shouldn't do it. It was the Armenian doctrine as we call it today because we name it after Jacobus Arminius in the 16th century but that particular doctrine that he taught was taught by all the church fathers until Augustine, the first three centuries of the church. Now, Augustine can apostatize.

There's warnings against it. Why even warn against it if you can't do it? Why all these warnings about don't do that if you can't? But the real question is and a problem for the Armenians is does an Armenian acknowledge that somebody who has left the faith can never come back? Because that seems to be the point being made. It's impossible to renew them to repentance.

And yet, most Armenians would think, well, sure people can fall away even Paul talked about the Jewish unbelievers being cut off of the olive tree but if they don't remain in unbelief they can come back. They've been cut off but they can be grafted back in he said in Romans 11. James says, in fact his closing remarks in the book of James are, Brethren, Christians, brethren, if any of you do err from the truth and one converts him, let him know that he that converts the sinner from the error of his way shall save his soul from death to have sinned.

Certainly sounds like the brother who errs from the way he needs to be saved from death again. And the one who goes out and converts him saves him from death. You mean you can convert him? A believer who falls away can be converted? Well then why does the writer of Hebrews say it's impossible to renew them to repentance? The prodigal son left and came back? You know, there's just too much in scripture and experience testimonies we know the prodigal son fell away and then came back solid, you know.

And that makes it rather impossible I think to interpret this passage as teaching that that can't happen because it does happen and other passages seem to confirm it too. So what is it saying? Well I'm not 100% sure myself but I will give a few caveats here that might help. This may not be correct but this might help because the word impossible does not always mean absolutely impossible.

It sounds like it does but the Bible often uses hyperbole and there's a similar kind of case in the gospels where the rich young ruler refused to accept Christ on Christ's terms and went away sorrowful. And Jesus said how hard it is for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God more so than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God. The disciples said well then who can be saved? And he said well with men it's impossible but with God nothing will be called impossible.

So at one level it is impossible at another level not so much because God can do anything. God can do the impossible Jesus said nothing should be called impossible and in that context he's talking about certain kinds of people who are particularly hard to get

saved. Well it's like pulling a camel through the eye of a needle.

Can you do it? No. It's impossible. With men it's impossible.

It's humanly impossible but nothing's ultimately impossible to God. Things that are so difficult people who are so resistant to the right kind of change that would turn them into a Christian sometimes you can't change them. Sometimes you can't reach them.

Sometimes there's nothing you can do but you can't reach them in many cases. Now if that's true then maybe this passage is talking about a similar situation not rich people but another kind of people who are very hard to reach. Another kind of people who are particularly stubborn or particularly a challenge to get them to come into the kingdom.

People who have already been there and done that and said I'm done with that. A person who's never been a Christian the same way that a divorcee differs from a virgin. To use an analogy C.S. Lewis uses one of his books.

A person who has been a Christian and left it is more like a divorcee. A person who's never been a Christian is more like a virgin. They've never really been there yet.

It's easier to win a person who's never been there than someone who's been there and rejected it. They've hardened their heart in a different degree. And therefore like a rich man who's a special class of persons especially hard to get saved people who've been Christians and have rejected are another class of people particularly hard to get saved.

These are stubborn, obstinate they've been there. What are you going to tell them? You babes in Christ you need to grow up. Maybe then God could use you for this but you're in no position to reach this kind of person.

And it may be that what the what the author is actually saying is for you my readers you who are babes and unskillful in the word of righteousness you who've never gone beyond the basics what are you going to do? For people who've already been further along than you have who've had all the spiritual experiences that a Christian can have you're going to do that. But you're going to find it impossible for you to lead them to Christ. It doesn't mean it can't be done necessarily.

With God nothing is impossible but it's impossible for men. These men anyway. I could be wrong about this but that seems to me as a possible meaning of the passage.

There are probably problems with it I'm not seeing. But I know of problems with almost all the other interpretations of the passage too. This is one of the great difficult passages of the Bible.

But it seems to me that the immaturity of his readers we have to assume he's making one of two points. One, either is because of their immaturity they cannot help people

who are in the condition he's just described. It's impossible for them.

It doesn't say it's impossible for them to repent. It's impossible to bring them to repentance to renew them to repentance. That's the action of another person.

It doesn't say it's impossible for these people to repent. It says it's impossible to renew them to repentance. working with them to renew them, to bring them back.

And so he could be saying, you're immature, you're unskillful in the word, you can't do this. You can't help folks like this. You should be able to by now.

You should be teachers by now, but you need to be taught again. And therefore this is to your shame. People in this kind of need, you have no condition to help.

But the other possibility is he's saying, because you are immature and not progressing, the next danger is that you might become one of these people that you may fall away to. Now, it's not obvious that being immature or having your spiritual growth stunted will necessarily result in you falling away from Christ ultimately. It doesn't happen.

Lots of people remain immature all their lives and die believers. But some feel that he's actually describing a condition they may fall into. So this passage with all its difficulties might be describing the condition of other people that the readers might encounter and should be able to help but won't.

Or it might be describing a condition that the readers themselves might fall into if they don't improve and start growing up. It can go either way. And I don't know how to resolve it finally.

And so I'll leave it unresolved and move on. And he says in verse seven and eight, for the earth which drinks in the rain that often comes upon it and bears herbs useful for those by whom it is cultivated. There's it produces the fruit that it should produce.

It's good earth. That receives blessing from God. The produce of the land is a blessing from God to the farmer and the land is blessed by God for its fruitfulness.

But if the same land, that is land that's been cultivated and has had rain on it and there's every advantage for producing fruit, but it doesn't. If it produces thorns and briars, it is rejected and near to being cursed whose end is to be burned. Now in the context of the kind of situation this was written to where Jerusalem was quite in danger of being burned shortly after this time when the Romans were coming actually did burn it down and the people in it.

Hundreds of thousands of Jews were burned in the city and in the temple when the Romans burned it down. This was an impending judgment, which I believe has alluded to a number of times in the book. This might also be an allusion to it, I'm not sure.

But saying that land that's supposed to bear fruit and doesn't bear fruit is gonna be burned over. Certainly Jesus said that Israel was like a vineyard that didn't produce the fruit. And he said he was gonna come and utterly destroy those wicked men and give his vineyard out to others who would produce the fruits of it.

What God's looking for from his people is fruit. Israel was his people expected to produce fruit. They didn't, Christians will.

They are part of another nation that will bring forth the fruits of it, Jesus said. But these readers have to decide which are they gonna be? Are they gonna be the Christians who do bring forth the fruit and experience blessing from God? Or are they gonna go back to the Jewish system and be part of that temple system that's gonna go down and be burned because it's not producing fruit? That's apparently the dichotomy, the options that are here presented to the reader as a Jewish Christian living shortly before the judgment upon the Jewish temple. It wouldn't apply exactly the same way to others in other situations, but these are particular people that are being addressed in a particular circumstance and it may well be what he's implying.

Verse nine, but beloved, we are confident of better things concerning you. Yes, things that accompany salvation, though we speak in this manner. Now, by the way, the Calvinist sometimes point this out in dealing with that earlier difficult passage.

They say, you see, it's hypothetical because he's saying he doesn't expect this to really happen to them. He's got confidence that this wouldn't happen to them. So this idea of flying was a hypothetical thing.

But as we pointed out, it's not hypothetical. He's talking about actual people who have fallen away. And the Calvinist can only assure in their view that only the elect will not fall away.

But how could you be sure that everyone who's reading is one of the elect? Since, I mean, the Calvinists themselves say, in any church, some people are elected and some are not. And no one knows which ones are, only God. So if they say, but the writer says to all his readers, I'm confident of better things for you.

He's not saying, I know you are all the elect and therefore you cannot fall away, which a Calvinist would have to make of that. But he's rather saying, this can happen, but I'm confident that you guys won't let that happen. That's why I'm writing to you.

I'm exhorting you. I'm hoping that you'll do better than this. This has happened to some people.

I'm hoping it won't happen to you. I'm even trying to show some confidence in you. It doesn't mean that I know for sure, but I have this confidence that I'm dealing with people who are not gonna go that far and who will take my warning seriously and move in the

right direction.

He says, we do speak this way to warn you, but we really are confident that you're gonna take it to heart and not go in this fruitless way and end up being burned. For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love, which you've shown toward all his name in that you have ministered to the saints and do minister. And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end.

That you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises. So he says, he's kind of trying to encourage them here. I really, I'm talking kind of negatively here about things, but I'm not really trying to suggest, I think negatively toward you.

I do, I think negatively, but not that bad. Not as bad as what I've been talking about here. I think you need to grow up.

And I'm really confident that you're gonna take this to heart and you will grow up. You're gonna produce in your life the fruit that accompanies salvation. Because I've seen some evidence of that and God has too.

God notices, he knows you've been faithful. You've been helping the saints. You know, he's not gonna forget about that.

He's gonna give you every advantage necessary to help you persevere and go through. Of course, it still depends on you in some measure to agree with God, but he's, you know, God is on your side here in this thing. I'm not trying to say that, you know, God's angry at you or something like that.

He's, he doesn't forget what you've done. He knows what you're doing still. I'm just trying to say this so that you'll keep doing it, that you'll show the same full diligence to the full assurance of hope till the end.

That's what I'm concerned about. You've done it right up to this point in measure. You're still with the Lord.

I'm just hoping you'll stay there. And that's why I'm writing to you. He says that you should not become sluggish.

So easy to become sluggish in your spiritual zeal, especially if you don't have a lot of fellowship with people who are other than sluggish. I mean, if everyone around you is sluggish, it's easy to just fall asleep spiritually. And there is much to be said for, you know, poking yourself once in a while to see if you're awake and to be diligent, maybe more diligent than anyone around you encourages you to be.

But you should be imitating those. They may not be in your immediate social group, but

they are there in your knowledge. You know, church history, imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

Much of my Christian life, when I was younger, I had more zeal than it seemed like most of the people around me had. And I didn't receive as much encouragement in that way as I would have liked to have had. But I was determined to be spurred on by other Christians.

So I had to pick biographies. You know, I fellowshiped with Tozer. I fellowshiped with, you know, Puritans.

I fellowshiped with William Law. I fellowshiped with George Mueller. I mean, these people were not living, but they were ones who through faith and patience moved forward all the way to inherit the promises.

And if I was not around a lot of people like that, I could still imitate these people. You need to become imitators of those who are doing the right thing. It may be hard sometimes to find people who are doing the right thing or the thing that you want to imitate.

But fortunately there are people who have, and you know of some of them and you can find them and use them to spur you on. Now we're pretty much out of time here, which is a shame because we're not out of chapter yet. As we know, this chapter had some special challenges.

But let me, you know, I'm going to take five more minutes. I'm just going to take the liberty and bring out the basic things in these verses, 13 through 20. For when God made a promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he swore by himself saying, surely blessing I will bless you and multiplying I will multiply you.

This is a quote from Genesis 22, 16 and 17. And this is when Abraham offered his son Isaac. And the part of the verse that isn't quoted here is alluded to.

And he says, God swore by himself. Actually in the verse it says, God says, by myself I have sworn that in blessing I will bless you and multiplying I will multiply you. So the writer is suggesting, he assumes you know that part of the verse.

He says, see God swore by himself because he couldn't swear by anyone greater. Now he explains what he means by that observation. And so after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promises.

For men indeed swear by the greater. And an oath for confirmation is for them an end of all dispute. Thus God determining to show more abundantly to the heirs of the promise, the immutability of his counsel confirmed it with an oath that by two immutable things.

The word immutable means unchangeable things. What are the two unchangeable things? God's promise and his oath that he made about the promise. That by two immutable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us.

This hope we have as an anchor to the soul, both sure and steadfast in which enters the presence behind the veil. That is in the Holy of Holies in heaven he refers to where the forerunner has entered for us, even Jesus having become high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek. Now this whole section is no doubt called forth by the last line of verse 12, that we wanna be like those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

There are promises that remain to be realized. In fact, he says this to the readers again in chapter 10, 1036, for you have need of endurance so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise. The point is that they have not received fully all that is promised yet.

You have to endure and be patient until it does materialize. And because of that, he says, you need to imitate those who through their faith and their perseverance, inherit the promises. You wanna inherit the promises that have not yet been realized.

You need to have faith, perseverance, patience. And so verses 13 through 20 are telling us here's why it's a sure thing. These promises, it's worth holding out for because they really will happen.

Why? Well, think about it. Think of the promise that God made to Abraham. He promised him, and by the way, God can't lie.

So his promise alone should be enough, but just to make sure that he knew it's certain, he swore by himself. Now he says, certainly people always swear by a greater person than themselves, but God can't do that. There's no one greater than him.

So he swore by himself. But you see an oath, which is something we don't have in our culture so much, but they had in all ancient cultures. An oath was like a signing a contract.

Basically, you take an oath and you're bound. Now Jesus, of course, told his disciples, you shouldn't even have to take an oath. You should just be bound by your integrity.

Say yes and mean yes. You don't have to take an oath to be held to your integrity. But in some societies, people who could not otherwise be trusted would make an oath swearing by something greater than themselves, invoking the virtue of something greater than them.

If you say, well, you don't trust me because you don't know me. Well, you know God. I

swear by God.

I invoke his virtue. And the idea would mean that if I break my oath, it's not just my reputation, it's God's reputation that's on the line here. People always swore by something greater than themselves.

There's nothing greater than God, so he swore by himself. But he swore so that you'd have two reasons to trust him. One is the normal reason for trusting him.

He said so, and he always tells the truth. His word, his promise is one. But the other immutable thing is his oath.

So you've got a double assurance that the promises are true and will be worth holding out for. They'll come. And he says this hope, verse 19, is a sure anchor that we have.

Now, this anchor keeps us from drifting. In chapter two, he said, be careful that we don't drift like a ship losing its moorings. We have an anchor that enters.

It's like the chain that the anchor's on disappears behind the veil, and the anchor's locked into a solid rock inside the veil, in the Holy of Holies. We're not in there necessarily yet, but we're connected, and that chain is a solid chain. Nothing's going to tear us away if we hold on to that hope.

That hope is our anchor. I hope that God will fulfill all his promises to us. And I know he will, because he swore it, he promised it.

And my hope is not just wishful thinking, it's confidence in the integrity of God's promise and of his oath. And therefore, it is something I can live with confidence about. And Jesus has entered into that place.

He's there for us. His presence in heaven is the assurance that we will have all things necessary that God has promised, and we should not go back as if persecution or something like that gives a lie to what God has promised us in Christ. And notice at the very end, he comes back to his statement, which launched him into the warning section about Christ being a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.

He said that, of course, in chapter five, verse 10, which was his launching point into this digression. He's just finished his digression. He's coming back now to that place that he launched from.

Now, in chapter seven, he's actually finally going to get into this subject in a very interesting way.